

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana

Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula Ekadasi
full day

Star: Revathi till 11.28 pm

Variyam: 10.08 am to 11.55 am

Durmuhurtam: 5.44 am to
7.28 am

Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am

HJRI CALENDAR

Shawwal 23,1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.08 am

Zohar: 12.05 pm

Asar: 4.11 pm

Maghrib: 5.47 pm

Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.08 AM

SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM

MOONSET 3.11 AM

MOONRISE 3.51 PM

COUNTER POINT



SHORT TAKES

Indian team fails to arrest Choksi

New Delhi: India's multi-agency team that had gone to Dominica to bring back Mehul Choksi is headed back home on a Qatar Airways private jet after the island nation's high court adjourned the hearing on the fugitive diamantaire's habeas corpus petition, sources said. Publicly available flight data showed that the jet took off from the airport in Dominica at 8.09 PM (local time) on June 3 and is travelling towards Madrid.

RBI keeps key rates unchanged

Mumbai: The RBI on Friday left key interest rates unchanged at record lows as it reiterated its commitment to keep its monetary policy accommodative, to help the economy recover from the world's worst outbreak of Covid infections. It also lowered its forecast for the country's economic growth to 9.5 per cent for the current fiscal, from the previous 10.5 per cent.

■ Full report on Page 7

Forex reserves cross \$600b

Mumbai: RBI governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday said that India's forex reserves may have crossed record level of \$600 billion on the back of robust capital flows. As per the RBI's data issued on May 28, the country's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$2.865 billion to a record high of \$592.89 billion for the week ended May 21, boosted by gold and currency assets.

■ Full report on Page 7

Car parking lot sold for \$1.3m

Hong Kong: A single car parking space has been sold for a whopping HK\$10 million (\$1.3 million) at a luxury Hong Kong apartment complex, local media reported. The 135 square-foot spot is part of a development on The Peak, a swanky area that has attracted some of the city's richest residents. A 2019 report by UBS said a "skilled worker" needed 22 years of income to afford a 60-square-metre flat.

■ Full report on Page 5

₹43K-cr for 'Make in India' subs

Defence ministry approves 6 conventional submarines for Navy

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

In a mega make-in-India deal, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday approved the domestic production of six new-generation stealth submarines in collaboration with foreign players under Project P75(I) estimated at ₹43,000 crores. The project was first initiated in 2007 and it will take nearly a decade before the first submarine is delivered.

The submarine deal was given the go-ahead amid

● **THE DEFENCE** Acquisition Council chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh, also approved proposals for acquiring various military weapons including air defence guns and ammunition for the Indian Army for ₹6,800 crore

reports that the country's sole nuclear-powered attack submarine INS Chakra is on its way back to Russia as the agreement for its lease is coming to an end. The Navy will thus be without a nuclear-powered attack submarine for many years till another advanced version of the submarine, Chakra III, comes from Russia on a 10-year lease for which a \$3 billion deal was signed in 2019. The INS Chakra is reported to be giving trouble as it was getting old and its lease, which was ending in January, was not sought to be extended.

Nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) are the equivalent of the most dangerous underwater sharks which hunt submarines and ships and are equipped with torpedoes, anti-ship cruise missiles and land-attack cruise missiles.

The DAC on Friday approved the issue of a request for proposal (RFP) for the construction of six conventional submarines for Project P75(I) under the strategic partnership model. The RFP will be issued to defence shipyard Mazagon Docks and private sector giant Larsen and Toubro, who were selected as Indian strategic partners to bid for the submarine project by the DAC last year in January.

Mazagon Docks and L&T will now collaborate with any of the five foreign companies to submit their bids.

Border control



Army vehicles leave for Leh on Manali-Leh highway on Friday. — PTI

HPCL to face action for safety lapse at Vizag plant

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) in Visakhapatnam is to face action for allegedly compromising on safety norms at its crude oil refinery, where a major fire at the crude distillation unit on May 25 caused considerable destruction but no injuries or casualties.

The 10-member committee appointed by Visakhapatnam district administration, including experts from various fields belonging to professional institutions like Andhra University, which carried out an independent inquiry into the fire mishap, has made a preliminary observation that lapse in safety measures has led to the mishap.

Highly-placed sources privy to various developments at the plant disclosed that initially it was assumed that the fire mishap occurred due to a mechanical failure. But during the course of inquiry, it has been found that the pipeline at the HPCL refinery had developed cracks at multiple points, which led to the huge fire mishap.

Further probe is on to find out whether the pipeline developed leakage at a particular point or at multiple points, or whether multiple-point leaks developed under impact of blaze. The committee will also suggest measures for rectifying lapses to avoid recurrence of such mishaps.

The refinery has a capacity of processing 8.3 million metric tonnes of crude per annum. In the process, it extracts LPG, kerosene, diesel, naphtha and other products. The capacity of the plant is proposed to be increased to 15 million metric tonnes per annum.

Sources said breakage of the pipeline raises issues like irregularities in regular maintenance, corrosion, quality of metal used for making pipelines, wear and tear, apart from compliance with safety standards.

Committee members will discuss their independent findings at the plant. They will come up with a common report specifying reasons for the fire mishap and measures to be taken for rectifying lapses and ensuring safety. The finalised report will be submitted to the state government.

A senior government official, who is a part of the 10-member committee, said, "The cause of fire is breakage of pipeline at a single place or multiple points. This is a serious lapse, which will be dealt with as per norms."

FUELLING | CONCERN

Oil marketing companies have hiked petrol and diesel price for 18 times in last one month

Petrol crosses ₹100-mark all across state, except Vizag

K.M.P PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 4

Petrol is now ₹100 per litre all over Andhra Pradesh except for Visakhapatnam City. Petrol price was increased by 27 paise per litre and diesel by 28 paise a litre and this is the 18th hike in the last one month, taking fuel prices across the country to a historic high.

In Vizag the petrol costs ₹99.75 a litre and diesel is priced at ₹94.08 per litre. Andhra Pradesh also slaps highest VAT on the petroleum products next to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana.

Andhra Pradesh as the state government has increased the value added tax or on the two fuels since July last year. This helped the state to fetch additional revenue of ₹600 crore amidst the cash crunch caused by pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns.

As per the new rates amended as per the



- Oil marketing companies have hiked petrol price by 27 paise and diesel 28 paise per litre. This is 18th time that fuel price was hiked in the last one month.
- With VAT at 31 per cent plus a levy of ₹4, AP collects highest local tax from fuel, along with Telangana
- Petrol price in Vizag is 25 paise cheaper due to the proximity of terminal

Andhra Pradesh Value Added Tax Act, 2005, petrol is being taxed at 31 per cent along with an additional levy of ₹4 while diesel is taxed at 22.25 per cent plus ₹4 per litre, respectively.

The chief regional manager of HPCL, Ravi Shankar Pammi, who covers East Godavari and three north coastal districts, said international crude prices determine the retail sector and it would be difficult to speculate the timing of the rise.

"Since Visakhapatnam is

AP-Amul project is paying off: CM

Says women are getting up to ₹15 per litre more

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said the Jagananna Palavelluva-AP Amul Project will give a filip to the empowerment of women self-help groups by encouraging milk cooperatives in the government sector. He was launching the project in West Godavari district virtually from his camp office on Friday.

He said the government had kept its promise to the dairy farmers by strengthening the milk cooperatives and offering remunerative price by signing an agreement with Amul. He said the project was first started on December 2 last year, and milk was being collected from 722 villages in Guntur, Chittoor, Kadapa and Prakasam districts. Now, milk would be collected from 153 villages in West Godavari district.

On why the government roped in Amul, he said that it is the largest dairy cooperative in the country, where all the shareholders are dairy farmers. It is paying remunerative prices and women in Guntur, Chittoor, Kadapa and Prakasam districts are able to earn ₹5 to ₹15 more per litre than the existing price. He noted that 52.93 lakh litres of milk was so far collected from 13,739 women dairy farmers in 722 villages in Guntur, Chittoor, Kadapa and Prakasam districts, where a sum of ₹24.54 crore was



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launches Amul milk collecting centre virtually from the camp office on Friday. — DC

To ensure all the women are being paid in a transparent manner, the CM said bulk milk cooling units and automatic milk collection units would be set up in 9,899 villages.

paid to them.

Jagan Mohan Reddy pointed out that Amul had paid ₹4.06 crore more than the existing price by providing an additional income. In order to ensure that all the women are being paid in a transparent manner on the basis of quality check, bulk milk cooling units and automatic milk collection units would be set up in 9,899 villages at a cost of ₹4,000 crore as part of the Amul project in the next two years.

Amul MD Sodhi said that Jagan Mohan Reddy had brought revolutionary changes for the development of villages, especially in the dairy sector, by encouraging women farmers on a large-scale. He informed that Amul company is being operated by the farmers and the profits are being passed on to them.

Animal husbandry minister S. Appalaraju, agriculture special chief secretary Poonam Malakondaiah and AP Dairy Development Cooperative Federation managing director Babu and others were present at the event.

CoWIN available in Telugu too now

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

The Central government's website and mobile application for checking vaccination centres, registration for jobs and availability of slots, CoWIN, has now been made available in Telugu, and nine other languages, it was announced on Friday.

Until now, the CoWIN website was available in English and Hindi making it difficult for many who did not know these languages to register themselves for vaccination. On Friday, the Centre said that the website henceforth could be accessed in Telugu, Marathi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Gujarati, Assamese, Kannada, and Oriya.

The url, primarily the address for the website on the internet — cowin.gov.in — remains in English. Once the website is accessed, a user needs to click on a small icon at the extreme right with the alphabet 'A' in a small box,

Once the icon on the right at the top of the website is clicked, the user can choose the language of his or her choice, which translates the registration/sign-in link into the chosen language.

right at the top of the website.

Once the icon is clicked, the user can choose the language of his or her choice, which translates the registration/sign-in link into the chosen language. Also, the link for booking a slot then becomes available in the language of choice.

However, there are still some limitations on the website when it comes to accessibility in regional languages as not all information, once the link for booking a slot is clicked, is available in the language of choice. The names of hospitals, or even the names of states, districts in the search fields remain in English.

ETALA QUILTS TRS, MLA POST, SET TO FACE BYELECTION

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

A month after he was dropped from the State Cabinet on May 2 over allegations of land encroachments, Etna Rajendar on Friday resigned from the Telangana State Legislative Assembly and the primary membership of the ruling TRS necessitating yet another bypoll in the state within six months.

Addressing a press meet at his Shamirpet residence, he, however, maintained silence on joining the BJP saying that he would disclose his future course of action very soon.

He said he would submit resignation as MLA to the Speaker in the 'prescribed format' as per regulations on Saturday.

Speaking informally with reporters later, he said that after the lockdown, he wanted to visit Delhi along with his key followers to join the BJP.

SHORT TAKES

DELHI HC JUNKS
PLEA NOT TO LET
YSRC USE 'YSR'DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

The dispute on using the YSR acronym by the YSR Congress Party was resolved on Friday with the Delhi High Court dismissing a plea by the Anna YSR Congress seeking derecognition of the YSRC for using the 'YSR' acronym. Justice Prateek Jalan said the plea was 'unmerited.' The detailed judgement is not yet available.

The Anna YSR Congress Party, in its plea, opposed the use of the acronym YSR Congress Party in the letterheads of the ruling party in AP. It contended that the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led party was registered in the name of Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party.

HC ASKS APPSC
FOR DETAILS ON
GRP-I EVALUATIONDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) to submit details on the evaluation of Group-I mains answer scripts in digital mode and posted the next hearing to June 14.

A single judge bench headed by Justice K. Vijaya Lakshmi heard a batch of petitions on Friday, raising objection to the APPSC sending answer scripts of Group-I mains exams written in English language to other states for evaluation in digital mode, involving a third party. The petitioners mentioned in their plea that the APPSC in its notification issued in 2018 did not mention about the digital mode of evaluation and answer scripts written in Telugu language were evaluated in AP while some written in English language for subjects like AP History and Geography were evaluated in other states. The petitioners wanted the interviews scheduled to be held on June 17 to be cancelled.

APPSC counsel R.V. Mallikharjuna Rao argued that in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, answers scripts were evaluated in digital mode at different places and ruled out any lapses in the evaluation as experts were involved in the evaluation.

HIGH COURT
SHOCKER TO AP
OVER AMUL MoUDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the state government not to spend any amount pursuant to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) it entered into with Amul Dairy.

A division bench comprising Justices Kongara Vijaya Lakshmi and D. Ramesh heard a petition on Thursday, filed by YSR Congress MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, stating that handing over of assets of AP Dairy Development Cooperative Federation Limited (APDDCF) to Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) Limited was illegal and that the MoU between both the parties was arbitrary.

The court declared that the AP cabinet decision dated 04-05-2021 handing over the APDDCF assets to GCMMF (Amul Dairy) was illegal, irrational, arbitrary and was in violation of the Article 14 of the Constitution. It declared Animal Husbandry Dairy Development and Fisheries department approving the MoU between state government and Amul Dairy and appointing the committee for fixation of lease rentals, for lease of assets of state government to Amul Dairy as illegal and arbitrary. The court also declared granting of loan of ₹69 crore to Prakasam Milk Producers Company Limited was in derogation of law, contrary to the Companies Act, besides being irrational and arbitrary. Moreover, the court directed the state government and APDDCF not in any way utilise the funds of the state and its instrumentalities and for their employees for the business that is being proposed to be carried out by the Amul Dairy.

The court issued directions to serve notices to Amul Dairy and also to National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and posted the next hearing in the case to June 14. Senior counsel Adinarayana Rao argued on behalf of the petitioner.



A policeman puts barricades on the road to enforce the lockdown at the College Down Junction on the One Town main road in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

WORLD | ENVIRONMENT DAY

Curfew, rains improve
AP's air quality index

Amaravati, Tirupati & Rajamahendravaram record good AQI levels

AVINASH P.
SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, JUNE 4

Restrictions imposed on movement of vehicles during curfew hours and on construction activities because of Covid-19 and reasonably good rains have brought down air pollution in several towns and cities by nearly 50 per cent.

Before lockdown, the air quality was poor at various locations due to emissions from vehicles, dust from construction works and smoke from industries.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Amaravati, Tirupati and Rajamahendravaram is being recorded in the good category, while that of Visakhapatnam is 'satisfactory' for the past few days. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) retrieves AQI from the air quality monitoring stations at these four locations. According to it, an AQI between 0-50 is considered good, 51-100 is satisfactory, 101-200 moderate, 201-300 is poor, 301-400 is very poor and 401-500 is severe.

Amaravati recorded AQI at 25 around 11 am on Friday. It was 90 and 36 during the corresponding period in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Rajamahendravaram's AQI was 74 on June 4, 2019. It improved to 40 and 38 in 2020 and 2021 for the same period.

Visakhapatnam's latest AQI stands at 71, as against 63 in 2020 and 104 in 2019. Though the port city's AQI is found 'satisfactory' during curfew,

Efforts taken to regain
temple city green coverDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 4

A popular dialogue in superhit Telugu movie Muta Mesthri has the villain saying, "Oka Pranam Thisanu; Oka Pranam Posanu". This means, "I have taken a life; I saved a life."

Local bodies including TUDA, the Tirupati Municipal Corporation and the TTD seem to have taken the movie dialogue to their heart, as regards promoting greenery in Tirupati and its suburbs is concerned.

On the one hand, hundreds of trees are being cut down to widen roads. On the other hand, they are carrying out a 'Compensatory Afforestation' programme by planting more saplings than they have cut, and making up for the lost green cover over the years.

On either side of the 6-km-long busy stretch between Alipiri and Cherlopalli, over 1,300 trees, many of them decades-old, have been cut down for widening the

double-way. The authorities, at first, gave the nod for cutting down 2,300 trees. However, the alignment of the road was slightly changed later to save 940 trees and this helped reduce the damage to the ecosystem.

This road connects the face of Tirumala and Tirupati with Cherlopalli cross, from where the road leads to highways headed for cities like Bangalore and Chennai.

This was the first bypass road laid at the cost of piercing an immense semi-forest stretch on the slopes of a hill located close to Alipiri, so as to ease the pressure of the ever-increasing traffic to Tirumala.

Many constructions also came up on this road and added more damage to the ecosystem.

However, to compensate for the loss in the green cover, the TTD is planting 10-20 saplings for each axed tree. "We are developing greenery on both sides of the roads leading to Tirumala. We also took up massive tree plantations, trans-locating

nearly 193 trees, which were placed along both sides of the 6km long stretch and are also planting saplings along the roads that lead to Tirumala," a TTD forest wing official said.

The Tirupati Urban Development Authority (TUDA) has taken up the task of developing a Miyawaki Forest, a park with high-density plantation, in Avilala panchayat on the outskirts of the city, with an aim to improve the urban landscape.

The TUDA is planting over 4,000 varieties of plants (130 species) on a small area of 1.3 acres.

"This concept was first introduced in Japan by renowned botanist and plant ecology expert Akira Miyawaki. It helped restore mini forests in urban/populated areas. This method advocates planting of more trees in small spaces, not like the traditional method of planting trees by providing sufficient space between each sapling", an official from TUDA explained.

environmentalists fear that it may reach the 'moderate' category once all the restrictions are lifted.

If the AQI comes between 101 and 200, sensitive groups may experience health effects but the

general public is less likely to be affected.

The AQI of Tirumala, at 11 am on Friday, was 42, whereas it was 28 during the same period last year and 67 in 2019. Around 10,000-20,000 vehicles,

including two-wheelers, TTD Vehicles and APSRTC used to ply in Tirumala before lockdown. As only a few are being allowed now, air pollution has come down considerably.

WOMEN FARMERS TO BENEFIT FROM AMUL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JUNE 4

Women farmers are hopeful that the entry of Amul dairy would be a boon to them as it would pay more than others. A woman farmer Dasari Durga Rani participated in the inauguration of Amul Jagananna Palavelluva programme by CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday. She said women farmers would benefit more as they can earn extra money. She

said previously they did not know the fat percentage in the milk and used to be cheated by some dairies. Now, they are assured of ₹7 to ₹8 extra per litre and the amount is directly credited to their accounts.

West Godavari District Collector Karthikeya Misra who participated in the programme from Gollagudem village in Unguturu mandal said that 11 routes have been set up in 11 mandals for procuring the milk and

the milk procurement is being done from 14,913 farmers which are having 24,470 cows and buffaloes under 100 Rythu Bharosa centres in the district. He said that 13,661 litres of milk was procured from May 28 and ₹4.6 lakh have been credited to the accounts of the farmers. He said that all departmental officials are being involved in the project and they would give sufficient technology to the farmers to increase the milk production.

GREAT | LOSS

Rama Rao brought international recognition to the Telugu story, said Chiranjeevi

Literary luminary 'KaRa Mastaru' dies at 97

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 4

A renowned literary luminary from north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Kalipatnam Rama Rao, popularly known as KaRa Mastaru, passed away at his residence in Srikakulam on Friday. The 97-year-old Sahitya Akademi Award winner suffered from multiple ailments in the past few weeks, according to relatives.

Literary lovers expressed their grief over KaRa Master's death. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan

Mohan Reddy said, "The death of KaRa master is a great loss to Telugu literature and also people of Telugu states. He was one of the literary luminaries of North Andhra."

Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu expressed grief over the demise of KaRa Master and recalled his association with him. KaRa was known as a master language writer, narrator and critic, he added.

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock over the death of KaRa. He recalled how 'KaRa Mastaru' ren-



Kalipatnam Rama Rao

dered an unforgettable service to Telugu literature. His contributions to Telugu storytelling and

CM inaugurates 500-bed
Covid hosp. in TadipatriDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Friday virtually inaugurated a temporary 500-bed Coronavirus hospital at Arjas Steels in Tadipatri town of Anantapur district.

The CM appreciated that the hospital has been established within two weeks German Hanger concept, wherein large numbers of patients can be served under one roof.

On the occasion, Jagan Mohan Reddy congratulated Anantapur district collector Gandham Chandrudu for establishing the German Hanger with help of Arjas Steels, which also has an air separation plant with capacity to generate 100 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen. The CM also congratulated Arjas Steels managing director Sridhar Krishna Murthy and public representatives, apart from officials for swiftly putting up the hospital in place.

The entire complex is spread over 11.5 acres with one-lakh square feet of space built with state-of-art facilities. The hospital has O2 lines to every bed, 1 nursing station for every 30 beds, 200 nurses and more than 50 doctors.

LARGEST COVID HOSP HAS DIRECT O2 SUPPLY

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 4

Three districts of Rayalaseema region – Anantapur, Kurnool and Kadapa – would have additional medical facilities with the setting up of a 500-bed Covid-19 Care Hospital close to Arjas Steel Plant at Tadipatri in the district. It will greatly help tackle the third wave by ensuring uninterrupted oxygen supply via pipeline direct from the steel plant to the Covid care facility.

Arjas Steel in partnership with the district administration has set up the temporary hospital and the joint initiative addresses the critical need for oxygen. It simultaneously reduces the burden on the already scarce resources of oxygen for patients from Rayalaseema region.

"Uninterrupted oxygen supply will be a major

concern as direct piping of oxygen from captive plant to the Covid care hospital would help provide timely treatment to rescue patients," Arjas MD Sreedhar Krishnamoorthy. He expressed gratitude to CM and the district administration for making them take part in the mission to treat Covid patients.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu said the 500-bed facility is aimed at providing care for the Covid patients from the three districts Anantapur, Kadapa and Kurnool even during critical conditions. More than 40 doctors and sufficient nursing and other staff are provided at the facility to provide good care round-the-clock, he said.

Minister Shankar Narayana said the hospital with 500 beds equipped with oxygen pipelines from a plant is the first-of-its-kind in the state.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, municipal minister Botsa Satyanarayana, principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal, health commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, and APMSIDC VC and MD

Vijayarama Raju were among those present at the virtual event. From Tadipatri, minister Shankar Narayana, MPs Talari Rangaiah and Gorantla Madhav, and district officials attended the event.

CONG. WANTS CM
TO PUT PRESSURE
ON PM FOR VAXDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

A Congress team led by APCC president Dr Sake Sailajanath met Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and submitted a memorandum demanding administering of Corona vaccination to all by December end this year.

Dr Sailajanath pointed out that entire adult population above 18 years in the country needs to be vaccinated by December 31, so that they remain protected from Coronavirus. For the purpose, he suggested that Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy pressurise Prime Minister Narendra Modi into ensuring that one crore people of the country are given free vaccinations each day till universal vaccination is achieved within India.

The APCC president said Covid-19 has not left untouched almost every Indian family. But tragically, Modi government has completely abdicated its responsibility, leaving people to fend for themselves when it comes to vaccination. "This is criminal mismanagement on part of BJP government at the centre," he remarked.

Dr. Sailajanath maintained that vaccination is the only protection in the midst of raging Coronavirus. But the central and state governments have till date ordered only 39 crore vaccines when the total population is 140 crore. He pointed out that though the government has administered 21.31 crore vaccine doses till May 31, 2021, only 4.45 crore Indians have received both the doses, which is only 3.17 per cent of India's population.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Congress leader and Rajya Sabha member Jairam Ramesh wonders as to why Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is not asking questions to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Corona vaccine issues. He posted his comments on his Twitter handle on Friday.

The Andhra Pradesh chief minister had written a letter to all CMs on Thursday, urging them to speak in one voice for an early resolution of the vaccine shortage issues. Reacting to this, Ramesh tweeted: "All I ask Jagan is: who made the vaccine issue Union vs states? Who unilaterally decided the Union Government will abdicate (its role of vaccinating the 18-44 year olds? Why weren't states consulted before this policy was rolled out? Why don't you ask the PM these questions?"

Ramesh also posed questions to Odisha chief min-



Jairam Ramesh

ister Naveen Patnaik who also wrote letters to fellow CMs on the lines of what the AP CM did, on the Corona vaccine shortage issue.

Addressing Naveen Patnaik, Ramesh tweeted: "It's all very well for Odisha CM to write to all CMs, but why can't he write to PM & persuade him? After all, BJD has supported the BJP in Parliament for the past 7 years. Several like-minded parties have already written to the PM, asking for procurement of vaccines by the Union Government."

HAS CHANDRABABU NAIDU TAKEN
CORONA VACCINE, ASKS YSRCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

YSR Congress has sought clarification from Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu whether or not he has taken the Coronavirus vaccine. "He is above 45 years of age and should have taken the vaccine by now," agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu observed on Friday.

Kannababu said people are indeed concerned about the health of former chief minister and present opposition leader in the state. "If he has taken the vaccine, when did he take it? Which vaccine did he take? "Is it

Covaxin of Bharat Biotech or Covishield of Serum institute? Has he taken both the doses? Where did he take the vaccine –Telangana or Andhra Pradesh," the minister asked.

Kannababu advised the leader of opposition to question the government's efforts with regard to the vaccination drive after disclosing whether or not he has taken the vaccine.

He further wanted to know whether Chandrababu Naidu is aware of the fact that it is the central government that has been controlling the supply of vaccines so far.

His first story 'Chitragupta' was a mini-story. Some of his popular story books include: Theerpu in 1963, Veerudu Mahaveerudu, Himsa, No Room, Sneham, Jeevana Dhara. His stories were translated into Russian and English. He had an association with Visakhapatnam where he worked as a teacher at St. Anthony's High School. Inspired by KaRa Master's Katha Nilayam in Srikakulam, a literary lover Abbigari Rajendra Prasad also established Katha Nilayam at Nandaluru in Kadapa.

Later on February 22 in 1997, KaRa founded a library called 'Katha Nilayam,' an archive of various Telugu literary works written by authors across Telugu states. The library, which was opened with around 800 short-story books, is now estimated to have nearly one literary works including KaRa's own books.

IN BRIEF

STATE REGISTERS
10,413 NEW COVID
CASES, 83 DEATHSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Andhra Pradesh has registered 10,413 fresh Coronavirus infections and 83 deaths in the last 24 hours. The state has been showing a dip in daily cases in the last few days.

On May 16, it recorded 18,285 cases of Covid-19. Since then, except for a steep decline of cases to 7,947 on May 31, AP has consistently reported a dip in fresh cases. With this, total number of samples tested so far has reached 1,96,19,590; of whom 17,38,990 persons tested positive. 15,93,921 of them have recovered while 1,33,773 are still undergoing treatment.

BODIES OF WOMAN,
2 CHILDREN FOUND
IN SAGILERUDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 4

The bodies of a woman and two children were found floating in the Sagileru project under the B. Koduru police station limits in Kadapa district.

The locals, who saw the bodies floating in the water, informed the police. It was not known who they were until Friday evening.

According to the information from B. Koduru police sub-inspector Naini Varalakshmi, the woman is about 35 years old and has two children, five and five months respectively. When the information was received, the police rushed to the spot and picked the bodies from the water.

The bodies were shifted to the hospital in Porumamilla and kept there. She said photos of the woman and children were sent to all police stations in the district and even at the state level.

It was revealed that no one had claimed until Friday evening and they would look into it until Saturday morning and then conduct a post-mortem and bury it.

A case has been registered and is being investigated.

AP TRANSFERS
19 IAS OFFICIALS
ACROSS STATEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA JUNE 4

In a major administrative exercise, the Andhra Pradesh government transferred 20 officials including 19 IAS officers across the state on Friday.

Krishna district collector A. Md. Imtiaz was transferred and posted as special secretary to the minorities welfare department. Srikakulam district collector J. Nivas was transferred and posted as collector; Krishna district.

The services of AP, AGROS vice chairman and managing director Lathkar Srikesh Balajirao were stopped and he was posted as collector at Srikakulam.

Anantapur district collector Gandham Chandrudu was transferred and posted as director, village and ward secretariat. The services of APEPDCL chairperson and managing director Nagalakshmi were ended and she was posted as collector at Anantapur.

Visakhapatnam sub collector Dr Venkateswar Salijamala was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Anantapur.

Narsapur sub collector K.S. Viswanathan was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Prakasam. Vijayawada sub collector H.M. Dhyanchandrar was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Kadapa.

Madanapalle sub collector M. Jahnavi was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, East Godavari. Narsipatnam sub collector N. Maurya was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Kurnool.

Narasaraopeta sub collector S. Nupur Ajay Kumar was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Krishna. Rajamahendravaram sub collector Anupama Anjali was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Guntur.

Parvathipuram sub collector Videsh Khare was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Nellore. Tekkali sub collector Ganore Suraj Dhananjay was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, West Godavari.

Nandyal sub collector Kalpana Kumari was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Visakhapatnam. Tenali sub collector K Mayur Ashok was transferred and posted as joint collector; housing, Vizianagaram.



People get Covid vaccine at a health centre near Krishna College in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

State police felicitate
‘Manavathva Dheeras’

AP issuing passes to individuals rendering service to society

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

Andhra Pradesh Director General of Police Gautam Sawang, along with superintendents of police belonging to all 13 districts of the state, on Friday felicitated 50 organisations for their selfless service in providing a dignified last journey to those dying during the Covid-19 pandemic.

All these organisations had voluntarily come forward to ensure that no person, who has succumbed to Coronavirus infection, is deprived of the basic human right of dignity in death.

The dead included those whose bodies were not claimed during both the waves of infection in the state. The DGP and SPs

NGOs feted for free last rites

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 4

Services of social workers and organisations which conducted cremation of a huge number of dead bodies were recognised and awarded by the police.

Life World Charitable Trust head Uday Kumar and Muslim Nagara president Umar Farook of Hindupur conducted more than a hundred last rites in the past one year

gave these organisations “Manavathva Dheeras” award - Warriors of Humanity.

Speaking at the event, DGP Gautam Sawang

in Hindupur town.

Similarly, Sai Seva Trust convener Sri Sai of Anantapur, Sanjeevani Trust head Ramana Reddy, Kadiri Pavani Yuvaseva organiser Sheikh Abdul Ali, KK Society organiser Maruthi Kumar of Puttaparthi, Aa Naluguru of Guntakal, U r a v a k o n d a Raghavendra Trust among others were felicitated by District SP Satya Esababu.

said, “While fulfilling our duty to the best of our abilities during the course of both Covid-19 waves, we came across many individuals and

organisations that courageously came forward to help those in need despite risk to their lives. They include many nameless and faceless people who chose to remain selfless and anonymous.”

Sawang pointed out that at certain places, these organisations worked shoulder to shoulder with police. They came forward when systems were burdened beyond imagination and bodies were being left unclaimed due to fear of Coronavirus.

The DGP said Andhra Pradesh is expressly issuing passes to all individuals who are rendering such selfless services to the society. He further requested people to come forward and work with police wherever possible.

MEGHA INSTALLS
KEY EQUIPMENT
AT COVID HOSPSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 4

MEIL has provided oxygen pipelines, manifolds and flow meters to the country's second largest Covid care facility established by the AP government at Tadipatri. It provided similar facilities at Anantapur, Punganur.

At the Tadipatri Covid-19 temporary hospital near Arjas Steel Factory, MEIL completed works on oxygen supply to the 500-bed facility. It fitted the oxygen pipe with required valves and pressure gauges including outlets and flow meters with L-Gauge and Humidifier (0-15 bar) for each bed. It also provided a stand-by manifold with a control panel.

At the Anantapur Covid temporary hospital, work is under progress for a 300-bed oxygen pipeline. At the Covid PHC Hospital at Punganur, MEIL completed 80-bed oxygen pipelines and manifests with control panels.

Testing times for people
as labs fleece Covid-hitDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JUNE 4

Private diagnostic laboratories are fleecing Covid-19 patients in the name of different tests as the virus is ravaging the state. Apart from private and corporate hospitals, the laboratories are extorting huge sums of money for various tests.

Even in cases, where it is not necessary, it is alleged that some doctors are prescribing even C.T. scan twice or thrice, thus benefiting the laboratories which are allegedly sharing profits with them. Before Covid-19, the labs used to charge ₹75 to ₹100 for diabetes tests. Now, they are charging ₹175 to ₹350 for the test.

The government has fixed charges for RT-PCR at ₹499, Rapid Antigen Test at ₹230 and CT Scan at ₹3,000. But neither the laboratories nor private hospitals are offering tests at these rates. They are charging ₹1,200 to ₹2,500 for RT-PCR and rapid tests alone. There is no check.

However, District Medical

Doctors too draw flak for prescribing unnecessary tests and even calling for C.T scans

DMHO Gowreeswara Rao urges public to inform about overcharging by diagnostic labs

The Covid-19 patients urge Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to pay attention to exploitation by the laboratories and their nexus with doctors

and Health Officer K.V.S. Gowreeswara Rao said that stringent action would be taken against the laboratories, if they are charging more than the charges fixed by the government. He appealed to the patients to inform if any laboratories are overcharging them.

Meanwhile, a patient developed Covid-19 symptoms and took a Covid-19 test. But the test result showed 'negative.' When he went back to his doctor, he prescribed tests again along with CBP, CRP, LDH, D.Dimer and others. He

even prescribed C.T. scan for chest.

A laboratory in Rajamahendravaram charged ₹17,000 for these tests. For the past 20 days, he made these tests in two instalments. The doctor recommended him to undergo the same tests another time. “I am unable to bear such huge costs for laboratory tests. When I want to go to the government hospitals for these tests, the situation there is not favourable,” he said.

In Kakinada also, the laboratories are fleecing the patients exorbitantly. Four members of a family of a private employee in a rice mill at Kakinada contracted Covid-19. He spent ₹20,000 so far and he tested 'negative,' but his doctor said he would call for the same tests after a week. He said that he was at a loss to raise money for further tests.

The Covid-19 patients urge Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to pay attention to exploitation by the laboratories and their nexus with doctors.

TS, AP given 4 weeks to
form SSC, PCADC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 4

The High Court has given one final opportunity to Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh to comply with the orders passed earlier by it and the Supreme Court regarding constitution of a State Security Commission (SSC) and a Police Complaints Authority (PCA). The panels are meant for redressal of public grievances with respect to abuse of power by police personnel.

SSC is state-level panel which will look into grievances against higher-rank police officials with a retired judge of either the Supreme Court or High Court as the chair whereas PCA is a district-level panel, which will look into complaints against SIs, CIs, DSPs and ranks below the SP cadre. The apex court had in 2006 directed all state governments to constitute the panels in the Prakash Singh case that also resulted in the Supreme Court coming up with guidelines to bring in police reforms.

In one of the petitions on non-implementation of the Supreme Court orders, the then Hyderabad High Court had in 2016 directed the constitution of SSC and PCA within two months. When

the States failed to adhere to the directions, the High Court initiated a suo-motu contempt case against both States in 2017.

On January 21 of this year, the High Court gave four weeks to the governments to comply with the orders. However, both sought another two months.

Telangana state Advocate-General B.S. Prasad informed the court that the constitution of SSC had been completed and a chairperson was to be appointed from the lists of retired judges suggested by the High Court.

Andhra Pradesh special counsel Govinda Reddy informed that guidelines and rules had been framed but sought more time to appoint heads of the panels.

The bench expressed dissatisfaction at the attitude of the governments and directed that the last opportunity of four weeks be given to complete the process, failing which it call for the appearance of secretaries of TS and AP home departments to explain reasons for the delay.

CLASSIFIEDS

FOR SALE

PROPERTY

COMMERCIAL

COMMERCIAL COMPLEX for Sale on Main Road PVNR Express Highway, Rajendernagar, Aramghar. Each floor 13500 Sft, 6 floors+ two cellars, Total Area 81000 Sft. Mehdiapatnam Ring Road. Suitable for Hotel, Offices, Hospital, Colleges etc. Contact 9000087652. (B/2122/IC00016)

FLATS

✓MLA COLONY-ROAD no.12 Banjara-Hills perfect-Vaastu 3yr-Old Fully-Furnished 3000-sft. Fantastic-view 1-flt per-floor fully air-conditioned with-TV-Fridge-WIFI Washing-Machine complete-furniture 3.75cr 9 9 6 3 6 9 9 0 0 0 (W/2122/AT000161)

SAINIKPURI/ TARNAKA 2, 3 & 4 BHK flats 1225 sft - 2500 sft all amenities, 100% vastu, ready to occupy, gated community. www.happyhomeshyderabad.com. Ph:7729999725 / 732. (S/2122/C00339)

SITUATION VACANT

MULTIPLE VACANCIES

URGENTLY REQUIRE A Multitasking Male PA to MD To Work at Banjara Hills. Should Have Minimum 2years Experience, Good Communication Skills, Office Filing, Good Drafting Skills & Good Computer Knowledge. Minimum Graduation Required. Walk-in For an Interview at BanjaraHills, Between 9AM

To 12PM, Ph: 7075559599/ 8978762211. E-Mail: vertexuniversal@hotmail.com (HYMM/2122/C01317)

EDUCATIONAL

DISTANCE EDUCATION

✓NO ADVANCE Fee. Contact For: B.Tech./ Engineering Diplomas in-Mechanical Engineering/ Electrical/EEE/ I T / Electronics & Communication/ Information Technology/Civil/ Refrigeration/ Diary Engineering/ Textile -from Government Universities/ Boards. ECA guidance - IQAS/WES available. Institutes only. Students please no call. Admission Guidance. Engineering Education Service. Lucknow, Mumbai. Email:engg.educationservice99@yahoo.com. Mob: 7 7 5 3 0 6 9 4 9 3. (HYMM/2122/C01329)

MACHINERY & TOOLS

STONE CRUSHER 300 tph 3 Stage Plant, Mining & R.M.C Schwing, Stetter, H1 Plant tms & Pumps, Total setup running condition. Sale or Lease. Contact: 7 7 2 9 9 9 9 7 2 5 / 3 2, 7 0 9 3 7 8 1 2 3 5. (S/2122/C00345)

NOTICE

Readers are advised to make appropriate enquiries while responding to advertisements in these columns. Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. does not vouch for any claims made by the Advertisers. The Printer, Publisher, Editor and Owner of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. shall not be held responsible / liable for any consequences, in case such claims are found to be false.

SHORT TAKES

GUJARAT ALLOWS OFFICES TO RUN WITH 100% STAFF

Ahmedabad, June 4: In the wake of a significant decline in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government on Friday announced that private as well as government offices in the state can now function with 100 per cent staff from June 7.

The decision was taken by Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, an official release issued on Friday said. All government offices will remain open on Saturday (June 5), it added.

Private as well as government offices in Gujarat have been functioning with 50 per cent staff since the beginning of May, when the state witnessed a substantial rise in infection cases. The state government had allowed only half the work force in offices in a bid to curb the spread of the virus.

However, the number of daily infections has come down drastically in the last couple of weeks. On Thursday, Gujarat recorded 1,207 new cases and 17 deaths.

ASSAM HALTS 1ST DOSE OF COVAXIN DUE TO SHORTAGE

Guwahati, June 4: The Assam government has stopped administering the first dose of Covaxin due to its shortage, and will accord priority to 1.50 lakh people who are due for the second dose of the jab, a state minister said on Friday.

The current stock of Covaxin in the state is 20,000 but “we will get 50,000 more doses within the next few days”, minister for health and family welfare Keshab Mahanta said.

He also urged those who are slated for the second dose to not panic as the gap between the two doses has been increased from 28 to 42 days, and said they will be inoculated within the stipulated time.

The state has received 15,000 doses of vaccine on Friday, he added. Assam has 3.20 doses of Covishield and the vaccination process with it will continue as per schedule, the minister said.

ALL MP DISTRICTS OUT OF RED ZONE, SAYS SHIVRAJ

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, JUNE 4

All the 52 districts in Madhya Pradesh have emerged out of the red zone, bringing the Coronavirus pandemic in the state under control, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday.

Reviewing the pandemic situation in the state, Chouhan said no district is in the red zone now and all the districts in the state have been reporting a positivity rate below five per cent for the past one week.

The review meeting has indicated that 30 out of 52 districts in the state have been reporting positivity rate below one per cent since last one week, while the other 22 have been maintaining 1-5 per cent positivity rate since the last seven days.

Three districts, Alirajpur, Jhabua and Katni have reported no fresh case on Friday, while four districts, Bhind, Mandla, Singrauli and Tikamgarh, recorded only one case each on the day.

AMBUBACHI MELA CANCELLED FOR SECOND YEAR

Guwahati, June 4: The Ambubachi Mela at Assam's famed Kamakhya Temple here has been cancelled for the second consecutive year due to the Covid situation but rituals associated with the four-day annual fair will be performed by the priests from June 22.

The event, during which temple doors are closed for four days due to the belief of the annual menstrual cycle of Goddess Kamakhya, attracts over 25 lakh devotees from across the globe who seek blessings of the presiding deity when the doors are opened on the fifth day.

The Shakti Peeth atop the Nilachal Hill shall remain closed for visitors till June 30 and a decision regarding its reopening will be taken in consultation with the Kamrup Metropolitan district administration, a statement issued by the Maa Kamakhya Devalaya said on Friday.

No devotee shall be allowed to enter or stay on the temple premises and no arrangement for their food and lodging shall be made, it said.

Kerala announces ₹20K-cr relief

₹5 cr set aside for children orphaned due to Covid; ₹1,000 cr to be used for free vaccination

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JUNE 4

Pinarayi Vijayan government which came to power for the second time in Kerala after the recent polls, has presented it's maiden budget on Friday which comprised a ₹20,000 crore special package to deal with the huge crisis triggered by Covid 19 second wave.

While presenting the budget in state Assembly, Kerala's finance minister K.N. Balagopal announced that as part of the package ₹2,800 crore would be spent on facing health emergency situation.

The minister said ₹8,900 crore would be pumped into the market through various social welfare measures including social welfare pensions.

This would in turn help people who have been plunged into grave crisis

due to loss of livelihood. Besides, ₹8,300 crore has been set aside for interest subsidy on loans granted for reviving the economy.

The minister said all community health centres, taluk and district hospitals will have 10 isolation beds each. Each medical college to have separate blocks for dealing with epidemics. Oxygen plant with a capacity of 150 metric tonne would be set up.

Balagopal said ₹1,000 cr would be utilised for providing free Covid vaccination for all above 18 years of age.

The minister announced that ₹500 crore would be spent on providing infrastructure facilities including equipment for mass vaccination drive. The government has set aside ₹5 crore for children who lost their parents due to Covid. Each orphaned

child would be given ₹3 lakh.

Balagopal said the emphasis of the new budget was on ensuring health and food for all especially during the pandemic period. With the state still fighting the second wave, the current challenges posed by the pandemic are also adversely impacting the state's development, he added.

He said the government was also gearing up to face the challenges that third wave might pose.

People spared of tax hike as Pinarayi government focuses on reviving Covid hit economy.

While sparing the people of additional tax burden, the minister said this was not the right time to impose taxes. However, he said that considering the 18.7 per cent dip in state's revenue due to Covid crisis, it would be difficult to move forward without an

increase in tax and non tax revenues.

Balagopal said the government hoped to shore up more revenues when the economy comes back on track.

Special package for coastal areas

The minister announced a special package for the state's coastal areas which witnessed widespread destruction due to recent cyclones and rains. The government would spend ₹5,300 crore as part of coastal package for coastal conservation activities including construction of integrating tetrapods and diaphragm walls.

A special loan package of ₹2,500 crore had been announced for farmers and ₹1,000 crore loans through Kudumbasree.

Opposition slams the government and said the budget is packed with

deceit. Opposition leader V.D. Satheshan said the government had deceived the people by making false claims. The government had earlier claimed that ₹8,900 crore would be transferred directly into the hands of people. However, now it has retracted from the announcement which clearly indicates their trickery.

Satheshan said the former finance minister Thomas Isaac before demitting office had claimed that he was leaving behind ₹5,000 crore in state's exchequer. Where is the money? asked Satheshan.

State reports 16,229 new cases; 25,860 recover

Kerala reported 16,229 new cases of Covid on Friday even as 25,860 people recovered from infection.

The number of active cases in the state fell to 1,74,526. During the last 24 hours 1.09 lakh tests were carried out in the state and the test positivity rate was 14.82. The state also reported 135 Covid deaths on Friday.

As of now 6.93 lakh people are under observation across the state including 6.57 lakh under home or institutional quarantine.

The state government has announced that additional restrictions would be put in place in the state from June 5. Only shops selling essential commodities and the units which supply raw materials for various industrial establishments would be allowed to function.

The restrictions are being imposed with the objective of preventing third wave of Coronavirus, expected to hit in December this year, in the state.



Naveen Patnaik

ODISHA CANCELS CLASS XII EXAMS, SAYS PATNAIK

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, JUNE 4

After the Central Board of Education (CBSE), Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE), Odisha also on Friday cancelled the Class 12 (Plus II) examinations this year. The decision was taken in view of the uncertain conditions due to Covid-19 pandemic and feedback received from various stakeholders.

Announcing the decision, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, “Education and livelihood have been the worst affected during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. However, keeping everyone safe in this pandemic is most important. Keeping in this view, the Plus II examinations conducted by CHSE have been cancelled this year. Ample opportunities will come in future and the civilisation will grow, only if we survive now,” he stated.

The Chief Minister also directed the CHSE to consult experts for recommendations and take steps to compile results of Plus II students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner.

K'TAKA TO HOLD CLASS X EXAMS IN JULY: MIN.

Bengaluru, June 4: The Karnataka government on Friday announced that the SSLC or 10th standard examinations will be held in July third week while cancelling the second year pre-university course (PUC) exams this year in view of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The PUC second year students will be promoted to the next level and the grading will be based on their performance in the first PUC exam.

“The SSLC exam will have one multi-choice question paper for mathematics, science and social science and one more question paper for languages,” Karnataka primary and secondary education minister S. Suresh Kumar told reporters.

The multi-choice question paper bearing 40 marks will be easy and straight and there will not be any indirect questions, he said. Kumar said there will be a supplementary examination for those students who are affected by the Covid-19. The exam results will be out by August.

The exams will be conducted in 6,000 centres, which is double last year, the minister said, adding, each room will have 10 to 12 students. —PTI



A health worker collects swab samples for Coronavirus tests in Nagercoil of Tamil Nadu on Friday.

— PTI

TN likely to extend curbs with relaxations

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, JUNE 4

The total lockdown now in force in the state is expected to continue for one more week with a few minor relaxations like letting shops selling essential items open for a few hours in a day even as officials and experts deliberated on the merits and demerits on Friday.

The meeting presided over by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin was attended by most top officials of the state like chief secretary V. Irai Anbu, health secretary J. Radhakrishnan and DGP J.K. Tripathi besides medical experts and various health department officers.

Since the two week total lockdown had led to the number of cases coming down in most parts of the state, many were in favour of continuing it for at least another week with a view to enable the rate of infection

Decision on class XII exams only by Monday, says minister

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, JUNE 4

The question on holding public examinations for Plus Two students of the state board hung on fire on Friday as educationalists, experts and officials were divided on the issue and a final decision was expected only by Monday. In the deliberations the state minister for school education Anbil Mahesh Poyamozhi had with dis-

trict education officers, government officials and experts, some wanted the conduct of the examinations after the Covid-19 crisis was over while others favoured its cancellation.

The minister would hold a meeting with leaders of the Legislative parties in the state assembly on Saturday before finalising the issue, which has gained significance after the Centre cancelled examinations for the

CBSE and ICSE boards.

Queries came up on the granting of marks to the students in the event of calling off the examinations and concerns were also raised on fixing the eligibility for admission to colleges without granting marks, particularly when the government was mulling over not taking into consideration the scores obtained in NEET or any other qualifying examination.

particularly those in the western part of the state.

Suggestions were made on opening big markets with restrictions and allowing businesses and commercial activities to resume in a small manner, though it was pointed out that such moves could turn risky and lead to spike in cases.

The government has also been receiving informal representations from various traders' bodies requesting the relaxation of the lockdown to enable them open their businesses, the closure of which had led to loss of livelihood for many people.

But the lack of discipline among the general people in following Covid-19 prevention norms has been a matter of concern for officials and also health experts, who feel that only a lockdown would ensure that people do not move around and spread the virus.

run of society. Those in charge of finance were concerned over the fall in revenue and said that it could have a long term impact on the state's financial wellbeing.

Another suggestion was

that more relaxations could be made in the districts where the numbers had come down and the stringent norms could continue in the districts where Coronavirus is wreaking more havoc, par-

Movement against plastic hit hard due to single-use items

COVID | DETRITUS

PPE, masks, shields adds to waste crisis

New Delhi, June 4: The crisis of plastic and biomedical waste is deepening with each Covid case as millions of people use and throw face shields, surgical masks, gloves and PPE suits, once used primarily in hospitals and now an indispensable part of everyday life.

The movement against plastic has taken a battering in the pandemic with dependency on single-use plastic surging and households contributing to the tonnes of biomedical waste being generated, worried experts said ahead of World Environment Day on Saturday.

The detritus of the pandemic can be seen everywhere PPE suits lying discarded behind hospitals and crematoriums, surgical masks and shields

being thrown as part of household waste and, of course, sanitiser bottles, gloves and the like found in street corner garbage dumps.

With waste disposal mechanisms less than perfect in India and the plastic footprint becoming larger by the day, concerns on plastic waste choking the planet and worries about safety are mounting.

There has been a general increase and since it is a crisis situation, we are not thinking of plastic but general prevention. The focus is no longer plastic, so that is a problem, Ravi Agarwal, founder director of the environmental NGO Toxics Link, said.

A lot of biomedical waste like masks and PPE kits are also being generated in general homes

● India produced 45,308 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste between June 2020 and May 10, 2021, an average daily generation of 132 tonnes of Covid-19 related waste.

now. So that is becoming a big problem. These things are finding their way across ecosystems. A lot of these things like masks can be seen on beaches, in coral reefs etc, he added.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), India produced 45,308 tonnes of Covid-19 biomedical waste between June 2020 and May 10, 2021, an average daily generation of 132 tonnes of Covid-19 related waste.

This is in addition to the 615 tonnes of biomedical waste a day being produced before Covid-19,

amounting to a 17 per cent increase in biomedical waste generation solely because of the pandemic.

Besides Covid-related waste from hospitals and homes with positive patients, there is pandemic promoted waste from non-Covid homes, including not just protective gear but also plastic packaging with more and more people using home deliveries for essential and non-essential shopping.

Under the existing waste disposal rules, biomedical waste is segregated into four categories Yellow (highly infectious waste such as human, animal, anatomical, soiled), Red (contaminated recyclable waste generated from disposable items like tubing, bottles tubes, syringes), White (waste sharps,

needles, syringes with fixed needles), and Blue (broken or discarded and contaminated glassware, including medicine vials).

Considered potentially infectious, all Covid waste, irrespective of content, is tagged Yellow and incinerated.

On the face of it, India seems well equipped to handle this extra load of biomedical waste with a national incineration capacity of 800 tonnes a day. But experts said there are other factors that needed to be taken into account.

Like the fact that due to the health crisis, non-Covid biomedical waste generation has also gone up. Secondly, these incinerators are meant for waste that has been segregated. —PTI

TN: Lioness dies of suspected Covid-19

P.A. JEBARAJ | DC CHENNAI, JUNE 4

A nine-year-old lioness housed at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park in Vandalur has died of suspected Coronavirus infection on Thursday evening. Eight other lions have also been tested positive for SARS CoV-2.

The deceased lioness named Neela had been asymptomatic and showed some nasal discharge only the day before her death and had been treated immediately.

According to the state department from the zoological park, five lions housed in animal house 1 of the Safari Park Area of Arignar Anna Zoological Park showed anorexia (loss of appetite) and occasional coughing on May 26.

The zoo veterinary team investigated the case and started treatment as per protocol. A team of experts from Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University also joined the team later. Later, 9 of the 11 lions tested positive in the examination conducted at Bhopal-based National Institute of High Security Diseases (NIHSAD). One of them died on Thursday evening.

Samples of the swabs have now been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute Bareilly and the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad on Friday to ascertain whether the reported findings are in the nature of false positives or the animal could have died of comorbidities.

SHORT TAKES

FIRE AT JUVENILE
DETENTION KILLS
6 KIDS IN EGYPT

Cairo: A fire broke out on Thursday at a juvenile detention center in Egypt's capital of Cairo, killing at least six children, officials said.

The officials said the fire followed a fist-fight between two children in one ward at the facility, located in the city's Marj district. More than two dozen other children were injured, they said.

Police are holding those running the facility as prosecutors investigate the cause of the fire, the officials said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief media.

It was not immediately clear what caused the fire. Initial investigation blamed an electric short-circuit for the blaze, according to state-run media.

The state-run newspaper *Akhbar el-Yom* reported that the children were not able to flee the fire because the ward was locked.

JAILED SAMSUNG
LEADER FINED FOR
PROPOFOL SHOTS

Seoul: South Korean prosecutors fined the jailed de facto leader of the giant Samsung group 50 million won (\$45,000) on Friday for illegally taking shots of the anaesthetic propofol. Lee Jae-yong — the 168th richest person in the world according to Forbes — is currently serving a two-and-a-half year prison sentence for bribery, embezzlement and other offences in connection with the corruption scandal that brought down ex-South Korean president Park Geun-hye.

He is also standing a separate trial over alleged stock manipulation that effectively eased the path for him to take control of the family conglomerate. Propofol is normally a medical anaesthetic but is also sometimes used recreationally. An overdose of the drug was given as the cause of pop star Michael Jackson's death in 2009.

Lee was accused of having repeatedly taken it at a plastic surgery clinic in Seoul in 2017 and 2018.

GERMAN CLERIC
TO QUIT OVER
CHURCH ABUSE

Berlin: A leading German cardinal and confidant of Pope Francis, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, offered to resign Friday over the Catholic Church's "catastrophic" mishandling of clergy sexual abuse cases, declaring in an extraordinary gesture that the scandals had brought the church to "a dead end." The archdiocese of Munich and Freising, where Marx has served as archbishop since 2007, published his resignation letter to the pope online, in multiple languages, and the cardinal said Francis had given him permission to make it public.

"It is important to me to share the responsibility for the catastrophe of the sexual abuse by Church officials over the past decades," the 67-year-old Marx wrote in the letter. But he also issued a challenge of sorts for his fellow bishops to use the opportunity of the scandal to save the church and reform it. There was no immediate comment from the Vatican, where Marx sits on powerful financial and political committees.

12 OZ FIRMS FINED
FOR BREAKING
PELL ORDER

Canberra: A judge on Friday ordered a dozen Australian media companies to pay fines from 1,000 Australian dollars (\$766) to AU\$450,000 (\$345,000) for breaching a gag order by publishing references to Cardinal George Pell's since-overturned convictions in 2018 for child sexual abuse.

Dozens of companies, reporters and editors were initially charged with contempt and breaching a suppression order over their coverage of the convictions, which were banned from publication in Australia until February 2019.

Such suppression orders are common in the Australian and British judicial systems. But the enormous international interest in an Australian criminal trial with global ramifications highlighted the difficulty in enforcing such orders in the digital age. The media companies pleaded guilty in February to 21 charges of contempt in a plea deal in the Victoria state Supreme Court.



People hold up their phones with the light on in the Causeway Bay district of Hong Kong on Friday, after police closed the venue where Hong Kong people traditionally gather annually to mourn the victims of China's Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 which the authorities have banned citing the Coronavirus pandemic and vowed to stamp out any protests on the anniversary.

— AFP

HK park empty for 1st time in
32 years on Tiananmen anniv.

Cops enforce ban public commemorations but protests flicker at distance

Hong Kong, June 4: A Hong Kong park that traditionally hosts huge vigils on the anniversary of China's deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown lay empty for the first time late Friday as police blocked access, but flashes of defiance still flickered across the city.

Huge crowds have routinely gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to mark the anniversary of Chinese troops crushing peaceful democracy protests in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds were killed in the crackdown, by some estimates more than 1,000.

Public commemorations are forbidden on the mainland and, until recently, semi-autonomous Hong Kong was the one place in China where large scale

remembrance was still tolerated.

This year's vigil was banned at a time when authorities are carrying out a sweeping clampdown on dissent following huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago.

Police threw cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.

Activists who approached the park were stopped and searched, while officers used loud hollers and signs to call for people to disperse from nearby streets.

Some officers displayed signs warning chanting crowds that they were in breach of a sweeping new national security law Beijing imposed on the

● **POLICE THREW** cordons around the Victoria Park, keeping crowds out and leaving the venue free of candle carrying mourners for the first time in 32 years.

city last year to stamp out dissent.

Unable to muster en masse, many Hong Kong residents still found other ways to mourn the dead.

As the clock struck 8pm in Hong Kong's shopping district of Mong Kok, dozens of people simultaneously turned their mobile phone lights on, a small gesture of defiance in a city where mass remembrance of Beijing's Tiananmen crackdown has been banned.

It was a scene repeated

in multiple districts across the city.

For the last 32 years, crowds of Hong Kongers, often tens of thousands strong, have come together each June 4 in the city's Victoria Park to hold a candlelight vigil for those killed in 1989 when tanks and troops crushed pro-democracy protesters in China's capital.

Police arrested an organiser of Hong Kong's annual candlelight vigil remembering the deadly crackdown in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, warned people not to attend the banned event and cordoned off parts of the venue on Friday as authorities mute China's last pro-democracy voices.

In past years, tens of thousands of people gathered in Hong Kong's Victoria Park to honour those who

died when China's military put down student-led pro-democracy protests on June 4, 1989.

Hundreds, if not thousands, were killed. China's ruling Communist Party has never allowed public events on the mainland to mark the anniversary and security was increased at the Beijing square, with police checking pedestrians' IDs as tour buses shuttled Chinese tourists in and out.

Chinese officials say the country's rapid economic development in the years since what they call the "political turmoil" of 1989 proves that decisions made at the time were correct.

Efforts to suppress public memory of the Tiananmen events have lately turned to Hong Kong.

— AFP/AP

S. Korea air chief
quits as abused
woman ends life

Seoul, June 4: South Korea's air force chief resigned on Friday, apologising and taking responsibility for the death of a member of the force who took her own life, according to her family, after being sexually harassed by a colleague.

Lee Seong-yong offered to step down a day after an air force master sergeant was arrested on charges of molesting and injuring a female colleague of the same rank in March.

The family of the victim said she had suffered mental distress and persistent bullying, and accused the air force of trying to cover up the assault and silence her over the past two months.

President Moon Jae-in immediately accepted Lee's resignation, his press secretary said, making him the shortest serving South Korean air

force chief after appointing him in September.

"I would like to extend my apology to the citizens and deep condolences to the deceased person and her family. I feel heavy responsibility and offer my resignation," Lee said in a statement.

The case sparked a public outcry after the woman's family filed a petition with Moon's office on Tuesday calling for a thorough investigation and punishment for those involved. More than 328,000 people have signed it so far.

Moon ordered an investigation on Thursday including on how the air force handled the case, as the family reported three officials at Lee's base to military prosecutors, accusing two of them of dereliction of duty and attempted compulsion and the other of sexual harassment. — Reuters

NZ allows way for
China extradition

Wellington, June 4: New Zealand's top court on Friday left open the possibility that a man could be extradited to China to face murder charges in a landmark case that has big diplomatic implications.

It remains uncertain whether the extradition of Kyung Yup Kim will proceed in a case that has already dragged on for more than a decade.

The dispute hinges on whether New Zealand can be assured that Kim will get a fair trial if he's sent to China and won't be tortured. New Zealand doesn't have an extradition treaty with China.

New Zealand's Supreme Court on Friday didn't make a final ruling on the case but asked for more information from Justice Minister Kris Faafoi and others to be submitted by the end of July.

The 3-2 split decision found that it was possible for New Zealand to get sufficient assurance from China about Kim's welfare, partially overturning an earlier appeals court ruling.

Such assurances could include confirmation that representatives could visit Kim at least every 48 hours during the investigation and that the trial take place in Shanghai. But times have changed since a previous justice minister from a conservative government backed extradition. Faafoi is from a liberal government and will decide how to proceed at a time when relations with China have deteriorated.

The court acknowledged Faafoi might see things differently, saying he would be "entitled to depart from the previous minister's decision." — AP

China urges closer Afghan
ties as US pullout looms

Beijing, June 4: China is urging closer security and economic cooperation with Afghanistan in an apparent effort to bolster its influence in the region as the US and its allies prepare to withdraw their forces from the country.

The official *Xinhua* News Agency reported that foreign ministers from China, Afghanistan and Pakistan met via video conference on Thursday and agreed that the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan should be carried out in a responsible and orderly manner to prevent the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan and the return of "terrorist forces."

It quoted Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi as saying the three countries "needed to strengthen communication and cooperation" for the sake

of Afghanistan's interests and those of neighbouring countries.

"The security and stability of Afghanistan and the region are facing new challenges, with foreign troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan accelerated, the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan impacted, and armed conflicts and terrorist activities becoming more frequent," Wang was quoted as saying. China has long resented the presence of US and allied forces in Afghanistan, but is equally wary of the country becoming a haven for insurgents that could threaten security in its Xinjiang region that shares a narrow border with Afghanistan.

Xinhua said Wang, Afghan Foreign Minister Mohammad Hanef Atmar and Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi "stressed the need to ...

forbid any terrorist organisations or individuals from using their territories to engage in criminal activities against other countries."

China has sought to invest in Afghan resources, particularly copper, but constant fighting between the government, the Taliban and other groups has largely held back such projects. China has also sought to boost already close ties with Pakistan through its Belt and Road initiative, but the country's economic weakness and security problems have blunted the success of that drive.

The United States is preparing to wrap up its longest war by withdrawing the last of its 2,500-3,500 troops along with 7,000 allied Nato forces by September 11 at the latest, generating fears of increased chaos in a country already deeply insecure. — AP

Corporate tax 'in sight' as G7 meets

London, June 4: Group of Seven finance ministers kicked off talks Friday, with optimism growing that the world's wealthiest countries will support US-backed plans for a minimum global level of corporate tax.

British finance minister Rishi Sunak was hosting the meet — held in person after an easing of Covid restrictions and attended by counterparts from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

The talks were preparing the ground for a broader summit of G7 leaders in Cornwall, southwest England starting on June 11, which will include US President Joe Biden on his first foreign tour since taking office in January.

Momentum is building for a minimum level of corporate tax to prevent multinationals like tech giants from playing the system to boost profits.

Corporate tax is one of two pillars in efforts for global fiscal reforms, the other being a "digital tax"



Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak speaks to Canada's finance minister Chrystia Freeland (right) on the first day of the G7 Finance Ministers Meeting at Lancaster House in London on Friday.

— AFP

to allow countries to tax the profits of multinationals headquartered overseas. "It is increasingly clear that in a complex, global, digital economy, we cannot to continue to rely on a tax system that was largely designed as in the 1920s," Sunak said in opening remarks.

"And I would just say this: The world has noticed. And I believe they

have high expectations for what we all can agree over the coming days.

"Opportunities to make truly lasting reforms like this do not come very often, and I sincerely hope that we seize the moment." The finance chiefs and central bankers of the world's seven richest nations will express "strong support" and a "high level of ambition"

over a minimum global minimum corporate tax rate.

They then hope to reach broader agreement at a G20 finance meeting scheduled for July.

Ministers also plan to commit to "sustain policy support", or stimulus, for "as long as necessary" to nurture economic recovery, while addressing climate change and inequalities in society, according to the document.

Furthermore, they will urge "equitable, safe and affordable access to Covid-19 vaccines" everywhere.

The thorny topic of the regulation of digital currencies such as bitcoin will also be on the agenda. Biden has called for a unified minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent in negotiations with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and G20. His proposal has so far won broad support from countries such as France and Germany, as well as the International Monetary Fund. — AFP

EXCITEMENT | APPREHENSION

11-day long annual celebration of cinema, will be held in person from July 6 to 17th

Cannes film festival all set to showcase 61 films

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 3

Jodie Foster, vaccination certificates, regular RT-PCR tests, celebrities in designer dresses negotiating the 24 red-carpet steps and a touch of the supernatural are all set to mark the opening of the 11-day long annual celebration of cinema at the 74th Cannes Film Festival that will be held in person from July 6 to 17th.

Whatever may be the apprehension of cinephiles and the film fraternity around the world about hosting an in-person

event at the grand Palais des Festivals theatre on the shore of the Mediterranean, festival president Pierre Lescure and general delegate Thierry Frémaux betrayed none as they unveiled the list of 61 films on Thursday morning that will premiere at Cannes 2021.

The Cannes website claims that 18,000 professionals and journalists have already applied for accreditation and from the looks of it, Pierre and Thierry are all set to welcome them all.

Last year, the 73rd

Cannes festival was cancelled owing to the raging Corona pandemic. But this year, with caution and preparation, it will go ahead.

Of the 61 films announced, 24 are in the festival's most prestigious Competition section. They will be vying for the Palme d'Or trophy — a delicate, golden sprig of leaf resting on a crystal cushion — that will be picked by a jury headed by American director Spike Lee.

Though opening films at Cannes have rarely ever lived up to the hype and expectation, there is buzz



Jodie Foster

around this year's opening film — French director Leos Carax's *Annette*, starring Adam Driver and Marion Cotillard.

Handsome in that very

French shabby-chic, chain smoking style, Carax is known for his "poetic, enigmatic" films that often tell tales of "tortured love". Carax's last film to premiere at Cannes was *Holy Motors* in 2012. It has been ranked as the 16th greatest film of the 21st century in a BBC critics' poll. Annette is a musical about "a provocative stand-up comedian and his wife, a world-famous soprano, and the unexpected turn their life takes when their daughter Annette is born, a girl with a unique gift".

Also in the Competition

section this year is *Flag Day*, a thriller directed by and starring Sean Penn, as well as Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*. The comedy-drama's ensemble cast includes the starlights of American cinema, from Benicio delToro, Tilda Swinton and Frances McDormand to Willem Dafoe, Bill Murray and Owen Wilson.

Forty-five years after she was part of Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* entourage, actress-director Jodie Foster will receive an honorary Palme d'Or at the Cannes' opening ceremony on July 6.

Then just 13 years old, Ms Foster has since starred in more than 50 films, directed four feature films, and received two Oscars (for *The Accused* in 1989 and *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1992).

That year, 1976, when Ms Foster climbed the stairs at the Palais Croisette, in Competition alongside *Taxi Driver* was Shyam Benegal's Hindi film, *Nishant*, starring Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Naseeruddin Shah, Girish Karnad and Amrish Puri.

This year there is no Indian film in Cannes' official section.5

DECCAN Chronicle

5 JUNE 2021

Change in pension rules a bid to stifle critical voices

Earlier this week, the government amended Rule 8 of the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules 1972. It aims to prevent retired officials from writing books or newspaper articles or give interviews without taking prior approval from the current heads of those organisations. In practice, this is likely to amount to a blanket ban unless, in a specific case, the government wants to promote a viewpoint through a retired officer.

It is evident that changing the pension rules amounts to dangling the threat of withholding or even withdrawing the pension earned through decades of dedicated service. This seems an intimidation tactic. In a recent interview, former Army chief Gen. V.P. Malik (Retd) said the amendment “requires a review” and that it was “overarching”. The military leader, who led the Army with distinction in the Kargil war, chose to speak his mind although the military is not covered under the change made. He rightly noted the Official Secrets Act was adequate deter those who seek to compromise national security.

A retired chief of both the Intelligence Bureau and Research and Analysis Wing, A.S. Dulat, who was an adviser in Atal Behari Vajpayee’s PMO, is an author of many books and newspaper articles and is often interviewed in the media, has said he wouldn’t be seeking permission. He also said the amendment “isn’t right”. He

If the government turned nasty, this could easily apply to a short story, poem or novel where insights or experiences of a period are referred to

wondered aloud in an interview if the changed rule would apply even if he chose to write literature or poetry. And there is a reason for this. The threatened backdoor ban would apply to writing that is related to the “domain of the organisation, including references or information about any personnel and his/her designation, and expertise of knowledge gained by virtue of working in that organisation”. If the government turned nasty, this could easily apply to a short story, poem or novel where insights or experiences of a period are referred to.

Why link pension, widely seen as an inalienable part of government service, to drummed-up fears on national security? It is necessary to raise the question as it is amply clear that through their writings and interviews, and through their contribution to think tanks whose discussions are frequently reflected in public forums, retired senior officials enrich the national conversation by raising the level of debate and discussion. They help us better grasp matters relating to national security, on which millions of rupees from the exchequer are spent. The process makes for an aware citizenry, an unquantifiable attribute that aids society and the State by preparing people for times of crisis. The experience of retired senior officials, when made public, also enhances the scope of knowledge production.

There are 18 departments in the Second Schedule of the RTI Act that are covered under the amended order covering pensions. These include the IB and RAW, the paramilitary forces like BSF, CRPF, ITBP, CISF, Assam Rifles, SSB, SFF, the special branch and CID in select locations like the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra, Nagar Haveli and Lakshadweep. The Enforcement Directorate, Narcotics Control Bureau and the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, outfits which are suspected to be used to harass political opponents, are also covered.

The list of departments suggests that the government is sensitive to any criticism or implied criticism in the future to policies related to Kashmir and the Northeast or distant maritime regions where the intelligence and security services are salient, and is keen that suppressing dissidents and political opponents is cost-free.

SDG: Gaps flagged, bridge them

A look at the dashboard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index of Niti Aayog showing data that was released on Thursday throws up little surprise — some Indian states are seen making steady progress while some fail to catch up in improving the lot of their people. And the pattern continues to be similar to what we have seen over all these decades — the South and West are doing relatively well compared with the northern and eastern states. Kerala retains its top position with 75 points while Tamil Nadu has shared the second spot with Himachal Pradesh, each scoring 74 points. Bihar is at the bottom of the list with 52 points. India as a nation has improved its own position by scoring 66 points against last year’s 60 on the back of better performance in areas such as clean energy, urban development and sanitation. The 2021 index covers 17 goals, 70 targets and 115 indicators compared with last year’s 17 goals, 54 targets and 100 indicators.

As per Niti Aayog, the SDG India Index is intended to provide a holistic view on the social, economic and environmental status of the country as a whole as well as those of the individual states and the Union territories and to provide decisionmakers with critical data for action. It is designed with the help of the United Nations and is expected to help states “understand reasons for differential performance and devise better strategies to achieve the SDGs by 2030”. It should also throw light on the areas where more investment is needed. It’s now over to the states to understand the gaps and focus their priorities.

Data are dead numbers unless the people who are entrusted with the job make proper use of it. It calls for a political will and sagacity.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Atal Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234
Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208
Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325
Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Subhani



The business of gagging retired spooks isn’t easy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

A recent amendment to the pension rules of Central government employees provides that those who worked with the intelligence and security agencies, and certain other organisations dealing with India’s scientific, strategic and economic interests, will stand to lose their pensions if they write or talk publicly about the outfits they were once associated with and the work they do. It’s a clear warning for former spies and spooks, and others who know a little too much about the secrets of the State, that they will lose their pension and other benefits if they were to spill the beans. Given the fact that all of us live in a nation state framework and that we are obliged to protect the interests of the State, it seems but natural that those who were part of officialdom and who worked in the inner circles of the Secret State — which is quite distinct from the Deep State — are honour-bound to keep the secrets till the very end.

It is one of the paradoxes of the modern State that though it operates within a democratic framework and the assumption is that the State is there to protect the interests of all citizens living within its boundaries, it turns out at many times citizens are asked to pay obedience to the State, and even surrender their democratic rights for the survival of the State. And this obligation becomes a draconian demand on those who had worked for the State, and that too in its deepest recesses. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government is understandably even more paranoid about the secrets — often dirty and dark — of the State as

befits a political party with the ideology of idol-worshipping the State. The tweak in the pension rules then does not come as much of a surprise.

But it’s a matter of some curiosity and much speculation about why the BJP-led NDA government felt compelled to bring in these punitive changes at this juncture. Is there a fear in the class of political masters that they had tried to use spy rings and the security experts to promote their own agenda on the pretext of serving the State’s interests? The case of Mehul Choksi, the fugitive diamond merchant, in Antigua-Dominica does point to some dirty plan that may have gone wrong, or the sedition cases foisted on critics of this government as well as against students and ailing social activists do point to the possibility that the Modi government may have a lot more to hide on issues that involve so-called national interests.

But the government’s real irritation lies elsewhere. The retired bureaucrats who have been constantly needling the government are mostly from the IAS and IFS, not many from the intelligence and security services. There are many “grey areas” in this order. If anyone were to write on developments after they left the service, will they attract the punitive action implied in the amendment? The scope of vagueness is much too large.

It is fairly unlikely that in India any government will have to face a book like *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man: The Shocking Story of How America Took over the World*, the 2006 best-seller by John Perkins, a former Central Intelligence Agency operative, which showed the repul-

sive underbelly of America’s secret operations in other countries. If ever there is a book like that of Perkins, it might have more stories of failures rather than successful subversions, in the small countries of South Asia and in the Indian Ocean region.

The issue, however, throws up fundamental issues of morality as well as realpolitik. At the moral level, the citizens of a democratic state have a right to know whether the money they pay in taxes is used for diabolical acts like murder and mayhem, and whether innocent people are being trapped and framed. These goings-on can only be told by those who have worked within the intelligence and security agencies. If the State commits criminal acts in the name of State interests, people have a right to know and to call out the leaders who allowed these things to happen.

It’s necessary to know the truth from the realpolitik viewpoint, even if we choose to junk morality. The people have a right to know if ostensibly immoral operations have helped the State’s cause or not. It may be that the State would have suffered a lot of harm through ill-thought plans of subversion at home and abroad. Many of America’s overseas operations have been utter failures, and the costs in terms of money and men was quite high. The examples of the wars that America has waged in Afghanistan, Iraq and

Syria in the past 20 years in a case in point. No government would, however, allow any of its former employees to spill the beans, and it is natural to hold out the threat of penalties. In India’s case, the government’s amendment of the pension rules only holds out financial penalties. The former spy or security establishment insider who writes on things he is prohibited from writing, except when permission is granted by a higher officer, will stand to lose his/her pension and other handouts.

Of course, all this is another way of validating the Official Secrets Act. But we know that at least in democratic countries, secret documents are declassified, and the time bar in India is 30 years. Unlike in many other countries, especially those in the West, many of the State’s crimes are committed and no record is left about it. It is very unlikely that any of the Indian intelligence agencies, like the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) or the Intelligence Bureau (IB), is ever likely to keep scrupulous records of all the right and wrong things that they have done, and which at least after a lifetime come to light. During the Shah Commission hearings after the Emergency, P.N. Haksar, Indira Gandhi’s onetime confidant, told the commission that not all orders were put in writing. It is often left to the eyewitness or the victim to speak the truth. It is in situations like these that a former spy or security insider has to speak out for the sake of the truth and morality. Of course, he or she does not have to do so. But if there is a call of the conscience, it may become a compelling need. Then the threat of losing his/her pension or other post-retirement financial benefits may not deter the person from speaking out.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

During the Shah Commission hearings after the Emergency, P.N. Haksar, Indira Gandhi’s onetime confidant, told the commission that not all orders were put in writing. It is often left to the eyewitness or the victim to speak the truth.

LETTERS

ATTACK ON DOCTORS

The violent attacks against our doctors is the worst thing that can be imagined. What happened to the law introduced during the pandemic to book those who turned violent against doctors in Covid duty? Where is insurance scheme for doctors who lose their lives in Covid duty? The Centre must clarify if will listen to a ‘monk’ questioning the credibility of doctors and our vaccines or medical professional?

Ratnaraj Jain
Rajahmundry

3 CAPITALS ISSUE

The earlier this 3 capitals issue gets resolved, the better it is for Andhra Pradesh (*3 capitals set to come into force, DC, June 4*). A lot of avoidable controversy was created by some vested interests (all pro-TD elements) who had invested heavily on land in the CRDA having ‘scented’ the location of the new capital of the residual Andhra Pradesh after bifurcation.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

VAX PROCUREMENT

Now, it’s clear that vaccines have to be procured by the Centre and distributed to states equitably since the major foreign manufacturers have declined to deal with the states directly (*Vaccines for all: SC has put the Centre squarely on the mat, DC, June 4*).

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Orders reserved on bail petition

HYDERABAD, June. 4

The Sixth City Magistrate, Mr. Y. Venkateswara Rao, today reserved orders on the bail petition of Thakur V. Hari Prasad, Honorary Secretary of A.P. Welfare Fund, and posted the case for tomorrow.

The Magistrate remanded Diwakar Shetty, joint secretary of Kannada Natya Ranga, to judicial custody for 15 days. The State Crime Branch CID officials arrested Diwakar Shetty last evening on charge of cheating and misappropriation.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



“How does a seed turn mud into trees?
 God won’t say!
 Numbers of leaves defy infinities
 Nature at play!
 Odours the animals, pollen the bees
 The eternal way.
 The sun sets; birds dance on the breeze
 The sky is grey...”

— From **Wobhi Theek** by Bachchoo

The most famous remark of the late Princess Diana in her BBC interview with journalist Martin Bashir was: “Well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded.”

It was not a revelation. Prince Charles had weeks before admitted in a publicised interview his relationship with Camilla Parker Bowles.

The remark was perceived by the media and the public as an insight into Diana’s suffering and seen as an assault on the morals and integrity of the royal family. It precipitated the Queen’s agreement that Charles file for a divorce.

At the time there was a lot of speculation about how Martin Bashir had persuaded Diana to give him

that interview and launch the royal scandal. Last week, 25 years after the broadcast, the report of an inquiry into that question has been published. The report, compiled by Lord Dyson (not the muck-suction tycoon) was an exposure of Martin Bashir’s perfidious and possibly criminal means of obtaining the interview. Lord Dyson severely criticised the coverup of his actions by the BBC.

The report reveals that Bashir, a junior BBC journalist, got a colleague in the BBC to forge bank statements which “proved” that the press were paying Princess Diana’s staff to spy on her and give them details of her relationship with an Army officer called James Hewitt. Bashir took these forged bank statements to Earl Spencer, Diana’s brother, and persuaded him that Diana should tell all in an interview before the media went on to characterise her as the villain in the triangle — or quadrilateral?

In the interview, Diana admitted her relationship with Hewitt before it got exposed as scandalous. Perhaps she could have, quite justifiably, said: “Well, since there were three of us in this marriage, I assumed there could be a fourth!”

The BBC apparently knew about the forged documents and Martin Bashir’s devious means of obtaining the interview and covered it up. Bashir was not reprimanded or disciplined and was, years later, hired as the BBC’s head of religion.

Bashir protests that Diana was quite willing to give him an interview in any case and that his forged documents weren’t instrumental in helping persuade her to speak to him.

The 25-year-old episode has been brought to light again and became the focus of media attention displacing, however briefly, the reports from the world and especially India on the Covid devastation, the Israel-Hamas conflict and terrorist activity in Mozambique. Prince William gave an interview attacking the BBC and claiming the interview had led directly to his mother’s death.

The newspapers were in the main very happy to use the Dyson report to attack the BBC without making the connection between Diana’s death two years later in a speeding car which crashed in a Parisian tunnel as it was being relentlessly pursued by — no, not gremlins — the same newspaper paparazzi.

That the public is interested in the shenanigans and quarrels of the royal

family is not surprising. There’s always something to report. The last three focuses on the royals were in themselves, even to a republican like myself, gentle reader, momentarily entertaining.

A year ago, Prince Andrew, the Queen’s favourite son, was interviewed on the BBC’s *Newsnight* programme about his involvement or friendship with the late Jacob Epstein, the paedophile billionaire who procured young girls for him.

And then there was the Prince Harry and Meghan Markle interview with Oprah Winfrey in the United States. It was seen as an assault on the prejudices and repressive controls within the royal family and caused an estrangement between Harry, his father and brother William.

The death and funeral of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, brought Prince Harry back briefly to England but the focus shifted from Philip’s deeds and gaffes to the froideur between Harry and William.

The Windsor Castle funeral, with the restrictions on gatherings imposed by the Covid lockdown, prevented any mass congregation of citizens, but still they came in their hundreds to profess their love for a man they had never met.

I completely understand, gentle reader, the admiration one may feel for, say, Muhammad Ali, Nelson Mandela or even one of the cricketers or Bollywood actors, male and female — though I suspect the last three have some affinity to the worst ship of deities. But love?

I, just like you, have various experiences covered by the word. Parental, both ways, romantic and even loving a favourite flower, food or wine... but for members of a privileged, parasitical and patronage-lending, mostly idle family?

It’s not that I feel Cromwellian in my republicanism. And I certainly don’t feel that a Parliament dominated by the likes of Boris Johnson and the freeprot and deport Indian variants, Priti Clueless and Wishi Sunak, or the mendacious health secretary Matt Halfcock are doing a better job than if it were all left to Liz II. My faith in parliamentary democracy has been deeply shaken through assessing the actions of elected leaders and parties of several nations in this our sad vale of oppressions. But the hope is that Prime Ministers are not permanent and that even in those countries the populace doesn’t love them like the tribal Brits just “love” their Queen.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,100.05	-0.25
Nifty 50	15,670.30	-0.13
S&P 500*	4,225.86	0.79
Dollar (₹)	73.0	-0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.91	0.51
Euro (₹)	88.44	0.497
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,917	388 0.80
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	71.95	0.90
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.028	0.52
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.564	-0.063

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Govt caps trade margin on O2 machine at 70%

The government has capped the trade margin on oxygen concentrators at 70 per cent at the distributor level. The chemicals and fertilisers ministry said the decision has been taken in view of volatility in the MRP of oxygen concentrators. As per information collected by the government, margin on the oxygen concentrators at the distributor level currently ranges up to 198 per cent, the ministry added.

SBI lends ₹3,725 cr to Jewar Intl airport near Delhi



The Yamuna International Airport Pvt Ltd (YIAPL) has secured a loan of Rs 3,725 crore from the SBI for developing the Noida international airport at Jewar in UP. YIAPL is a Zurich Airport International subsidiary. The entire loan has been underwritten by SBI on a door-to-door loan tenor of 20 years," Christoph Schnellmann, CEO, YIAPL, said. Door-to-door loan means the principal and interest have to be paid within 20 years.

TCPL launches 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee' brand

Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) has made a foray into the premium roast and ground coffee segment with the launch of brand 'Sonnets By Tata Coffee'. Through this brand, TCPL is eyeing customers seeking a special coffee experience. These are microlot coffees that are limited edition offerings and are processed on the estates in a distinctive manner, it said. The aim is "to make it the go-to choice for the well-travelled."

Bayer opens consumer health division in India

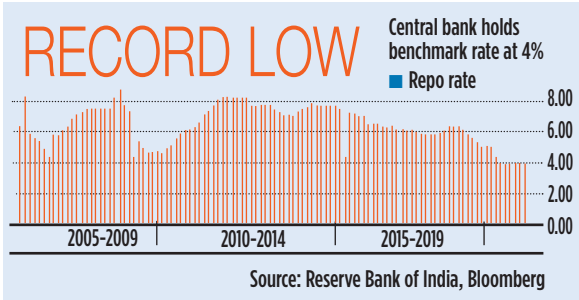
Bayer said it has launched its Consumer Health division in India comprising 10 brands across the categories of allergy, dermatology, nutrition and analgesics. These brands include Saridon, Supradyn, Becozym C Forte, Benadon, Alaspan, Canesten and Bayer's Tonic. The brands Saridon and Supradyn licensed to Piramal Consumer Products division in the past, have been transitioned back to Bayer, it said.



Economy to grow at 9.5%; inflation seen at 5.1% RBI cuts growth forecast, leaves rates untouched

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 4

Caught between slowing growth amid the second wave of the Covid pandemic and inflationary pressures, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy committee (MPC) stayed put on policy rates on Friday. The MPC also continued with its accommodative stance "as long as necessary" to support growth. A status quo in the policy repo rate means that there is unlikely to be any change in your equated monthly instalments (EMIs) on your home loans or car loans as of now. On the flip side, your fixed deposits too would continue to fetch the same low returns. This was the committee's second bi-monthly monetary policy meeting of the current fiscal and it was widely expected that the rates would remain steady. The MPC, which is the rate setting panel, has kept the repo rate unchanged in the last five bi-monthly policy meets, too. The six-member monetary policy committee headed by governor Shaktikanta Das voted unanimously for keeping repo rate - RBI's key lending rate - unchanged at 4 per cent, and the reverse repo rate—the borrowing rate—at 3.35 per cent. "The MPC was of the view that at this juncture, policy support from all sides is required to regain the momentum of growth that was evident in



REITERATES CONCERNS OVER CRYPTO TRADING

SUVASHREE GHOSH JUNE 4

The RBI reiterated its concerns over cryptocurrencies, clarifying its stance on digital assets just days after the regulator told banks to set aside a 2018 ban on trading. "There is no change in RBI's position," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das told reporters. "We have major concerns around cryptocurrency, which

we have conveyed to the government." Das' comments come less than a week after the central bank told banks, which are needed to help facilitate crypto trades, not to cite a 2018 RBI circular as a reason to prevent such transactions. The order, which has since been struck down by the Supreme Court, can't be cited or quoted from, it said. —Bloomberg

Anticipating some impact on the economy of the second Covid-19 wave, the RBI also trimmed the growth forecast by 100 basis points at 9.5 per cent from 10.5 per cent. Inflation for FY22 was revised upwards by 10 basis points with risks broadly balanced. One basis point is one hundredth of a percentage point. The RBI has projected CPI inflation at 5.1 per cent for FY22 with 5.2 per cent in Q1; 5.4 per cent in

Liquidity window opened for transport, hotels and tourism

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 4

To address the adverse impact of the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic, Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday announced an on-tap additional liquidity window for Rs 15,000 crore for contact-intensive sectors, including hotels and restaurants, transport, tourism, event management companies and beauty salons. Besides it also raised the aggregate debt eligibility threshold to struggling businesses to Rs 50 crore from Rs 25 crore. Under the on-tap liquidity window, banks can provide loans of three-year tenures to "certain contact-intensive sec-



Shaktikanta Das

tors i.e., hotels and restaurants; tourism—travel agents, tour operators and adventure/heritage facilities; aviation ancillary services—ground handling and supply chain; and other services that include private bus operators, car repair services, rent-a-car service providers, event/conference organisers, spa clinics, and beauty parlours/salons. Banks are expected to create a separate Covid

loan book under the scheme," the RBI said. Banks are to be incentivised by being permitted to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of their loan book under the scheme, with the reverse repo window at a rate 40 basis points higher than the reverse repo rate. Heading to the industry demand, the RBI also expanded the scope of borrowers by raising the maximum aggregate exposure threshold from Rs 25 crore to Rs 50 crore for smaller businesses and loans to individuals for business purposes. For liquidity, another GSAP operation under GSAP 1.0 will be conducted in June and GSAP 2.0 in Q2.

Central bank expands QE as growth seen faltering

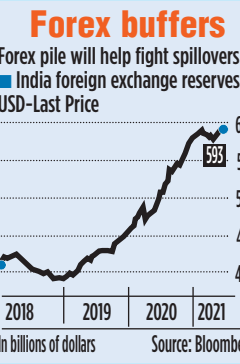
ANIRBAN NAG JUNE 4

The central bank expanded its version of quantitative easing (QE) to keep borrowing costs anchored, as economic growth is seen faltering because of a resurgent Covid-19 wave. The Reserve Bank of India will buy an additional Rs 1.2 lakh crore (\$16.4 billion) of bonds under the Government Securities Acquisition Program 2.0, governor Shaktikanta Das said in an online broadcast on Friday. The programme is aimed at keeping government borrowing costs anchored to ensure it can aid an economic recovery. The monetary policy committee, which has been in a rate pause mode for more than a year, said it was retaining its accommodative policy for as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis, signalling there's still room to cut rates further.



"At this juncture, policy support from all sides is required to gain the momentum of growth," Das said. The RBI's bond-buying programme aims to support the administration's borrowing plan, with the central bank buying sovereign debt to cap yields. It's already on course to acquire Rs 1 lakh crore of bonds in the current quarter. A recovery in Asia's third-largest economy is in peril from a resurgent pandemic, which forced states to impose lockdowns. The movement and activity curbs are seen fanning inflation and hitting GDP. —Bloomberg

FX reserves to help manage global spillovers: Das



ANIRBAN NAG JUNE 4

The country's foreign exchange reserves have by all indications crossed \$600 billion, central bank chief Shaktikanta Das said, a huge buffer that will help insulate Asia's third-largest economy from global spillovers and volatile external flows. Earlier this year, the country's forex reserves briefly surpassed Russia's to become the world's fourth-largest, as the Reserve Bank of India continued to hoard dollars to cushion the economy against any sudden outflows. The reserves are enough to cover around 15 months of imports and have been bolstered by rising inflows into the booming stock market and FDI. "While these flows ease external financing constraints, they also impart volatility to financial markets and asset prices, while producing undesirable and unintended fluctuations in liquidity, Das said. —Bloomberg

FM pushes ministries, PSUs to step up capex

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, JUNE 4

Focusing on the capital expenditure targets to revive the pandemic-hit economy, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday asked key ministries to aim to achieve more than their capex targets. She also emphasised that an enhanced capital expenditure will play a crucial role in the country's economic revival. According to finance ministry sources, the minister discussed capital expenditure road map of key ministries and the central public sector enterprises (CPSEs) under them, the status of the implementation of budget announcements, and vari-



Nirmala Sitharaman

ous measures to expedite infrastructure investment were discussed. "Besides, Sitharaman will also hold a meeting with heads of public and private sector insurers on Saturday for faster settlement of claims under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) during the pan-

demic," the sources said. All the discussions happened while reviewing the capital expenditure performance of the key ministries and their CPSEs on Friday. She met with senior government officials and encouraged the ministries to front-load their capex and ensure the clearance of MSME dues. According to a statement released by the Ministry of Finance on Friday, Sitharaman said that the budget for the financial year 2021-22 provided a capital outlay of Rs.5.54 lakh crore. This is a sharp 34.5 per cent over the budget estimate of the previous fiscal 2020-21. This was the fourth review meeting by the finance minister.

EU, UK open antitrust probe against Facebook over classified ads

KELVIN CHANAP LONDON, JUNE 4



European Union and British regulators opened dual antitrust investigations on Friday into whether Facebook distorts competition in the classified advertising market by using data to compete unfairly against rival services. The coordinated effort represents an escalation by European regulators in their battle to rein in the dominance of big tech companies. The focus of the investigations highlights a longstanding concern that the data they collect from people or businesses using their platforms is used to get an advantage over competitors, which could include those same businesses. Facebook collects vast troves of data on the activities of users of its social network and beyond, enabling it to target specific customer groups, said Margrethe Vestager, the European Commission's executive vice president in charge of competition policy. We will look in detail at whether this data gives Facebook an undue competitive advantage, in particular on the online classified ads sector, where people buy and sell goods every day, and where Facebook also competes with companies from which it collects data, Vestager said. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority said in a simultaneous announcement that it launched its own probe to examine whether Facebook's collection and use of data gave it an unfair advantage over competitors providing classified data and online dating services. Facebook said it will continue to cooperate fully with the investigations to demonstrate that these are without merit. Marketplace, Facebook's classified ad service, and Facebook Dating offer people more choices and both products operate in a highly competitive environment with many large incumbents, the company said in a statement. The EU's executive commission, the bloc's top antitrust enforcer, is looking at the possibility that Facebook collects data on what users are interested in based on how rival classified ad providers are advertising their sites to Facebook users. The commission is worried Facebook then uses that data to tailor Marketplace to outcompete the rival sites. It's also looking at whether the way Facebook embeds its Marketplace into the social network gives it an advantage. —AP

Restaurant stock leaps over panda pregnancy



SHOKO ODA JUNE 4

Shares of a Tokyo-based Chinese restaurant operator surged after local media reported that a panda at a nearby zoo may be pregnant, stoking investor speculation of increased foot traffic in the area. Totenko Company stock jumped as much as 29 per cent, the most in almost four years, after local broadcaster FNN reported that Shin Shin, a giant panda at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, may be expecting. The zoo had announced earlier in March Shin Shin and Ri Ri had mated twice. Tokyo governor Yuriko Koike confirmed the reports, local broadcaster NTV reported. Seiyo-ken, another nearby eatery, rose as much as 11 per cent, with trading more than five times the three-month average. The restaurant stock has served as a gauge for panda-related news in the past. In February 2017, Totenko shares also jumped after Ueno Zoo announced that the same pair of pandas had mated. Shares surged again when Shin Shin gave birth to a cub the same year in June. The news coincides with the reopening of the popular Ueno Zoo on Friday, which had been closed since December amid the Covid-19 outbreak in Tokyo. Visits require a reservation and the zoo is limiting visitors to 2,000 a day under infection prevention protocols. The pandas are one of the main draws to the zoo. —Bloomberg

PLI guidelines for white goods issued

New Delhi, June 4: Investments made in land and building required for a project will not be covered under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for ACs and LED lights and these would not be considered for determining eligibility of a company to avail of benefits of the programme.



This is part of the guidelines issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on Friday for the PLI scheme for promoting domestic manufacturing of white goods (only air conditioners and LED lights). The guidelines said eligibility of a company will be subject to achievement of thresholds of net incremental sales of the products for the respective financial year over the base year (2019-20) and cumulative incremental investment in the preceding fiscal. "Investment in land and building (including factory building or construc-

tion) required for the project or unit will not be covered under the scheme and therefore shall not be considered for determining eligibility under the scheme." Expenditure on consumables and raw material used for manufacturing shall not be considered as investment. "No second hand/used refurbished plant, machinery equipment, utilities shall be used to manufacture the eligible product," the guidelines said. In case an applicant does not meet criteria of threshold investment and threshold net incremental sales for any given year, it would not be eligible for disbursement of incentive for that particular fiscal. Investment will include expenditure incurred on new plant, machinery, equipment and associated utilities, research and development (R&D), and transfer of technology relating to the facilities setup for the products. Investment in R&D should not exceed 15 per cent of the total committed investment, the guidelines added. The application window for the scheme will be open from June 15 to September 15 this year and no applications will be accepted after that. The guidelines also said an applicant will have to submit a claim for disbursement of incentive on an annual basis for the sales made in a financial year along with audited financial statements. The scheme will be implemented through a project management agency (PMA) which will be responsible for providing secretarial, managerial and implementation support. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Milkha stable in ICU, wife unwell

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is "better and more stable" as he battles Covid-19 in the ICU of the PGIMER hospital here even as his wife and former volleyball captain Nirmal Kaur's condition deteriorated because of the same ailment.

Milkha also received a phone call from Prime Minister Narendra Modi enquiring about his health on Friday. In a statement, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) said that Milkha is better than Thursday when he was brought to the hospital with dipping levels of oxygen.

"On the basis of his medical parameters today, his condition has been observed better and more stable than yesterday," PGIMER's official spokesperson, Prof Ashok Kumar, said. — PTI

Ex-hockey player Usman no more

New Delhi: Former India hockey player Usman Khan has died after a prolonged battle with cancer, the sport's governing body in the country said on Friday while condoling his death. Khan was 76 and survived by three sons and a daughter. He breathed his last in Madanapalle, Andhra Pradesh after a long battle with cancer. Khan, a retired assistant commissioner of Customs, Chennai, was a stylish left winger. He played hockey at the Madras Azam Ground before shifting to Kolkata, where joined the Customs. In Kolkata, Khan played for the Calcutta Customs and also represented Bengal in the national championships for several years. Hockey India president Gyanendra Ningombam expressed his condolences to Khan's family. — PTI

Tech Mahindra, Fide in big league

Chennai: The FIDE on Friday announced a new partnership with Tech Mahindra Ltd for the Global Chess League (GCL), which will also have former world champion Viswanathan Anand as its official mentor and partner to shape the league. The memorandum of understanding signed by FIDE with Tech Mahindra, a leading provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering services and solutions, focuses on creating the Global Chess League, a project first proposed by the latter earlier this year. "Now, with the support of FIDE, the Global Chess League will be provided with an accredited and exclusive status as the only world league officially recognised by the governing body of the sport of chess," a press release here said. — PTI

IOA seeks relief from shut down

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President Narinder Batra has requested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to allow them to operate from their office premises for completing administrative work linked to the upcoming Tokyo Olympics. Due to the Covid-19 surge in the national capital, the Delhi government had ordered shutting down of all premises that don't fall under the essential category. However, the number of cases has reduced in recent days and the capital is inching towards easing of restrictions. "We request and appeal to You Sir to allow the office of Indian Olympic Association to function from Monday 7th June 2021 to enable IOA to upload the mandatory required data," Batra wrote in the letter. — PTI

Moin's son Azam in Pak T20 team

Karachi: Pakistan on Thursday named uncapped Azam Khan, son of former captain Moin Khan, in the T20 squad for the tours of England and West Indies. The selectors also recalled Imad Wasim for the three T20 matches in England and five in the West Indies besides Haris Sohail for the three ODIs in England. Muhammad Abbas and Naseem Shah have also won back spots in the Test squad. — PTI

Swiatek shimmers

Nadal celebrates birthday with victory; Zverev too wins

Paris, June 4: Rafael Nadal celebrated his 35th birthday in style with a straight sets win over Richard Gasquet on Thursday to reach the French Open third round. Nadal, the 13-time champion in Paris and chasing a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, won 6-0, 7-5, 6-2 to register his 17th career victory in 17 meetings with France's 53rd-ranked Gasquet.

Next up for the world number three is Britain's Cameron Norrie who he has beaten twice already this season, at the Australian Open and on clay in Barcelona.

German sixth seed Alexander Zverev eased into the French Open last 16 for the fourth successive year on Friday with a straight-sets win over Serbia's Laslo Djere.

The 24-year-old, last year's US Open runner-up, saw off the 55th-ranked Djere 6-2, 7-5, 6-2 on Court Philippe Chatrier.

He will next face former world number four Kei Nishikori, whose third-round opponent Henri Laaksonen retired injured following the opening set, for a quarterfinal spot.

Meanwhile, Serena Williams continued her quest for a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam title by reaching the French Open second week for the first time since 2018, after third seed Aryna Sabalenka's surprise loss left the veteran American as the highest-ranked player in her half of the draw.

Three-time Roland Garros champion Williams came through a potentially tricky third-round tie with compatriot Danielle Collins, winning 6-4, 6-4.

She will next face



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Sweden's Rebecca Peterson during their women's singles match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros in Paris on Thursday. Swiatek won 6-1, 6-1. — AFP

Kazakh 21st seed Elena Rybakina, with a possible quarterfinal against old rival Victoria Azarenka up for grabs.

Also, former world number one Azarenka, who stunned Williams in their 23rd meeting in last year's US Open semi-finals, cruised past Madison Keys 6-2, 6-2 to reach the Roland Garros fourth round for the first time since making the last four in 2013.

Earlier, defending champion Iga Swiatek breezed

through to the third round, however, beating Rebecca Peterson 6-1, 6-1 on Court Simonne-Mathieu. The No. 8-seeded Pole next faces No. 30 Anett Kontaveit. — AFP

OTHER RESULTS

Men's third round: Kei Nishikori (Japan) bt Henri Laaksonen (Switzerland) 7-5, 0-0 — RET; Federico Delbonis (Argentina) bt Fabio Fognini (Italy) 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; Alexander Zverev (Germany) bt Laslo Djere (Serbia) 6-2, 7-5, 6-2;

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (Spain) bt Casper Ruud (Norway) 7-6 (3), 2-6, 7-6 (6), 0-6, 7-5; Daniil Medvedev (Russia) bt Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-4, 6-2, 6-4.

Women's third round: Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan) bt Elena Vesnina (Russia) 6-1, 6-4; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (Russia) bt Aryna Sabalenka (Belarus) 6-4, 2-6, 6-0; Victoria Azarenka (Belarus) bt Madison Keys (USA) 6-2, 6-2; Serena Williams (USA) bt Danielle Collins (USA) 6-4, 6-4. — AP

Messi scores but Argies held

Santiago Del Estero (Argentina), June 4: Lionel Messi scored a penalty but Argentina missed out on the chance to take over top spot of South American World Cup qualifying from rivals Brazil after a 1-1 draw with Chile on Thursday.

Messi also clipped the woodwork and forced three impressive saves out of Chile goalkeeper Claudio Bravo but Alexis Sanchez earned the dogged visitors a point in Santiago del Estero.

The draw leaves Argentina a point behind Brazil, the only remaining side with a perfect qualifying record, who host Ecuador on Friday.

Chile are down in sixth, still two points off the qualification places having won only one of their five matches so far.

Argentina captain Messi said he was happy with the result, despite failing to win.

"The team had a good dynamic, it wasn't easy playing again after so much time," he said.

Elsewhere, Iran bounced back from two straight defeats to put their 2022 World Cup qualification campaign back on track with a 3-1 win over Hong Kong while Bahrain hammered Cambodia 8-0 to go top of Group 'C'.

Five-time finalists Iran struck twice in the second half of their Group 'C' game to take their tally to nine points from five matches, three behind leaders Bahrain, who are hoping to qualify for the tournament proper for the first time in their history.

Midfielder Ali Gholizadeh put Iran ahead from an acute angle after dribbling his way into the box in the 23rd minute before Vahid Amiri and Karim Ansarifard scored in the second half to give them a 3-0 cushion.

Meanwhile, it took less than a minute for Mathew Leckie to head in the opening goal as Australia romped Kuwait 3-0 in Kuwait City.

Jackson Irvine extended Australia's lead midway through the first half and Eintracht Frankfurt's Adin Hrustic netted the third with a free kick in the 66th minute. — Agencies



Argentina's Lionel Messi (right) and Eugenio Mena of Chile battle for the ball during their qualifying match for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 in Santiago del Estero, Argentina, on Thursday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw. — AP

Greece, Belgium in a friendly draw

Paris, June 4: A Belgium side missing many of the stars that have helped them rise to the top of FIFA's world rankings were held 1-1 by Greece in a Euro 2020 warm-up on Thursday.

For his first friendly ahead of the delayed tournament starting on June 11 coach Roberto Martinez was without injured trio Kevin De Bruyne (facial fractures), Eden Hazard (thigh), and Axel Witsel (Achilles).

The former Everton boss also chose to give the night off to Thibaut Courtois (with Simon Mignolet in goal), and Jan Vertonghen and Thomas Vermaelen in defence.

Those that were in Brussels had the chance to press their case for a place in Martinez's lineup for their June 12 opener against Russia.

Like Hazard's younger brother Thorgan, who started and supplied the finishing touch to the move that put Belgium into a 20th minute lead after Romelu Lukaku was denied at point blank

range by Greek goalkeeper Odysseas Vlachodimos. Georgios Tzavellas levelled for the unscripted winners of Euro 2004 midway through the second half, tapping in Kyriakos Papadopoulos' diving header which hit the woodwork.

Martinez will be looking for a sharper performance in the Red Devil's second friendly against Croatia on Sunday.

Belgium romped through to the finals as group winners with a 40-goal haul. After their Group 'B' opener in Saint Petersburg they go on to face Denmark and Finland.

In other warm-ups involving finalists for the delayed tournament Switzerland dished out a 7-0 drubbing to Lichtenstein, with Mario Gavranovic grabbing a hat-trick. The Swiss are in Group 'A' with Italy, Wales and Turkey who were also in action, seeing off Moldova 2-0. Ukraine, drawn in Group C, edged Northern Ireland 1-0. — AFP

TENNIS PLAYER ARRESTED FOR MATCH-FIXING

Paris, June 4: A tennis player suspected of match-fixing last year has been arrested in Paris during the French Open, the Paris prosecutor's office said Friday.

According to French newspaper *Le Parisien*, which first reported the story, the player is 765th-ranked Yana Sizikova of Russia. The prosecutor's office confirmed to The Associated Press that a "women's international player" was in custody, but it did not identify her.

An investigation was opened last October by a French police unit specialising in betting fraud and match-fixing. It has previously worked with Belgian authorities investigating suspected fixed matches at the lower levels of professional tennis.

The prosecutor's office said the probe centered on suspicions about one match at Roland Garros last year. It did not specify the match. German newspaper *Die Welt* and French sports daily *L'Equipe* said at the time there were suspicious betting patterns in the first round of a women's doubles match on Sept. 30.

On that day, Sizikova and partner Madison Brengle of the United States played on Court No. 10 against Romanian players Andreea Mitu and Patricia Maria Tig. Sizikova was broken to lead serving in game five of the second set, during which she double faulted twice. — AP

Sumit fails dope test, suspended

New Delhi, June 4: Olympic-bound Indian wrestler Sumit Malik has been provisionally suspended after failing a dope test during the recent Qualifiers in Bulgaria, a major embarrassment for the country with just weeks left for the Games in Tokyo.

It marks the second consecutive instance of a wrestler being caught in dope net before the Olympics — the previous being ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics when Narsingh Pancham Yadav had failed one and was slapped with a four-year ban.

Malik, the 2018 Commonwealth Games gold-medallist, had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in the 125kg category at the World Olympic Qualifier event in Sofia, Bulgaria which was the last chance for wrestlers to earn quotas.

The 28-year-old's participation at the main event starting July 23 seems uncertain now.

"We got a mail from the UWW (United World Wrestling) on Thursday that Sumit has failed the dope test and he has been suspended provisionally. The substance found in his sample is said to be 5-methylhexan-2-amine (1,4-dimethylpentylamine)," Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) secretary Vinod Tomar said.

A Delhi-based sports lawyer Parth Goswami contends that since this substance is a specified one, Malik cannot be suspended provisionally. — PTI



Sumit Malik

Brianna McNeal

HURDLES CHAMP BRIANNA BANNED FOR FIVE YEARS

Paris, June 4: Olympic 100m hurdles champion Brianna McNeal has been banned for five years for tampering with the anti-doping testing process, the Athletics Integrity Unit announced on Friday.

McNeal, 29, can still take part in the US trials for the Tokyo Olympics later this month while she appeals the ban, which is backdated to August 15, 2020, the AIU said in a statement.

Her appeal will be heard before the Olympics begin on July 23.

AIU said she had been banned for "tampering within the results management process".

It was her second doping violation after she missed the 2017 World Championships while serving a one-year ban for missing three drug tests.

"The system is pretty messed up if you ask me but that's another topic for another day," she said in an Instagram post. — AFP

JAPAN CORNERED ON GAMES, SAYS COMMITTEE MEMBER

Tokyo, June 4: Japan has been backed into a corner over the Tokyo Games, a member of the country's Olympic committee said Friday, arguing the virus-postponed event has "lost meaning" but it is too late to cancel. Public opposition to holding the Olympics this summer remains high, but organisers insist they will go ahead safely under strict Covid-19 countermeasures and with most athletes and officials vaccinated.

In an opinion article for *Kyodo News*, Japan Olympic Committee member Kaori Yamaguchi, who won judo bronze in Seoul in 1988, described "anxiety and distrust" between the public and the government over the Games.

"What will these Olympics be for and for whom? The Games have already lost meaning and are being held just for the sake of them," she wrote.

"We have been cornered into a situation where we cannot even stop now. We are damned if we do, and damned if we do not," added Yamaguchi, who has previously voiced unease over the Games and called for their postponement last year. — AFP

Rain ruins play in Eng-NZ Test

London, June 4: Persistent rain meant there was no play before lunch on the third day of the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's on Friday.

The match was intriguingly poised, with England 111-2 in reply to New Zealand's first-innings 378 that featured debutant Devon Conway's 200 — the highest score by a batsman making their Test bow in England.

England, now 267 runs behind, slumped to 18-2 before ending the second day with Rory Burns 59 not out and England captain Joe Root 42 not out following an unbroken stand of 93.

New Zealand looked like battling England out of the game while South African-born opener Conway and fellow left-hander Henry Nicholls (61) were sharing

a fourth-wicket partnership of 174.

But they lost four wickets for just six runs as they slumped from 288-3 to 294-7, with Mark Wood, the fastest member of England's pace quartet, instigating a collapse.

Meanwhile Test debutant paceman Ollie Robinson led England's attack with 4-75 in the first of this two-Test series.

This match marks the return of spectators to international cricket in England after last season's fixtures were all played behind closed doors because of coronavirus restrictions. The second Test is due to take place at Birmingham's Edgbaston from June 10-14. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 378 vs England 111/2 in 43 overs (Rory Burns 59 batting, Joe Root 42 batting; Tim Southee 1/17).

INDIAN PLAYERS UNDER HARD QUARANTINE IN SOUTHAMPTON

Southampton, June 4: India spinner Axar Patel has revealed that the team will serve a three-day hard quarantine before it is allowed to train at the Aegean Bowl here ahead of the WTC final against New Zealand. The final begins on June 18 and India have limited time to prepare having arrived here on Wednesday.

On the other hand, New Zealand are already involved in a two-match series against England.

The India squad was in quarantine for 14 days in Mumbai prior to its departure and is in the middle of another yet shorter quarantine.

"I had a good sleep...the plan is to quarantine. We have been told that we can't meet each other for three days so we will be quarantining for that much time," said Axar. The men's and women's squads were in the same flight. After landing in London, the contingent took a two-hour bus journey to Southampton. — PTI