

SHORT TAKES

KADAPA DFO BAGS
PRESIDENT'S
MEDALDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, AUG. 16

Kadapa district fire officer (DFO) Manchala Bhupal Reddy has been chosen for the prestigious President's fire service medal. The director general of the central fire service department has conveyed the news to Mr Bhupal Reddy. The other winners of the President's medal are Kurnool district fire officer Vutakuri Srinivasa Reddy and Bodasingi Golladu, a fireman from Visakhapatnam. Director of fire services Karamthot Jayaram Naik has been selected for the President's medal for distinguished service.

HOSPITAL HANDED
OVER WRONG BABY
TO OFFICIALS

FROM PAGE 1

While Childline personnel were probing the matter, Chandra Mohan— an associate of Dr Namrata, handed over a baby-boy to the child-line officials citing that the widow is the biological mother of the boy.

However, the investigation has revealed that management of the hospital handed the wrong baby boy (whose mother is a resident of Madhurawada area in Vizag city) to the childline officials since the mother (widow) did not see her son after birth.

The DCP said that the woman, 24, from Madhurawada filed a complaint with city police citing that she married a person in 2011 and was blessed with a daughter and due to some disputes she separated from him and married another person in 2018. They had a son. She became pregnant again last while her husband was jailed in a theft case. The woman told that matter to one G. Jhansi (agent of Dr Namrata) who assured free delivery at the hospital and some money. The doctors performed a caesarean and the woman gave birth to a boy in March.

While Childline personnel were probing the matter of the widow's boy, the hospital management handed over Madhurawada woman's child to the childline officials citing that they had brought the boy from Kolkata.

When the woman demanded her boy, Dr Namrata's agents arranged another boy (whose mother is an unmarried woman who was cheated by her boyfriend). The DCP said that so far they have arrested 14 people in connection with the child trafficking racket and investigation is on.

BJP LEADER HELD
FOR SMUGGLING
LIQUOR FROM TSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

Four persons including a BJP leader were arrested by the Special Enforcement Bureau and prohibition and excise department officials at Guntur for smuggling liquor from Telangana and selling it in AP. Three cars and 1,920 liquor bottles worth ₹6 lakh were seized from them.

BJP state president Somu Veerajulu suspended Anji from the party for his involvement in liquor smuggling.

The arrested BJP leader was identified as Gudivaka Ramanjaneyulu alias Anji. He unsuccessfully contested on BJP ticket in the Machilipatnam Lok Sabha election in 2019. Anji along with three others was smuggling liquor from Chitayala in Nalgonda district of Telangana and selling it in various parts of Guntur district.

He is reportedly managing two bars — Touch Bar and Anji Bar — in benami names in Guntur city. Manu Wines at Chitayala is said to be owned by him through a benami. A prohibition and excise officer said that the BJP leader had threatened the officials that he would influence the ACB to conduct raids against them if they filed any case against the bars in Guntur city.

SEB superintendent V.Chandrasekhar Reddy said that they conducted raids at Koppuravuru village of Pedakani mandal and seized 1,920 liquor bottles worth ₹6 lakh and 3 cars while the accused were shifting the contraband from Guntur. He said that they arrested Masta Suresh of Guntur, Karanki Naresh, licensee of Manu Wines in Chitayala and Ganta Harish Kumar of Guntur.

Festive spirit



Children construct a temporary pandal for the upcoming Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations near Mangamaaripeta junction in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Srisaillam reservoir to get
more inflows in two weeks

Presently 135.9418 tmc ft of water is available against the total 215.807 tmc ft

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, AUG. 16

Despite heavy rains in the upper reaches of Krishna and Tungabhadra rivers, the inflows in Srisaillam reservoir are far less when compared to the corresponding period of last year.

As against 197.4617 TMC ft of storage water that prevailed on August 15 of last year, the reservoir has now only 135.9418 TMC ft of water. There is a gap of 61.5199 TMC ft of water causing concern among farmers, who are dependent on Srisaillam waters.

An irrigation officer said they were expecting a good flood flow in the next two weeks as rainfall was more than the normal average for August in the upper reaches of Krishna River. He said it was similarly high in Tungabhadra basin. He was optimistic that Tungabhadra River

would carry more water into Srisaillam in the next couple of weeks. So far the inflows from Tungabhadra are not satisfactory. Only the Handri River contributed nearly 40 TMC ft of water due to flash floods.

This June saw the district having an average rainfall of 148.8 mm and for July it has received 260.7mm against the normal rainfall of 117.2mm while up to August 14, the district has registered 80.1mm. In the previous year, the district had registered only 60.9mm for June, 73.8mm for July and 142mm for August.

However, with steadily increasing inflows into the Srisaillam reservoir, now 135.9418 TMC ft of water is available against the total capacity of 215.807 TMC in the reservoir. It is receiving 1.24,228 cusecs, including 1,21,763 cusecs from Krishna River and 2,465

NDRF rescues five stuck in floodwaters

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

Five persons, including three farmers, stuck in the overflowing Munneru stream in Krishna district were rescued by NDRF on Sunday. The stream was in spate following incessant rains and the farmers, who went to their fields, got stuck in the floodwaters near Pallamgiri in Nandigama mandal. Revenue officials pressed NDRF into action and they rescued the three using

life-boats. The farmers P. Nagaraju, P. Bhanu and T. Syam went to their mango orchards at Pallamgiri in the early hours on Sunday. But the Munneru stream started swelling and inundated the farmlands leaving them stranded.

They informed their relatives through mobile phones. When the locals Y. Lakshmaiah and Y. Subba Rao went to rescue them, even they were stuck in the floodwaters. They immediately informed about their condition to

revenue and police officials who further alerted NDRF personnel.

NDRF 10 battalion commandant Zahed Khan immediately sent a 26-member team to the spot. The team was led by assistant commandant DN Singh. They graved the huge force of floodwaters and brought the five in their boats. Pallamgiri villagers and Nandigama Legislator hailed the efforts of police, revenue and NDRF and thanked them on the occasion.

The Jurala project of Telangana located on Krishna River has received 1,61,244 cusecs of water from Almati dam. Presently there is 8.61 TMC of water in the reservoir out of a total storage capacity of 9.657 TMC.

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The NDRF rescued five persons, including three farmers stuck in the floodwaters of Munneru stream. Other local streams are also overflowing in several areas in Krishna district.

A control room has been set up in the Municipal Corporation office at Vijayawada with 0866-2424172 and 2422515 phone numbers to help people during emergencies.

Rains lashed East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Kurnool

districts. The Munneru, Wyra, Kattaleru and Kuchivagu in Krishna districts were overflowing as a result of incessant rains. All 70 gates of Prakasam Barrage on Krishna River at Vijayawada were lifted and 1,12,000 cusecs of water released into the Sea.

The low pressure area in the northwestern Bay of Bengal has turned into a severe depression and is likely to move in a north-west direction. This would cause heavy rains in north Andhra and coastal districts and moderate rains in south coastal and Rayalaseema districts.

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Crops in 10,000
acres badly hit

FROM PAGE 1

The fury has been such that flood water entered double bedroom houses at Gangolu.

Kinnerasani reservoir is receiving 28,000 cusecs of flood water which is being released downstream. When a breach developed at a bridge on Kinnerasani

at Rangapuram in Paloncha mandal, officials filled it up with sand and soil.

Road connectivity between Charla and Venkatapuram and Bhadrachalam was cut off because water from rivulets flowed onto the roads.

The road between Nellipaka in Andhra Pradesh and Bhadrachalam was cut off as backwater from

Godavari is all over the roads. All the streams in Charla, Dummugudem, B u r g u m p a h a d , Manuguru, Aswapuram, Pinapaka, Tekulapalli, Allapalli and Gundala have been overflowing. Edullabayyaram and four of its hamlets are surrounded by flood water.

Also badly hit are farmers as 10,000 acres in various mandals of Bhadrachalam district have stagnated and paddy farmers are worried that their crops could be gutted. The six barrages that were built as part of the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project are full. Road connectivity to 40 habitations in Gundala and Allapalli mandas was cut off as 14 streams are overflowing.

State govt set to revive livestock
research centre at PulivendulaNAGESWARA RAO
BALLEDA | DC
KADAPA, AUG. 16

The prestigious Andhra Pradesh Centre for Advanced Research on Livestock (APCARL), established at a cost of ₹280 crore in Pulivendula, by former CM Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy a decade ago, is set to see glorious days in the present government headed by his son Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. After the bifurcation of the state, the TD government paid little attention to the institute.

As part of reviving the research centre, the Jagan government issued a GO for setting up of horticultural, agriculture and animal husbandry colleges in the existing buildings. The three colleges were to have started from this academic year, but they were delayed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

All these years the centre has done nothing exceptional barring inconsequential research carried out by a few small firms. The late Rajasekhara Reddy had envisioned

developing it into a research centre of global reputation. But that did not happen after his death.

The three colleges are expected to start functioning once the Covid threat ends. The APCARL houses the administrative building of the Banana Research Centre, which has 70 acres for its activities.

In another boost to Jagan's efforts, IG Immunology Pvt Limited signed an agreement with the state government in June to set up a veterinary vaccine production centre

at a cost of ₹50 crore in APCARL. Representatives of the company came here last month to inspect the facilities.

Deputy CEO of the centre J.D. Prasad, estate engineer Seshareddy and engineering officer Lakshmi Prasad have undertaken the task of sprucing up the buildings including removing overgrown bushes and repairing a network of 12-km roads. A 4.5-km long pipeline has been laid to supply drinking water to staff quarters through an overhead tank.

Cops warn actor
Pothineni to keep
off fire probeMD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

The police have threatened to slap notice on Telugu actor Pothineni Ram if he tries to create any hurdles to the probe into the Swarna Palace Hotel fire mishap case. Ram is a relative of Ramesh Hospitals MD Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu and posted comments on his Twitter account in support of the hospital.

Vijayawada assistant commissioner of police N. Suryachandra Rao, who is investigating the case, made it clear that notices would be served on anyone who tried to create hindrance to the enquiry into the Swarna Palace Hotel fire accident that claimed the lives of 10 Covid patients.

Addressing media persons here on Sunday, the ACP said that nobody would be spared if found guilty in the case and warned the actor against poking his nose in the case.

Mr Suryachandra Rao said that till now Dr Mamata and Dr Soujanya attended the inquiry, while Dr Ramesh's son-in-law Kalyan Chakravarthy skipped questioning on Sunday, claiming that he was going into a two-week quarantine at home. He expressed his readiness

● Ram is a relative of Ramesh Hospitals MD Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu and posted comments on his Twitter account in support of the hospital

to face interrogation at his home, the ACP said and added that they were checking the veracity of Kalyan's claim.

Mr Suryachandra Rao said that Dr P. Ramesh Babu after visiting the collector's office abandoned his car there and fled in another vehicle and switched off his mobile phone since. The hospital MD through a selfie video said he would cooperate with investigating officers.

The ACP said that notices under Section 91 of CrPC would be served on the hospital, asking the management to submit documents pertaining to the MoU with firms for supply of oxygen cylinders and medicines. Dr Ramesh would also be required to produce all the documents pertaining to permissions obtained from the government to run Covid care centre in the hotel. The ACP asked Dr Ramesh and actor Ram to attend the trial and stop sending tweets and audiotapes.

CM has no right
to talk swaraj: TDDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

Leader of opposition in the Legislative Council and former TD minister Yanamala Ramakrishnu on Sunday said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had no moral right to talk about 'grama swaraj' and local self-government when his party cadres were running a parallel government in rural areas. He asked how Mahatma Gandhi's dream of self-rule could be achieved in Andhra Pradesh as long as Mr Jagan retained total control on villages through his party cadres who were appointed as grama volunteers. He alleged that even in the local body elections, the YSRC created too many obstacles to rival contestants.

Mr Ramakrishnu demanded that the CM explain how the rule by "person in-charges" would bring in grama swaraj. He alleged that false cases were filed against rival contestants to force them to withdraw from local polls and nomination papers were torn.

2 held for cheating
men with sex baitDC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, AUG. 16

The Two Town police here on Sunday arrested a man and his woman friend on charges of cheating people offering sexual favours. They were identified as Aswini Kumar Raja and Sindhu.

Two Town circle inspector Ch. Srinivasa Rao said Raja, a native of Jamshedpur came to Vizianagaram 11 years ago and started a real estate business. During the course of his business, he met Sindhu, a mother of two and a divorcee. Both began living together and planned to make some quick

money. They launched a porn website and employed some girls.

Their modus operandi was to call customers and ask them to deposit money in their account. Once money was deposited, Sindhu would switch off her mobile phone. In last three years, 3,000 of the 5,000 people they call fell into their trap. On an average they made ₹60 lakh in this period. The case came to light when an NRI, Naresh Reddy, deposited \$1,100 and lodged an online complaint with the police, the CI said and added they were checking details of the bank deposits in two of their banks.

LAND IN VIZAG GRABBED BY YSRC LEADERS: CPI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna alleged that YSR Congress leaders and followers of MP V. Vijaya Sai Reddy were involved in illegal land settlements and encroachments in Vizag and demanded a probe by a sitting judge or senior IAS officer.

Mr Ramakrishna alleged that land grabbing was happening in a big way in Madhurawada, Kommadi, PM Palem, Anakapalle and other places soon after Visakhapatnam was announced as the executive capital of the state. He also demanded that the government make public the report submitted by the SIT.

IN BRIEF

Tributes to Kotla on birth centenary

Kurnool: Former CM Kotla Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy was fondly remembered by the people of Kurnool district on his 100th birth anniversary on Sunday. Rich tributes were paid at Kisan Ghat, the place where his mortal remains were laid to rest, in Kurnool by leaders of various parties. Reddy who was born on August 16, 1920, had a meteoric rise in the political circles. He served as the CM of Andhra Pradesh for two terms besides holding several portfolios in the Union Cabinet like shipping, industries and law. The Andhra Pradesh Reddy Association demanded naming Kurnool district as "Kotla Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy" district. Birru Pratap Reddy, state vice president of the Association, said that Vijayabaskar Reddy's contribution to the development of district included irrigation facilities which are benefiting farmers even today. He reminded that Kotla laid foundation for Pothireddy Padu head regulator during his chief ministership.

Tirupati: Lockdown extended

Tirupati: Though there was no respite from rising number of Coronavirus cases and deaths in the city, the Municipal Corporation of Tirupati (MCT) on Sunday announced more relaxations to the Covid-induced lockdown, which has been extended for the third time till August 31. According to the new relaxations which came into effect from Sunday, shops and commercial establishments, banks and offices would be permitted to be open between 6 am and 5 pm daily, whereas during the previous lockdown period, they were allowed to open from 6 am to 2 pm only.

No permission for Ganesh pandals

Kakinada: Given the increasing number of Covid-19 cases, East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy requested the people not to install Lord Ganesh idols at the village junctions, open places on the occasion of Vinayaka Chaturthi festival. He said that people should not take out any processions.



Medical staff collect swab samples from Covid suspects for testing at GVMC Model Primary School at Chinnawaltair in Visakhapatnam on Sunday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA

Suspects scramble for Covid tests in Vizag

People are swarming test centres on the slightest doubt

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 16

A few symptoms like cold and cough are enough to send people of all age groups rushing for Covid-19 tests resulting in long queues at both government and private labs in Visakhapatnam city.

A 40-year-old man working for a reputed media house as marketing executive had fever and throat pain and wanted to get tested at ENT Hospital. As he found a huge rush, he went to a private lab near his house at Madhuravada where the situation was

much worse with people having might muscling their way ahead leaving weaker ones behind.

On the suggestion of his friends, he tried his luck at a reputed private lab in Health City where he was told to come at 5 a.m. To his shock, there were about 250 people waiting in the queue when he reached the lab at 4 a.m.

"Finally, upon my request, my boss approached the superintendent of King George Hospital where normally tests are not conducted for outsiders. I got the test done which finally turned

■ There are seven testing centres, including hospitals. There may be some labs which have directly obtained permission from the CEO of Aarogyasri, said the DM&HO

■ Vizag recorded 23,402 cases till Aug. 15

out to be positive," said Mr Sudhakar Rao.

Taking advantage of the demand many private labs have mushroomed in the city.

"We have authorised seven testing centres including hospitals. There

are some labs which may have obtained permission directly from the CEO of Aarogyasri," said District Medical and Health Officer Dr S. Tirupati Rao. A senior doctor Dr Zaheer Ahmed, who has leased out his nursing home for a Covid hospital, said there was need for more labs in the city.

"The are not enough Covid testing labs to meet the demand," Dr Ahmed said. Meanwhile, Visakhapatnam registered 23,402 positive cases till August 15 and 18,820 of them were discharged. The toll stood at 187.

POLICE NOT FOLLOWING AMENDED SC ACT

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, AUG. 16

Indian Association of Lawyers state executive member Inapurapu Suryanarayana said that the Parliament has amended the SC, ST Atrocities Prevention Act in 2016, but the police officials were not implementing the amended Act.

He said that as per section 14(1) of the Act, there is no need to file FIR before the Judicial Magistrate or charge-sheet. The police officials directly can file it in SC, ST Court. This section is meant for reducing the delay in investigating and filing the cases in the courts.

He said that in the incident of tansuring of a SC youth, Vara Prasad, by the police at Seethanagaram, the police did not file the FIR in SC Court.

The police filed the FIR before the 7th Judicial First Class Magistrate Court at Rajahmundry without considering the amendment done to the Act. He demanded the state government to implement the amended Act and do justice to the victims.

■ As per amended Act, police can file FIR in the SC court directly but still the police officials are not doing so

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 16

The ruling YSR Congress challenged Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for a public debate on development in the state.

Party MLA Jogi Ramesh, addressing a press meet here on Sunday, dared Naidu and his leaders to prove their claim that the state did not achieve any development under CM Jagan's rule.

10,117 Covid-19 patients recovered

From Page 1

As many as 10,117 patients have recovered from the disease in the same period.

Both Chittoor and East Godavari have reported the death of 10 people due to Covid-19, followed by nine in Kurnool, eight each in Nellore, Anantapur and West Godavari, seven in Visakhapatnam, six each in Guntur and Kadapa, four each in Prakasam, Srikakulam and Vizianagaram and 3 deaths registered in Krishna district.

The state has conducted Covid-19 tests on 48,746 people in the last 24 hours and 16 percent of them or 8,012 people were diagnosed as having Covid-19 disease. Till date, AP tested a total of 28,60,943 samples for Coronavirus and is in the top place in terms of the number of tests conducted

in the country.

The highest number of Coronavirus cases — 981 — were registered in Chittoor district, taking the overall aggregate to 23,459. The actual number of people being treated now is 9,131.

West Godavari district occupied the second place on Sunday by registering 893 new cases. While the total number of cases registered in the district was 23,582, the active cases are 4,967.

East Godavari has added the third highest number of cases on Sunday with reporting 875 new cases. While the total cases stand at 40,293, 14,895 are being treated.

Kurnool district reported 834 new cases, Srikakulam 773, Guntur 590, Anantapur 580, Visakhapatnam 512, Nellore 423, Vizianagaram 388, Kadapa 286 and Krishna 263.

District	Total	Active cases
Kurnool	33,580	7,830
Srikakulam	14,731	5,179
Prakasam	11,866	4,688
Guntur	26,139	7,740
Anantapur	29,527	5,981
Visakhapatnam	24,808	5,783
Nellore	17,164	5,096
Vizianagaram	12,633	6,691
Kadapa	16,808	4,573
Krishna	12,344	3,391

1,796 evacuated from 47 villages

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, AUG 16

As many as 1,796 people were evacuated from 47 flood-hit villages in 11 mandals in East Godavari district on Sunday.

According to officials, four mandals in Yetapaka division, one in Rampachodavaram, two each in Amalapuram,

Rajahmundry and Ramachandrapuram were affected by floods in the river Godavari. Horticulture crops were damaged in 282 hectares and 97 houses were damaged. Two NDRF teams and 60 boats were deployed for rescue operations.

Seven relief camps have been set up for flood victims in the district.

MLA warns of action against land grabbers

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, AUG. 16

Tirupati MLA and TTD Trust Board's special invitee Bhumana Karunakar Reddy gave a stern warning to anti-social elements to stay away from land encroachments in his name, in the temple city.

In an official release here on Sunday, the legislator stated that the urban police department and the state government will initiate stern action against those who resort to illegal activities

such as land grabbing or encroachment.

"The YSRC government will not leave anybody, irrespective of their influence or stature, if they resort to land grabbing or unlawful activities by misusing the party name or my name. We would take punitive action against such miscreants", he said.

He said that the YSRC government will extend support to the police and the concerned law enforcement agencies to take stringent action against miscreants.

Two more Covid centres in Tirupati

DCCORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, AUG. 16

Following the steady spike in the number of Covid cases across the Chittoor district, the authorities have hastened the process of increasing bed capacity by converting two more rest houses of TTD into Covid Care Centres (CCC).

The administration is said to be looking at the TTD choultries, situated behind the railway station, to convert it as a CCC, where it is possible to accommodate 1,500 beds.

Going by the official statistics, the district, which registered its first Covid-19 positive case on March 24, took nearly four months to add 10,378 patients and breach the 10,000 mark on July 31, but it took only 13 days in August to reach the 20,000 mark. Out of the 22,478 cases registered till date, over 12,100 cases were recorded in last 15 days.

The situation in Tirupati and its suburbs, which

RAIN AFFECTS DIGITAL CLASSES

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC HYDERABAD, AUG 16

Heavy rains played spoilsport for the start of digital classes. The Tela-ngana State Board of Intermediate Education announced that the inauguration of digital

classes for Intermediate students by education minister Sabitha Indra Reddy was postponed. The board had proposed to start digital classes through Doordarshan and T-SAT from August 17. The next date will be intimidated shortly. .

Surge in number of +ve cases attributed to foreign returnees

From Page 1

The surge in the number of positive cases was attributed to natives of AP returning from foreign countries and other states to which they had migrated on work.

Significantly, there were no Coronavirus cases for the first few weeks in Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam districts. But after the return of people to their native places, Covid-19 cases started rising in these districts.

Patients who have recently recovered while being under home quarantine say many people are unaware about the

increased recovery rate, which is causing fear among them about Coronavirus. They say there is no need to worry about treatment, as the government itself is offering home isolation and quarantine by arranging for medical kits and continuous supervision. They feel the state government should campaign among people about the increasing recovery rate, which would build confidence among people about recovering from Covid-19.

Covid state nodal officer Dr. C. Prabhakar Reddy said false information spread through social media platforms has been the cause for fear among masses. A few people had

even committed suicide due to the fear factor. Dr. Prabhakar Reddy said Coronavirus patients can recover swiftly in 90 percent of the cases. He forecast that in the coming two months, the recovery rate will further increase and the pandemic will be fully under control in the state.

The Covid nodal officer, however, advised people to follow the Covid-19 protocol, including wearing of face masks and maintaining physical distancing without fail. In case some of them contract Coronavirus, most of them can opt for home quarantine and isolation with medical assistance from health authorities.

MARBLE GODOWN RANSACKED

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 16

A marble dealer, Santosh Kumar Bucha, lodged a complaint with the MVP police alleging that about 30 unidentified persons barged into his godown located close to the National Highway in the wee hours of Sunday and ransacked it.

According to the complaint, the intruders tied up the watchman before ransacking his office and destroying documents.

He said he had taken the land 15 years ago and he did not have disputes with anyone. Sources said this was a typical case of land grabbing by people having close connection with political leaders. The land is said to be worth ₹30 crore. Meanwhile, RS member Vijaysai Reddy called up commissioner of police R.K. Meena and told him to probe the case due to the fact that the city was gaining importance as it would be executive capital soon.

Circle inspector of MVP police station M. Shanmukha Rao said he received a complaint and is investigating the case.

Mentally sick youth found with skull

K.M.P PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 16

Residents of Relli Veedhi in I Town area of Visakhapatnam were shocked to see a 20-year-old youth in possession of a preserved skull in his house in the early hours of Sunday.

Some people said they saw the youth chewing parts of the skull. On information, the police rushed to the spot and took the youth into custody.

I Town CI Chandrasekhar said the youth was identified as Ravalapadi Raju. The CI said one Subrahmanyam of the area found a gunny bag and became suspicious. He later opened to find the skull.

Suspecting to be the handiwork of his neighbour, he pulled up Raju and asked him about the skull but he did not answer.

After some time, Raju put the skull inside the bag and dragged it into his house.

Neighbours said Raju's father died five years ago due to illness and his mother left him and

■ Police said the youth was identified as Ravalapadi Raju

■ The CI said one Subrahmanyam of the area found a gunny bag and became suspicious. He later opened to find the skull

began staying in another house. After he became alone, Raju got addicted to drugs and to buy the drugs, he took to stealing.

"His answers were incoherent and we suspect he might have stolen the preserved skull from either the anatomy department of Andhra Medical College which has no lock and key or from the cremation ground," the CI said dismissing allegations of Raju chewing parts of the skull.

He said a woman present in his house and Raju were taken into custody for further questioning. The CI also added that Raju might have become mentally sick after getting addicted to drugs.

Raju wore a black T shirt with a full size picture of a skull in white in the front, which indicated his illness caused by psychotropic substances.



Dragonflies on the Kakinada-Uppada Beach Road on Sunday. — DC

Dragonflies swarm Kakinada beach

DC CORRESPONDENT KAKINADA, AUG. 16

When East Godavari District including Kakinada-Uppada Beach road is experiencing incessant rains and the sea is very rough, a huge swarm of dragonflies were found in Kakinada-Uppada Beach Road. The

passersby have faced hardships to cross the flies on their way by the vehicles. The flies controlled the traffic.

When the sea waves touched the Kakinada-Uppada road, many of the people went to the road to see it and experienced the moments. However, on Sunday, the visitors and

passersby faced difficulties with the dragonflies.

Environmentalists say that it is a good sign and flies should not be disturbed in their natural movement. In the past, whenever there were rains, dragonflies were often spotted. They haven't been spotted in the past several years.

YSRC dares Naidu for public debate

■ The total expenditure on welfare schemes during the five-year TD rule was ₹44,534.62 crore, while the Jagan government spent ₹19,375.66 crore in just one year.

Mr Naidu's Janmahaboomi committees benefitted only those from the TD, YSRC MLA alleged

Mr Ramesh challenged the opposition leaders to come for a public debate on welfare schemes implemented in the last 14 months and the progress achieved by the TD government in five years.

He stated that Naidu who never gave a place to

STs and minorities in his Cabinet had no moral right to talk about their welfare.

The total expenditure on welfare schemes during the five-year TD rule was ₹44,534.62 crore, while the Jagan government spent ₹19,375.66 crore in just one

year. Mr Naidu's Janmahaboomi committees ruined the public welfare system and benefited only those from the TD, he alleged.

Since Jagan Mohan Reddy came to power, over four lakh jobs were created and BC, SC, ST and minorities got 82 per cent of them, the MLA said and described Jagan as visionary leader to fulfill Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Grama Swaraj.

SHORT TAKES

PAWAR FAMILY HOLDS MEET TO PACIFY PARTH

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, AUG. 16

As Pawar family is trying to pacify disgruntled Parth Pawar, son of Deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, the Opposition BJP took advantage of the situation and termed Parth, a mature leader. According to reports, a meeting was held in Baramati at Shrinivas Pawar's bungalow to speak to Parth regarding Sharad Pawar's public reprimand. Few days ago, NCP chief Sharad Pawar had openly called Parth 'immature' and said that he gives absolutely no importance to his grand-nephew's demand for a CBI probe in Sushant Singh Rajput's death case.

The meeting in Baramati was attended by father Ajit Pawar, mother Sunetra Pawar, Uncle Shrinivas Pawar and Aunt Sharmila Pawar on Saturday night.

On August 13, Parth had gone to meet NCP chief Sharad Pawar at the latter's residence Silver Oak in South Mumbai. However, he could not meet the NCP chief but had over two-hour long discussion with paternal aunt Supriya Sule.

According to the media reports, Sharad Pawar was scheduled to go to Baramati on Sunday but cancelled the visit after a telephonic conversation with Ajit Pawar, who was in Baramati, and returned back to Mumbai from Pune.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and Rajya Sabha member Narayan Rane said, "Parth is above 18 years and is mature enough. There must be a reason why he demanded a CBI probe in Rajput's death case."

PVT OPERATORS FREE TO CHOOSE HALT STATIONS

New Delhi, Aug. 16: Private operators who will be handed over 150 trains to ply on 109 routes by the Railways will have the freedom to choose halt stations of the trains they operate, documents released by the national transporter have shown.

However, the private operators have to submit in advance to the Railways the list of such intermediate stations on the trains' paths where they are proposing halts.

The private operators also have to provide the time in and time out at the intermediate railway stations, which shall form part of the train operation plan. This has to be submitted in advance and will be in place for at least a year, after which it can be revised, a draft of the Concession Agreement has said. "The Concessionaire shall have the flexibility in deciding the stops/ halts in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Concession Agreement," the Railways has said in reply to a query by one of the private players who attended the pre-application meetings.

The Railways has also said the number of such halts of the private trains will not be more than the number of existing halts of the fastest train of the Railways operating in that route.

KAFEEL KHAN'S DETENTION EXTENDED

Lucknow, Aug. 16: The Uttar Pradesh government has extended by three months the detention of physician Kafeel Khan under the National Security Act for his alleged provocative speech during the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests.

Khan was arrested in January for delivering the speech at Aligarh Muslim University on December 10, 2019. It is the second time his detention under the stringent law has been extended by another three months, this time beyond August 13.

Under the National Security Act (NSA), people can be detained without a charge for up to 12 months if authorities are satisfied that they are threat to the national security or law and order.

In an order dated August 4, 2020, the UP Home Department said the NSA was invoked against Khan on February 13, 2020, on the orders of the Aligarh District Magistrate. "The matter was then sent to the advisory council, which in its report, said there are 'enough reasons' to keep Khan in jail following which orders were given on May 6, 2020, to extend his detention under the NSA by three months, that is till August 13, 2020," the order said.

New normal



Devotees stand in a queue outside Mata Vaishno Devi cave in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday. The shrine along with other religious places across the Union Territory reopened for devotees on Sunday after remaining closed for almost five months due to the Covid-19 outbreak. — PTI

Raj Bhavan under surveillance of Mamata, alleges Dhankhar

He also claimed that Maoism is now returning with support of state actors

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, AUG. 16

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday alleged that Raj Bhavan is under the surveillance of the Mamata Banerjee government. He also observed the return of Maoism in the state.

"The Raj Bhavan is under surveillance. This should not happen. It undermines the sanctity of the Raj Bhavan. I will do everything to protect its sanctity. How can an office of the Constitution be under surveillance? I will take legal steps once our inquiry is over. Public servants should not get into political mode.

Nobody is above the law," the Governor told the media at an event to mark former prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's second death anniversary in Raj Bhavan.

Dhankhar claimed, "Important documents, which should not go out of Raj Bhavan without my sanction, are getting leaked outside. Documents are procured. I have initiated a very serious probe into it. Those, who have done this, have to pay a heavy price. On 14 August, a document was electronically shared using an app from here. That document came back to me from the highest authority of the govern-

ment."

Dhankhar noted, "The dangerous ado of Maoism is now getting visible with the support of state actors. West Bengal needs peace, tranquility and law and order."

His latest salvo came hours after he expressed his strong displeasure over the Chief Minister's absence at the 'at home' function at Raj Bhavan on Saturday.

Dhankhar tweeted, "Absence of CM and officials @MamataOfficial on occasion of Independence Day celebration at Raj Bhavan has like many startled and stunned me. We need to rise to occasion as respect to freedom fighters who gave their all to secure for us freedom and democracy. I am at loss of words (sic)."

Sharing a picture of the empty chair, he said, "The vacant seat meant for CM @MamataOfficial at celebration of Independence Day at Raj Bhavan speaks volumes — has created unwholesome situation that is not in sync with rich culture and ethos of WB. There is just no rationale for this unbecoming stance. CM and executive @MamataOfficial set bad precedent by not attending. Another painful instance of distancing from Constitution (sic)."

On Saturday morning, Mamata Banerjee visited Raj Bhavan and greeted Jagdeep Dhankhar on the occasion of the Independence Day in what appeared to be a "cordial meeting" after hoisting the National Flag on Red Road.

Bengaluru riots take caste turn

DC CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU, AUG. 16

The Bengaluru riots, during which the house of Pulikeshinagar MLA Akhanda Srinivas Murthy was burnt down and two police stations were attacked, has taken caste turn, with the BJP trying to portray the riots as an attack on a Dalit.

Sensing danger, the Congress quickly distanced itself from the SDPI (Social Democratic Party of India) and alleged that the violence was instigated by BJP activists to put the blame on the Congress.

While the Congress despatched a fact-finding committee headed by former deputy chief minister Dr G. Parameshwar, who himself is a Dalit, the BJP has constituted another fact-finding committee headed by former minister Aravind Limbavali, who belongs to the Bovi community from which Srinivas Murthy hails. BJP leaders B.L. Santhosh, Deputy Chief Minister Ashwathnarayana, ministers C.T. Ravi, B.C. Patil and others came down heavily on Congress for supporting the minority community blindly, who were attacking Dalits in the state.

KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar shot back saying that the BJP was the one which was following anti-Dalit policies.

On Saturday evening, former minister B.Z. Zameer Ahamed Khan led a group of Muslim clerics to the house of Srinivas Murthy to send a message that it was not a fight between Muslims and Dalits at Kadugondanahalli and Devara-

Jeevana Halli, where the riots took place. The clerics said they were ready to reconstruct the house of the MLA from community funds, if he agreed.

However, Zameer Ahamed Khan's earlier action had drawn flak from some of Congress leaders. Zameer had visited the houses of the three persons killed in police firing and distributed ₹5 lakh each. He had also said that the violence was instigated by miscreants, while all those killed were "innocent". The BJP was quick to seize on the issue and pointed out that Zameer and the Congress had links with the attackers but were calling them innocent. Some of the Congress leaders requested Siddaramaiah to advise Zameer not to identify himself with the attackers, as it would substantiate the BJP's claim that it was a fight between Muslims and Dalits.

Meanwhile, the special team investigating the riots has approached the cybercrime police for digital analysis of the crime scene. So far, the police has 8,000 telephone numbers, with an equal number of WhatsApp accounts, to be analysed. Besides, police has obtained thousands of Instagram and Facebook accounts as well as calls made using Facebook Messenger during the riots. The police is also analysing CCTV footage of over 800 cameras for further clues.

Guj: BSF nabs Pak fisherman

Bhuj (Guj), Aug. 16: Four Pakistani boats were seized by the Border Security Force on Sunday from 'Harami Nallah' creek along the India-Pakistan border in Gujarat's Kutch district, the force said.

A Pakistani fisherman, identified as Alla Bachao Siddique (25), from Sindh province of Pakistan was apprehended, while others managed to escape, it said.

A patrolling team of the BSF's Bhuj unit observed movement of four to five Pakistani men on boats near the 'Harami Nallah', in Kutch region, at around 6 am, it said. "The Pakistani fishermen were attempting to enter into Indian territory by taking the advantage of rough sea state. The alert patrol party of Border Security Force (BSF) intercepted the Pakistani intruders

the moment they tried to enter into Indian territory, while the intruders also saw the BSF patrol party and jumped into the water," the BSF said in a statement.

"The BSF patrol team chased them and apprehended one Pakistani fisherman and seized four fishing boats. Rest of the fishermen managed to escape into Pakistani territory by taking advantage of slushy and marshy terrain of the area," it said.

All four seized boats were searched and nothing suspicious was recovered from them, the border guarding force said.

In view of the incident, the BSF launched a thorough search operation of the area which was underway in the evening as well, and nothing suspicious was recovered thus far, it added. — PTI

GPR TO BE USED TO LOCATE BODIES IN IDUKKI

Idukki (Kerala) Aug. 16: Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) will be used to locate bodies buried in the landslide at Pettimudi in the district, where the death toll has risen to 58 with the recovery of three more bodies, a senior official said here on Sunday. The GPR would assist the NDRF, police, fire force personnel and locals, who have been engaged in search and rescue operations for the last nine days, District Collector H. Dineshan said.

"We have requested for a GPR from Chennai. We hope it will reach here by Tuesday. Currently 12 people are missing," he said. A massive mound of earth and slush, triggered by heavy rains, flattened a row of 20 one-room row houses made of tin and asbestos sheets, at Pettimudi in Rajamala on August 7. — PTI

Over 1L Covid cases recorded every two days

SANJAY KAW | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 16

Coronavirus cases in India continue to race ahead, with over one lakh new infections being added every two days in the world's third-worst affected country. The country reported 63,489 fresh cases in the past 24 hours, taking the total tally to nearly 26.34 lakhs. Given the daily rise of nearly 1,000 deaths, India on Sunday surpassed the grim 50,000-mark in the total number of fatalities due to the deadly virus.

The country has also been reporting over 60,000 Coronavirus cases daily since August 7, barring August 11, when it registered 53,601 cases. India is the third worst-affected nation due to the pandemic after the United States and Brazil. It has been reporting a higher daily surge in cases for the past 12 days, according to World Health Organisation data.

In India, Mizoram is reportedly the only state with fewer than 1,000 cases, besides Lakshadweep, which continues to be Coronavirus-free, with no cases having been detected in the islands so far.

With 945 deaths reported in the last 24 hours, the total fatalities due to the virus in India have gone up to 51,025. The country's Coronavirus fatality rate has, however, dropped to 1.93 per cent, one of the lowest globally. The United States crossed 50,000 deaths in 23 days, Brazil in 95 days and Mexico in 141 days. India took 156 days to reach this figure.

The government said the mortality rate is low in India "because of aggressive testing and early detection coupled with quick isolation and effective treatment protocols". India's case fatality rate (CFR) is on a "continuous positive slide" and stands now at 1.94 per cent. The CFR is the proportion of incident patients dying because of a disease or injury in a certain time window.

India's recovery rate is now 71.91 per cent after 18.91 lakh people were discharged across the country. Of these, over 53,000 patients were discharged in the past 24 hours.

The country saw a record of highest single-day recoveries on Saturday, after 57,381 Covid-19 patients were cured. To further build on this achievement, 32

MONSOON SESSION TO SEE COVID-PROOF MEASURES

New Delhi, Aug. 16: Hectic preparations are underway for the Monsoon Session of Parliament with several first-time measures in view of the Covid-19 pandemic such as staggered sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and use of both chambers and galleries to accommodate members while following physical distancing norms, officials said.

The Monsoon Session is likely to begin in the last week of August or early September. According to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, members of the Upper House will be seated in both chambers and galleries during the session.

This is the first time in the history of Indian Parliament since 1952 that such an arrangement will be in place, where 60 members will be seated in the chamber and 51 in the galleries of Rajya Sabha and the remaining 132 in the chamber of Lok Sabha. Similar seating arrangements are being worked out by the Lok Sabha Secretariat as well.

For the first time, large display screens and consoles for participation from galleries, ultraviolet germicidal irradiation, special cables between the two Houses and polycarbonate separators will be in place.

Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla at a meeting on July 17, after detailed examination of various options for holding the session, decided on using the chambers and galleries of both the Houses. — PTI

states and Union territories have exceeded the 50 per cent mark. About a dozen states or UTs have exceeded the national recovery rate. The gap between the recovered patients and active Covid-19 cases has increased further and crossed 11 lakhs, at 1,184,814 on Sunday.

The improvement in the recovery rate of Coronavirus patients is mainly being attributed to the continuous strengthening of the testing network in the country.

RAJNATH SINGH APPROVES PLAN OF NCC FOR MAJOR EXPANSION SCHEME

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, AUG. 16

Defence minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) for a major expansion scheme to meet the aspirations of youth in all the border and coastal districts.

As per the plan a total of one lakh cadets from 173 border and coastal districts will be inducted in the NCC. One-third of the cadets would be girl cadets. More than 1,000 schools and colleges have been identified in border and coastal districts where NCC will be introduced. The proposals of the

scheme were announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address on Saturday. As part of the expansion plan, a total of 83 NCC units will be upgraded (Army 53, Navy 20, Air Force 10), to impart NCC training to the cadets in the border and coastal areas.

Army will provide training and administrative support to the NCC units located in the border areas, Navy shall provide support to NCC units in the coastal areas and similarly Air Force will provide support to the NCC units located close to the Air Force stations.

WOMEN | SAFETY

Move comes amid rise in number of complaints of mental abuse

NCW mulls launch of 24/7 helpline

New Delhi, Aug. 16: The National Commission for Women is planning to launch a 24/7 helpline in view of the rising number of mental harassment complaints since the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

The helpline will be launched in north India first and steadily expanded to the rest of the country, NCW chairperson Rekha Sharma said. The launch date for the helpline hasn't been decided yet, she said. In an interview to PTI, Sharma

said the helpline development project is being carried out in collaboration with the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh.

"The launch date of the helpline has not been finalised yet. It will be launched in north India first and slowly and steadily it will be extended to other parts of the country," she said. The decision comes amid a rise in the number of complaints of emotional and mental abuse received by the com-

mission over the last few months.

According to NCW data, it received 2,320 complaints related to mental harassment and emotional abuse from April, days after the lockdown was imposed in the country, till now.

In contrast, it received 1,550 such complaints between December 2019 and March 2020. Elaborating on the issue, Sharma said mental tension for women increased during the lockdown. "Both men and women faced mental health prob-

lems during the lockdown. Women were working from home and doing all the (household) work and then they were not able to reach out to their parents even if they were getting mentally harassed. In normal circumstances, they were able to reach out to their family and friends and talk to them but (during lockdown) they were locked inside the house. So yes, mental tension increased during the lockdown," she said.

Sharma said the NCW worked 24/7 during the

lockdown to help women. "During the lockdown, we worked 24/7 because we knew women were not able to reach out to any other agency or their relatives and families," she said.

"We launched a WhatsApp number because we knew women were not able to go to the police station, reach us by post and many women do not even know how to send an email. Since the launch of the WhatsApp number, the number of complaints has increased manifold," she said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

PRO-DEMOCRACY
STIR DRAWS BIG
BANGKOK CROWD

Bangkok, Aug. 16: An anti-government protest in Thailand drew more than 10,000 people on Sunday, police said, the largest political demonstration the kingdom has seen in years as a pro-democracy movement gathers steam.

Student-led groups have held near-daily protests across the country for the past month to denounce Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha — a former army chief who led a 2014 coup — and his military-aligned administration.

By Sunday evening the protesters — who are demanding major democratic reforms — had taken over the busy intersection around Bangkok's Democracy Monument, which was built to mark the 1932 revolution that ended royal absolutism.

Police closed off surrounding main roads to stop incoming traffic, and an official at Bangkok's Metropolitan Police Bureau said the crowd size had grown to 10,000 by 6 pm (1100 GMT). "Down with the dictatorship," the students chanted, many holding signs critical of the administration. Others held pigeon-shaped cutouts representing peace.

The gathering at Democracy Monument is the largest the kingdom has seen since Prayut staged a putsch in 2014.

Partly inspired by the Hong Kong democracy movement, the protesters claim to be leaderless and have relied mostly on social media campaigns to draw support across the country.

S. KOREA ACCUSES
PASTOR AS COVID
CASES SURGE

Seoul, Aug.16: South Korea accused a conservative pastor on Sunday of violating self-isolation rules and obstructing contact tracing at a church where 240 infections have fuelled the country's worst outbreak in over five months. The focus on the Sarang Jeil Church, led by Rev. Jun Kwang-hoon, revived bad memories of the country's biggest outbreak, among followers of a secretive Christian sect back in February.

South Korea on Sunday reported 279 new cases, more than double the 103 reported on Friday, with most of the new infections found in and around Seoul.

Aside from the infections linked to the church, there were also smaller clusters, including some 30 cases linked to a Starbucks outlet in the city of Paju, north of Seoul.

The surge in Covid-19 cases prompted authorities on Sunday to reimpose tighter social distancing curbs in the Seoul metropolitan area.

The health ministry said it had filed a complaint against Jun, an outspoken government critic, for violating self-isolation rules by participating in a rally on Saturday, and for "obstructing" a medical investigation into the outbreak by failing to provide a full list of church members for testing and tracing.

YALE'S COVID
SALIVA TEST GETS
FDA APPROVAL

New Haven, Connecticut, Aug.16: The US Food and Drug Administration on Saturday granted emergency use authorization to Yale School of Public Health's saliva test to detect Covid-19, after a trial on National Basketball Association players and staff.

SalivaDirect, the fifth saliva test approved by the FDA for the disease, requires no swab or collection device and uses spit from people suspected of having the coronavirus, the agency said bit.ly/3fZyX30.

FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn called the test "ground-breaking" in its efficiency and in being unaffected by crucial component shortages.

SalivaDirect is seen as a cheap, simpler and less invasive testing method that requires no extraction of nucleic acid and can use several readily available reagents.

The NBA has used the test in a program involving asymptomatic players, coaches and staff from various teams, after partnering with Yale in June, the school said bit.ly/3iOIYmf in a separate statement.

"We simplified the test so that it only costs a couple of dollars for reagents, and we expect that labs will only charge about \$10 per sample," Nathan Grubaugh, assistant professor at Yale School of Public Health, said.

One of the goals of the research team was to eliminate the need for expensive saliva collection tubes.

Protests rage in Belarus



A woman takes pictures of anti-Lukashenko posters at the pedestal of a monument during an opposition demonstration in central Minsk on Sunday. The Belarusian strongman, who has ruled his ex-Soviet country with an iron grip since 1994, is under increasing pressure from the streets and abroad over his claim to have won re-election on August 9, with 80 percent of the vote. — AFP

Telephone service
starts between
UAE and Israel

Dubai, Aug. 16: Telephone service between the United Arab Emirates and Israel began working on Sunday as the two countries opened diplomatic ties, part of a deal brokered by the US that required Israel to halt its contentious plan to annex West Bank land sought by the Palestinians for a future state.

Associated Press journalists in Jerusalem and Dubai were able to call each other from both landline and cellular phones registered to Israel's country code +972 from around 1:15 pm.

Over an hour later, Emirati officials acknowledged that Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan had called his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi. Israeli Communications Minister Yoaz Handel issued a statement "congratulating the United Arab Emirates on removing the blocks."

"Many economic opportunities will open now, and these trust-building

● **IN THE UAE,** a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, a recorded message in Arabic and English would typically play prior to Sunday saying calls to +972 numbers could not be connected.

steps are an important step toward advancing states' interests," Handel said. Also on Sunday, Israeli news websites that had previously been blocked by UAE authorities, like the Times of Israel, the Jerusalem Post and YNet, could be accessed without using means to bypass internet filtering in the Emirates.

In the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Peninsula, a recorded message in Arabic and English would typically play prior to Sunday saying calls to +972 numbers could not be connected.

The advent of internet calling allowed people to get around the ban, though these too were often interrupted. — AP

Israel shuts down
Gaza fishing zone

Jerusalem, Aug. 16: Israel closed the Gaza Strip's offshore fishing zone on Sunday following a night of cross-border fighting with Palestinian militants, the most intense escalation of hostilities in recent months.

Palestinian militants in Gaza fired two rockets into southern Israel after Israeli airstrikes targeted sites belonging to the territory's militant Hamas rulers.

The military said the Iron Dome aerial defense system intercepted the two rockets that militants in Gaza launched at southern Israel. But police said rocket fallout caused damage to a house in the town of Sderot, and paramedics treated a 58-

year-old man for minor wounds from the exploding glass.

The Israeli army said the strikes were a response to explosive balloons launched by Hamas-affiliated group over the border, and attempts by Palestinian protesters to throw explosives at the Israel-Gaza perimeter fence and soldiers stationed along it.

Dozens of Palestinians took part in the protests. The military said the protesters "burned tires, hurled explosive devices and grenades towards the security fence and attempted to approach it."

The Gaza health ministry said Israeli gunfire at protesters wounded two Palestinians. — AP

CYBER | CRIME

Investigation was launched by Canada and the federal police

Govt accounts hacked in Canada

Toronto, Aug. 16: Tens of thousands of user accounts for online government services in Canada were recently hacked during cyber attacks, authorities said on Saturday.

The attacks targeted the GCKey service, used by some 30 federal departments and Canada Revenue Agency accounts, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat explained in a press release.

The passwords and usernames of 9,041 GCKey account holders "were acquired fraudulently and used to try and access gov-



In this file photo a pictures shows binary code reflected from a computer screen in a woman's eye. — AFP

ernment services," the authorities said.

All affected accounts have been cancelled.

● **THE ATTACKS** targeted the GCKey service, used by some 30 federal departments and Canada Revenue Agency accounts, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat explained.

ities said, adding that access to these accounts has been suspended to protect taxpayer information.

An investigation was launched by the government and the federal police to determine whether there were any breaches of privacy and whether infor-

Voting rules revive fights
over 'ballot harvesting'

Las Vegas, Aug. 16: As President Donald Trump's reelection campaign challenged Nevada's new voting law in court, the president and Republicans argued the rules would facilitate fraud and illegal voting. Chief among their criticisms was a provision allowing "ballot harvesting."

The Nevada lawsuit highlighted a practice that has long fueled Republicans' suspicions about mail-in voting.

Although widely practiced and rarely found to be abused, the rule permitting a third party to collect and return multiple ballots remains a source of partisan dispute. Those fights are likely to continue up to Election Day as states adjust their laws for the pandemic. One of the few recent instances of fraud related to ballot collection happened in North

Carolina in 2018, resulting in a congressional election being overturned.

More than half of states allow a third party to collect ballots. And political groups and campaigns from both parties have run ballot-collection programs aimed at boosting turnout and ensuring voters who are older, homebound, disabled, or live far from U.S. postal services can get their ballot returned.

"This is not new ground," Nevada's Democratic Assembly Speaker Jason Frierson said in a statement. "Allowing someone to assist a voter in turning in their ballot helps protect vulnerable populations, including our tribal and rural communities."

Trump and the GOP contend "ballot harvesting" opens the door for fraud and have fought to restrict it. — AP

UPS, FEDEX WARN
THEY CANNOT
CARRY BALLOTS

Los Angeles, Aug. 16: United Parcel Service (UPS.N) and FedEx (FDX.N) on Friday shot down social media calls that they step in to deliver mail-in ballots from the US Postal Service, which is warning states of potentially "significant" delays.

"State ballots must be postmarked to be considered valid and only the USPS has lawful postmarking status. Therefore UPS, FedEx and other private parties cannot technically be involved in shipping ballots," UPS said.

Republican President Donald Trump on Thursday said he opposed providing funds for the struggling Postal Service for mail voting. — Agencies

If elected, will stand with India
against threats it faces: Biden

Prez candidate to will work on expanding two-way trade between India, US

Washington, Aug. 16: Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden asserted that if elected, his administration will stand with India in confronting the threats it faces and called for strengthening the "bond" between India and the US.

Presidential elections in the US will be held on November 3, 2020, and 77-year-old Biden is challenging incumbent Republican President Donald Trump in the polls.

"Fifteen years ago, I was leading the efforts to approve the historic civil nuclear deal with India. I said that if the US and India became closer friends and partners, then the world will be a safer place," Biden, who was vice-president in the Obama administration, said while addressing the Indian American community on India's Independence Day.

If elected president, Biden said that he will continue to stand with India against the threats it faces from its own region and along its borders.

He said that he will work on expanding two-way trade between the two nations and take on big global challenges like climate change and global health security.

If elected, the

New York, Aug. 16:

Newsweek has apologised for an op-ed that questioned Sen. Kamala Harris' US citizenship and her eligibility to be Joe Biden's running mate, a false and racist conspiracy theory which President Donald Trump has not dismissed.

"This op-ed is being used by some as a tool to perpetuate racism and xenophobia. We apologise," read Newsweek's editor's note on Friday, which replaced the magazine's earlier detailed defense of the op-ed.

"We entirely failed to anticipate the ways in which the essay would be interpreted, distorted and

weaponised," read the apology, signed by Josh Hammer, opinion editor, and Nancy Cooper, global editor in chief.

But they ended the note by saying that the op-ed would remain on the site, with their note attached.

The op-ed was written by John Eastman, a conservative attorney who argues that the US Constitution doesn't grant birthright citizenship. Eastman sowed doubt about Harris' eligibility based on her parents' immigration status. Harris' mother was born in India and her father was born in Jamaica.

Newsweek earlier defended the piece, argu-

ing that Eastman "was focusing on a long-standing, somewhat arcane legal debate" about the 14th Amendment and not trying to "ignite a racist conspiracy theory around Kamala Harris' candidacy."

But the theory is false. Harris, who was tapped by Joe Biden to serve as his running mate on the Democratic ticket, was born in Oakland, California, and is eligible for both the vice-presidency and presidency under the constitutional requirements.

The question is not even considered complex, according to constitutional lawyers. — AP

diaspora, that keeps our two nations together; as I have throughout my career".

"My constituents in Delaware, my staff in the Senate, the Obama administration that had more Indian Americans than any other administration in the history of this country and this campaign with Indian

Americans at senior levels, which of course includes the top of the heap, our dear friend (Kamala Harris) who will be the first Indian American vice president in the history of the United States of America," Biden said.

Early this week, Biden scripted history by selecting Harris, 55, as his run-

ning mate in the US presidential election.

Harris, whose father is an African from Jamaica and mother an Indian, is the first-ever woman of colour vice-presidential nominee.

"We all know she's smart, she's tested, she's prepared. But another thing that makes Kamala so inspiring is her mother's immigrant story to the US that started in India, with pure courage that brought her daughters to this moment. I know the pride you feel. It's your story too," Biden said.

"For your sacrifices, and your family's courage, you became pillars of our community and our country. You're patriots and the frontlines of this pandemic. In this reckoning of systemic racism, you're making a real promise that America is a place where people of all races and religions can live together in peace," he said.

"But I know it's hard. I heart goes out to all those of you who have been the targets in a rise in hate crimes, and the crack-down of legal immigration, including sudden and harmful actions on H-1B visas. That for decades have made America stronger and brought our nation's closer," Biden said. — PTI

Trump vows 'snapback' to revive Iran curbs

New Jersey Aug 16: US President Donald Trump said on Saturday he will try a controversial "snapback" to force a return of UN sanctions against Iran, after the Security Council rejected Washington's bid to extend the arms embargo against the Islamic republic.

"We'll be doing a snapback," the president said, referring to the contested argument that the US remains a participant in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal — despite Trump's withdrawal from it — and therefore can force a return to sanctions if it

sees Iran as being in violation of its terms.

The president said the US will make its move next week.

Trump also said at the press conference at his private golf course at Bedminster, New Jersey, he would "probably not" participate in the 5 + 1 summit with Iran proposed by his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Putin called on Friday for an online summit of the leaders of the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany and Iran over a possible extension of the

● **DONALD TRUMP'S** younger brother Robert died on Saturday after being hospitalized for an undisclosed illness, the US president said in a statement mourning his loss.

international embargo on arms sales in Tehran.

It was in this so-called 5 + 1 configuration that the Iran nuclear agreement was negotiated and concluded with Iran, which Trump then denounced.

"Probably not, I think we will wait until after the election," Trump said when asked about his pos-

sible participation in this summit.

The Trump administration's defeat Friday at the Security Council highlighted its isolation on Iran since Trump withdrew from the accord in 2018.

Only two of the Council's 15 members voted in favor of the U.S. resolution.

Washington's European allies all abstained, Russia and China voted against it, and Iran mocked the Trump administration for winning the support of just one other country; the Dominican Republic.

Trump argued Saturday

that Iran was a "different ballgame" now and that the country no longer has the funds to sponsor terror. "Iran wants me to lose so badly" in November's presidential election, he added.

If Trump follows through, the snapback could plunge the Council into one of its worst diplomatic crises, experts warn.

European allies have been skeptical on whether Washington can force sanctions and say the attempt may delegitimize the Security Council.

— AFP

Moment of pride



New York Empire State Building illuminated in the colours of the Indian flag on Independence Day. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

17 AUGUST 2020

Bhushan ruling: Court in contempt of justice

The Supreme Court of India is perfectly justified when it says the judiciary is considered “the last hope when a citizen fails to get justice anywhere” but its decision to punish one who doubted its ability to deliver justice is problematic. The court’s observation on its own role in the democratic scheme of things came on Friday along with its finding that lawyer and activist Prashant Bhushan is guilty of criminal contempt of the court for his two tweets that were critical of it.

One of Mr Bhushan’s tweets suggested that access to justice was denied during lockdown, and he seemingly attributed the reason to the Chief Justice of India (CJI). In another tweet, he held the Supreme Court, and the last four CJIs in particular, responsible for “the weakening of democracy” in India in the last six years. Those who wonder why a lawyer should hold the judiciary responsible for the denial of access to justice and weakening of democracy may find their answers in the 108-page judgment itself. “The Indian judiciary is not only one of pillars on which the Indian democracy stands but is the central pillar,” insists the judgment. Is it not then fair that a citizen, who feels the structure of democracy is weakened, holds the institution which arrogates to itself the role of the central pillar, responsible? Isn’t he entitled to hold the view that the CJIs, as masters of the roster, have a role in it? The court does not share the view, obviously.

One must stand with the court when it says “the Supreme Court is a protector of the fundamental rights of the citizens, as also is endowed with a duty to keep the other pillars of democracy i.e. the executive and the legislature, within the constitutional bounds”. But has it come to the aid of the people and protected their fundamental rights when it was warranted the most is the moot question. Some of the recent events are not particularly encouraging. We have the SC putting off for months together the hearing on the habeas corpus petitions, a constitutional guarantee against the State’s unauthorised usurpation of people’s liberties, moved by the people of Jammu and Kashmir. It initially refused to act when its intervention was sought to bring relief to the millions of guest workers who were forced to trek home following a government missive. It is yet to hear petitions against the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, which many fear undermined the very idea of India. The highest court shocked many when it put preconditions to hear the students of a university who sought protection from governmental action. It will be a far-fetched claim if someone says such acts added to the dignity of the court and strengthened the people’s belief in the system; the contrary could very well be the truth. Believers in democracy could air their desperation publicly; little purpose will be served by shooting the messengers.

Dhoni made winning a habit

Mahendra Singh Dhoni is a sui generis. Coming as he did from a town in the hinterland and his first job as a railway ticket examiner, his background seemed all wrong and he was run out without scoring on his international debut. As he evolved from a gawky youth with long hair into a suave national icon he also transformed Indian cricket — on the field with his instinctive dynamism and in the selection committee room where he backed the men he saw as match winners.

Leading a bunch of young players, he stunned the world in the T20 World Cup in a format that was thought to be unsuitable for the laid-back temperament of Indian cricketers. Like Kapil’s Devils did in the 1983 World Cup final at Lord’s, Dhoni’s young guns had shown an ability to seize the moment. Indian cricket was a financial powerhouse by then but with few trophies in its cupboard. Dhoni changed that by bringing in his winning ways, leading from the front as one of the best finishers in the game and the safest catcher and alert stumper.

Soaking up the pressures while retaining an essential calmness to bring out the best of sporting skill sets was Dhoni’s forte. He became the only captain in the world to win across formats — T20 World Cup in 2007, World Cup in 2011 and Champions Trophy in 2013 after having first led India to the top rung of the Test ladder of merit, besides three IPLs for his favourite Chennai Super Kings and two Champions League titles.

In handling success with equanimity, Dhoni has become an inspirational national figure with a special place in his heart for men of the armed forces, who see him as an apolitical figure endowed with the ideal fighting spirit. He kept up the element of surprise in timing his retirement announcement, lacing it with the Armed Forces’ 24-hour clock — 1929 hours — in perhaps a hint of what he may like to do as a mentor. Close to 40, he gives up a young man’s international game while leaving Indian cricket in better shape.

ADITYA SINHA

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Printer & Publisher

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Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. HSD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Find motive to work out Chinese checkers moves



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

It has been over 100 days now that the Chinese are squatting on Indian territory. They are refusing to move back. Neither the government nor any former official or for that matter any strategic thinker has answered the basic question — Why have the Chinese occupied our land? The Chinese, of course, choose to deny that they are in our territory and profess they are only at best on their perception of the Line of Actual Control.

For the sake of argument even if you buy the Chinese explanation, their behaviour still is in stark contrast to 1962 where the Chinese were tactically successful in the eastern sector. After launching an unprovoked aggression then they still chose too retreat 20 kilometres not from their professed claim line but from the Actual Ground Position as on November 7, 1959. The Chinese ceasefire declaration of November 19, 1962, stated as follows —

“Beginning from 21 November 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will cease fire along the entire Sino-Indian border. Beginning from 1 December 1962, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw to positions 20 kilometres (12 miles) behind the line of actual control, which existed between China and India on 7 November 1959. In the eastern sector, although the Chinese frontier guards have so far been fighting on Chinese territory north of the traditional customary line, they are prepared to withdraw from their present positions to the north of the illegal McMahon Line, and to withdraw twenty kilometers (12 miles) back from that line. In the middle and western sectors, the Chinese frontier guards will withdraw 20

kilometres (12 miles) from the line of actual control.”

What is the salience of November 7, 1959? It was on this date a seminal proposal was made to Pandit Nehru by the then Chinese premier Chou-en-Lai. Excerpts from that letter are worth quoting: “In order to maintain effectively the status quo of the border between the two countries, to ensure the tranquility of the border regions and to create a favourable atmosphere for a friendly settlement of the boundary question, the Chinese government proposes that the armed forces of China and India each withdraw 20 kilometres at once from the so-called McMahon Line in the east, and from the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west, and that the two sides undertake to refrain from again sending their armed personnel to be stationed in and patrol the zones from which they have evacuated their armed forces, but still maintain civil administrative personnel and unarmed police there for the performance of administrative duties and maintenance of order. This proposal is in effect an extension of the Indian government’s proposal contained in its note dated September 10 that neither side should send its armed personnel to Longju, to the entire border between China and India, and moreover a proposal to separate the troops of the two sides by as great a distance as 40 kilometres. If there is any need to increase this distance, the Chinese government is also willing to give it consideration. In a word, both before and after the formal delimitation of the boundary between our two countries through negotiations, the Chinese government is willing to do its utmost to create the most

peaceful and most secure border zones between our two countries, so that our two countries will never again have apprehensions or come to a clash on account of border issues. If this proposal of the Chinese government is acceptable to the Indian government, concrete measures for its implementation can be discussed and decided upon at once by the two governments through diplomatic channels”.

In his reply on November 16, 1959, Nehru after extensive consultations both in the Congress Working Committee and his Cabinet rejected the proposal for all the right reasons outlined in that letter except insofar it applied to Ladakh. He wrote “I suggest, therefore, that in the Ladakh area, both our governments should agree on the following as an interim measure. The Government of India should withdraw all personnel to the west of the line which the Chinese government have shown as the international boundary in their 1956 maps which, so far as we are aware are their latest maps. Similarly, the Chinese government should withdraw their personnel to the east of the international boundary, which has been described by the Government of India in their earlier notes and correspondence and shown in their official maps. Since the two lines are separated by long distances, there should not be the slightest risk of border clashes between the forces on either side.” One can only speculate that had Nehru accepted Chou’s proposal the trajectory of Sino-Indian relations could have been different.

Did Prime Minister Modi renege on some commitments given to President Xi in Wuhan and Mamallapuram, is it about distance from the US, accepting China’s new hedonistic world order or all of them?

Since 1962, India and China have had a number of standoffs but eventually they were all surmounted some with casualties and others without any loss of life. Even Doklam that persisted for 73 days was eventually cracked through a fortnight of diplomatic negotiations in 2017. However, the current crisis is substantively distinctive for both Chinese belligerence and brazenness. They have killed 20 Indian soldiers and injured numerous more in at least three clashes in Ladakh alone. Ten Indian soldiers were taken hostage and subsequently released by the People’s Liberation Army.

Despite both foreign ministers speaking to each other, Mr Doval confabulating with his special representative equivalent, numerous conferences of the working mechanism for consultation and coordination on India-China borders affairs, five corps commander level exchanges and other tactical level military talks, the Chinese are not budging. In fact, in the July issue of the China-India Review, Ambassador Wei Sun Weidong has squarely blamed India for the current crisis. Unlike this government that pulled documents of the MOD website.

China has effectively moved the Line Actual Control westwards by creating new facts on the ground along the entire LAC in Ladakh. They have instigated Nepal and Pakistan to indulge in cartographic aggression. The question, however, remains, why? Did Prime Minister Modi renege on some commitments given to President Xi in Wuhan and Mamallapuram, is it about distance from the US, accepting China’s new hedonistic world order or all of them? Till the time we do not know what the Chinese want we will not be able to deal with them effectively going forward.

The author is a lawyer, Member of Parliament and former Union information and broadcasting minister. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

PRAGMATIC SOLUTION

Our lack of readiness to tackle the invasion by Covid-19 pandemic stands exposed. With massive manpower at our disposal and money, we failed to make a difference. We can easily build makeshift hospitals with medical support systems like ventilators and medicare only if we prune down our unproductive expenditure. We need to be on toes at least from now on.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

DHONI RETIRES

The Finisher and Captain Cool, winner of two World Cups, M.S. Dhoni, has finally hung up his boots from international cricket (DC, Aug. 16). His contribution to cricket is immense and has left behind a lasting legacy. We miss him on the field.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

LEFT WITH SLOGANS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi sounded ever so confident in his 7th consecutive address to the nation from Red Fort. However, six years of his tenure has failed to make much of a difference to the common man who is still in search of *roti, kapada aur makaan*. The nation is used to listening to lofty slogans. The Congress was a slogan monger. The most dubious of them was *Garibi Hatao*. Since 2014, Narendra Modi’s BJP too is learnt the habit of coining catchy slogans like *Sab Ka Saath — Sab Ka Vikas*, *Swachh Bharat*, *Make in India*, *Atmanirbhar Bharat* and many more. There is no effective system in our country.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

Drug makers directed to restore old prices

NEW DELHI, AUG. 16 In a determined bid to push down prices, the Union Government today directed the drug manufacturers who have rained the price level to restore the level prevailing on May 15, the day immediately before the commencement of the Drug Prices Control Order.

In a directive to the manufacturers who revised the prices of drugs on August one, The Petroleum and Chemicals ministry said sternly that the “higher prices should not be enforced.”

with foreign firms and being compelled to adhering to stringent policies and rules laid down in the government financial regulations and the DPP (Defence Procurement Procedure 2020). All such manufacturers will also be free to export their products making India a net exporter of defence products. The requirement to drastically reduce imports has long been felt but it needed a strong political dispensation and the will to carry it out. The road ahead is not going to be smooth but this single significant step taken by the government to wean itself away from imports in this crucial domain needs to be applauded. That it was in the making since 2016 is known. However, it appears to have been pushed through now because of the combination of a slackening economy, the deleterious effect of Covid-19 and, above all, by China’s transgressions in Eastern Ladakh. How this will play out remains to be seen.

Lt. Gen. Gautam Moorthy (Retd) is a former member of the Armed Forces Tribunal and a former director-general of ordnance services

Gautam Moorthy



August 9, 2020, will go down as a red-letter day in India’s history. While the world and India, too, remained largely immobilised owing to the ubiquitous Chinese virus, the defence minister, Rajnath Singh, announced what is arguably the most historic reform ever undertaken by India’s ministry of defence (MoD). It put out a list of 101 major war fighting equipment, platforms and systems whose imports are to be progressively terminated from December 2020 to December 2025. There is supposedly yet another “negative import” list due. This left observers hard put to count the systems/platforms left out for future import.

A quick glance at the list indicates that 69 systems/platforms have the cut-off date of December 2020, 11 with December 2021, four with December 2022, eight with December 2023, eight with December 2024 and one with December 2025. A cursory look at the timelines would indicate to the astute observer that these have been drawn up keeping in mind the indigenised content already incorporated into the system.

With this announcement closing the tap on imports, India’s ranking as the second largest defence importer in the world next only to Saudi Arabia will certainly drop much to the relief of its government and citizens. Besides saving precious foreign exchange, it will also indicate to the world that India is no longer punching below its weight.

While all this is music to the ears of most Indians as it would boost manufacturing, employment and trade, thereby giving a fillip to the economy, how this would be operationalised is the question that needs to be addressed.

There is a lot of apprehension that has been expressed in the media. Some commentators have stated that this is nothing but new wine in old bottles being as it is a reiteration of the Defence Procurement Procedure 2016 (DPP-2016). However, if one examines that document in some detail, it is seen that this is simply not the case, but a logical conclusion of that policy four years down the line.

In the foreword prefacing that document, the then defence minis-

ter, late Manohar Parrikar, very presciently forecasted this conclusion. He had written, “Hence, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is determined to treat DPP 2016 as a dynamic and an evolving document and is committed to making improvements based on emerging data and anecdotal evidence, to realise the vision of ‘Make in India’ in the defence sector.” It is evident that this import embargo list is neither a reiteration of that policy nor something completely new, but simply a consequence consistent with that policy.

The other apprehension is that India’s military-industrial complex has not matured enough to be standing on its own feet and delivering the goods. This too is fallacious as a number of platforms/systems that are now being manufactured in India is a testimony to the level of expertise achieved. This has taken place either through tie-ups with firms abroad (the strategic partnership model) or through the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) route.

Going forward, how this embargo would be operationalised is the question rightly asked. First,

India’s defence industry complex, tightly controlled by the government, represented by 41 ordnance factories and nine defence PSUs have now to compete with the private sector and can no longer bank on the Armed Forces to bail them out with orders whose pricing in many cases is exorbitant.

Second, within the private sector, there is a humongous scope for medium and small scale industries to rise to the occasion by ramping up capacities and building up a huge defence industry base to cater for ancillaries, sub-systems and components that would be required if India is going solo and not relying on government imports.

This leads us to the third important factor, which is that the private sector and the corporatised Ordnance Factory Board along with the defence PSUs are free to sign MoUs with original equipment manufacturers abroad to also import critical ancillaries, sub-systems and components for manufacture within India with transfer of technology and with proportionate offsets. This single significant step frees the government from getting involved in complex negotiations

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,877.34	-1.13
Nifty 50	11,178.40	-1.08
S&P 500*	3,372.85	-0.02
Dollar (₹)	74.90	-0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.87	0.00
Euro (₹)	88.43	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,691.730	1.35
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.80	0.00
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.965	0.070
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.709	0.00

* As of Friday/Saturday

Zimbabwe annual inflation soars to 837%

Annual inflation in Zimbabwe accelerated to 837.53 per cent in July, the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency said on Saturday in a Twitter post. The year-on-year rate for June was 737.3 per cent. The monthly rate was 35.53 per cent, up from 31.7 per cent in June. The southern African nation is struggling with food and fuel shortages and a local currency that has imploded since being re-introduced last year after a decade-long hiatus.

Chandra: Steel demand to dip significantly



Steel demand is expected to decline significantly in 2020-21. Most of the steel producing regions are expected to witness a decline in crude steel output due to production cuts amidst ongoing lockdowns. The global economic growth is expected to see a contraction of over 3 per cent in 2020, Tata Steel chairman N. Chandrababu Naidu said in Tata Steel's annual report, terming the slump as the "worst contraction" since the 1930s.

Strict safety rules for construction machinery soon

To ensure greater safety on highways, the government has proposed stricter norms that include features like machine-mounted audible travel alarms, non-metallic fuel tank and wider operator visibility for construction equipment machinery. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has come out with a draft notification for construction equipment vehicles that addresses issues of safety requirements.

Peak power demand declines further to 5.65%

The slump in peak power demand has widened to 5.65 per cent in the first fortnight of August from a 2.61 per cent drop recorded in July, by the power ministry data. Peak power demand met was at 167.49 GW in the first half of Aug., down by 5.65 per cent from 177.52 GW recorded in Aug. last year. Peak power demand met was recorded at 170.54 GW in July this year, down 2.61 per cent from 175.12 GW a year ago.



MFs change tack, take to value investing Funds book profit on top performers

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, AUG. 16

Profit booking in stocks that had given high return from March 2020 lows and value investing in the large-caps and mid-caps where the upside potential is still intact were evident in mutual funds top picks and sell in July 2020. Thus, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys and Mindtree became the top picks while Reliance Industries, HDFC, Maruti Suzuki and Mahindra & Mahindra were top sell based on their stock market performance.

Primary market offerings also attracted mutual funds' interest as they bought shares of Rossari Biotech and Yes Bank.

Mutual funds' top 10 buys in value terms in July, as per data compiled by Prime Database, included TCS, PI Industries, Infosys, ICICI Bank, Balkrishna Industries, Rossari Biotech, Yes Bank, Dr Reddy's Laboratories, ACC and Nestle India.

Page Industries, Mindtree, UPL, Petronet LNG, Cipla, Ashok Leyland, Indiamart, Intermesh, Voltas, State Bank of India and Ultratech Cement were the other top picks of the mutual funds in value terms, according to Prime Database.

Top companies where mutual funds sold shares in value terms in July included RIL, HDFC, Bajaj Finance, Eicher Motors, Axis Bank, Vedanta, Avenue Supermarts, Bajaj



Auto, Vodafone Idea, Hindalco Industries and Power Grid Corporation of India.

Mutual funds also reduced stake in Titan Company, Biocon, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra, Airtel, HDFC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, TCS, Axis Bank and ITC.

FPIs invest ₹28,200 cr in Aug.

New Delhi, Aug 16: Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) remained net investors in Indian markets in the first half of August, pumping in Rs 28,203 crore in debt and equities on a net basis.

Also, FPIs turned net investors in the debt segment in August after a gap of five months.

Experts attributed the inflows to better-than-expected corporate earnings and global liquidity.

Depositories data showed that a net sum of Rs 26,147 crore was invested in equities and Rs 2,056 crore in the debt segment by FPIs during

Syngene International and IndusInd Bank.

The combined top holdings of the mutual funds at the close of July in terms of market value were HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, Infosys, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, HDFC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, TCS, Axis Bank and ITC.

August 3-14.

In the debt segment, overseas investors turned net investors after a gap of five months. Before this, FPIs had invested Rs 4,734 crore in February.

Himanshu Srivastava, associate director-manager research, Morningstar India, said, "A combination of global and domestic factors has resulted in huge net inflows from FPIs in Indian equities."

Harsh Jain, the co-founder & COO of Groww, said the inflows are in correlation to the fall of treasury returns in the US.

—PTI

Media catches MPC mood ahead of meet: RBI study



Mumbai, Aug 16: Media often captures the sentiments correctly ahead of monetary policy announcements by the central bank, says a study by the Reserve Bank of India officials.

Many media organisations, based on experts' analysis and movement of key macroeconomic variables in the immediate past, project policy action ahead of the actual monetary policy announcement by the central bank.

"It is found that (media) sentiment concentration was directionally in sync with the policy rate decision except on few occasions," said the article on 'Policy rate expectations in media,' written by Geetha Giddi and Shweta Kumari of RBI's Big Data Analytics Division, Department of Statistics and Information Management.

"Media disseminates, explains and interprets news to the general public, and also conveys concerns, perceptions and opinions of various economic agents to the policy makers," it added.

—PTI

Cruising industry sees no gains from govt measures

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 16

In a decision intended to provide relief to the industry during the pandemic, the Ministry of Shipping has rationalised the tariff rates of cruise ships for a limited period of one year. However, experts say a limited period offer will do no good to the industry, which will take a year to operate normally.

According to the ministry, the rate relaxation would be an immediate reduction in port charges ranging from 60 to 70 per cent. This includes port charges of \$0.085 per gross registered tonnage (GRT) instead of the current rate of \$0.35 for the first 12 hours stay and \$5 per passenger. The ports will not charge other rates like berth hire, port dues, pilotage and passenger fee.

For the period exceeding 12 hours stay, the fixed charges on cruise ships will be equal to the berth hire charges payable as per the Schedule of Rates, with 40 per cent discount as applicable for cruise ships. Further, rebates will be given based on calls cruise ships make—those making 1-50 calls per year will get 10 per cent rebate, 51-100 calls per year 20 per cent rebate and those above 100 calls per year will get 30 per cent rebate.

The new tariff rates are applicable from August 14 and will be in place till the same day next year. The ministry believes



this will give "substantial relief to the cruise industry in India, in line with the government policy to support the economy in the pandemic situation". However, no cruise liners are operating during the pandemic and are not expected to operate normally till it subsides.

"The revival of the tourism industry itself will take one year. Chances are very low that people will travel in cruise liners till the pandemic fears have completely vanished. So this one-year offer will have no impact on the industry. The government should have given these concessions for a five-year period," said Iqbal Mulla, chief council, Global Tourism Council.

"This is an unfeasible scheme and will serve no purpose," he added.

According to Ratna Chadha, co-founder and chairperson of Tirun

Travel Marketing, the tariff rates will be applicable to only domestic cruise ships, which are expected to start operations in November. "International cruises are not going to come to Indian ports soon," she said. However, she too is not sure when the industry will start functioning normally.

"This is a nascent industry and if the industry has to develop, it needs government push. We have been asking the government for incentives. At the moment, we are taking what the government is giving and we will show that we can flourish. We hope that the government will extend the rebate scheme beyond one year," she said.

Mulla finds that the rebate-system based on performance is discriminating as the targets seem unachievable in the current situation.

It could be shortest recession: Birla

FC BUREAU
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, AUG. 16

Hindalco Industries chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla has said the widely expected recession in 2020 will be the one of the shortest if the pandemic doesn't create a second wave. "Terming the pandemic-induced troubles as a once in-a-century crisis for the society and the economy, Birla, in a letter, cautioned shareholders that this year will see an economic contraction. This 2020 recession is turning out to be very different from the past recessions, he said.

"It has been too sudden almost off the cliff; its spread has been all-encompassing affecting almost every economy and sector, and the plunge in economic activity levels and employment has been unprecedented," Birla said.

On the positive side, this recession is likely to be one of the shortest, assuming no second wave of the pandemic recurs. As present lockdowns around the world get lifted, and businesses reopen, economic activity is likely to bounce back fairly quickly, he said.



Kumar Mangalam Birla

"Around \$9-trillion stimulus from different governments globally will help to support this recovery, along with the monetary actions by central banks. These policies will also help to restrict the second-order effects like defaults and bankruptcies," Birla said.

Some scars of the crisis will remain in the form of subdued consumer and business confidence. Some sectors, like airlines and hospitality, will take time to recover fully. And some supply chain disruption effects will linger.

As the world emerges from the current crisis, the next few years are likely to be marked by lack of buoyancy in growth, subdued commodity prices and inflation,

a cautious trend in project investments, heightened risks of de-globalisation and political uncertainty; and increased dependence of financial systems on ultra-loose monetary policy conditions, Birla said.

He mentioned that Covid-19 struck India at a time when the underlying economic conditions were subdued on account of heightened global uncertainty and stress in the domestic financial system.

"It is estimated that about 80 per cent of India's GDP originates from districts which were classified under red and orange zones during the lockdown, where economic activity remained severely constrained. Correspondingly, India's GDP is likely to contract in FY21, which would be the first such instance in over four decades," Birla said in the letter.

Given the fog of uncertainty all around, it is hard to be prescient in these times, Birla said. "But there is little doubt on one reality: companies with quality leadership, sound business fundamentals, and a track record of winning in turbulent times, will emerge as champions in the new global order," he said.

PSBs may manage without additional capital infusion

New Delhi, Aug 16: The government may not have to inject fresh capital into the public sector banks (PSBs) as the one-time loan restructuring permitted by the RBI has reduced their additional fund requirement.

Also, the poor credit off-take on account of the pandemic may obliterate the need for significant growth capital during the current fiscal, sources said.

There may not be a sudden surge in non-performing assets (NPAs) after the six-month moratorium comes to an end this month, as it is followed by one-time loan restructuring, the sources said, adding, provisioning requirement is also low for the debt recast accounts.

Moreover, most of the public sector banks have taken approval in advance for raising tier-I and tier-II capital in the current fiscal depending on the need.

Despite all these, if at all there is a need for regulatory capital requirement by some public sector banks towards the end of the fiscal, the government will provide that, the sources said.

In 2019-20, the government infused Rs 70,000



crore into PSBs to boost credit for giving a strong impetus to the economy.

However, the government refrained from committing any capital in the Budget 2020-21 for the PSBs, hoping that the lenders will raise funds from the market depending on the need.

After the second quarter numbers are out, the government may do a performance appraisal and assess the capital position of the public sector banks.

According to a senior official of a public sector bank, loan restructuring will act as balm for the economy stressed from the Covid-19 crisis.

Many borrowers are under stress because their businesses are running at 50 per cent capacity, impacting their cash flow, which compromised their capacity to service debt.

Banks, under a board-approved loan restructuring programme, can save such accounts from turning bad by extending the repayment period, reducing the interest rates or offering an extension of the moratorium to avoid an immediate shock.

Still some of the accounts would turn NPAs, especially those which were under stress even before the outbreak of the pandemic, and banks are gearing up for meeting that challenge, the bank official said.

According to rating agency Fitch, "Raising capital remains challenging in the current environment. However, the new policy will reduce transparency over asset quality, which could further hinder some paths for capital-raising."

—PTI

UAE, ISRAEL FIRMS SIGN FIRST DEAL

FARAH ELBAHRAWY
AUG. 16

The UAE-based Apex National Investment agreed to conduct research on the coronavirus with Israel's TeraGroup in what could be the first cross-border deal after the two countries began normalising relations.

TeraGroup is "the first business to inaugurate trade, economy and effective partnerships between the Emirati and Israeli business sectors," Apex National Investment Chairman Khalifa Yousef Khourai said in a statement on the state-run Emirates News Agency on Sunday. The deal was described as a "strategic commercial agreement." —Bloomberg

Super tiny stocks outdo Wall St. megacaps

AMENA SAAD
AUG. 16

Tech behemoths have been Wall Street's obsession all year. But the tiniest of stocks have surreptitiously been making a comeback—in a big way.

The Russell Microcap Index, whose members have a value of \$300 million on average, is up more than 60 per cent from this year's stock-market lows, outperforming both the tech-heavy Nasdaq 100 and the S&P 500. The tiny-stock gauge is having its best month relative to the US equity benchmark since September 2017.

"The good-looking big boys and girls have been touted as the only game in town this year. These large, domestic, safe, easily rec-

ognized, fast-growing, and sexy stocks have been the ticket," wrote Jim Paulsen, chief investment strategist at the Leuthold Group. "But, like the S&P 500 this year, the really tiny—those Mighty Microcaps—have shown their FAANGs!" he said, referring to the popular Facebook, Amazon, com, Apple, Netflix and Google-parent Alphabet.

It's a demonstration of the market weirdness this year, with the most beaten-down stocks recovering toward pre-pandemic levels even as unemployment remains around 10 per cent and signs mount the recovery is slowing. Unprecedented support from the government and central bank has given a lifeline to small companies. At the same time, retail investors



have rushed in, chasing momentum names without always scrutinising their balance sheets.

Tiny companies, which often swing at a higher velocity during times of turbulence than their larger brethren, were among the most punished during the coronavirus crash. They tend to be more indebted and have less cash on hand. But many ana-

lysts see potential for them to outperform once a recovery begins.

That's because their profits are often depressed in a recession and the companies have more room to improve during a rebound, said Michael Sheldon, executive director and chief investment officer at RDM Financial Group Inc.

But the performance in micro-caps is remarkable given that more than half of the members didn't make any profit in the latest quarter. More intriguingly, unprofitable ones have seen their shares outperforming, rising an average 13 per cent this year. That's triple the 4 per cent gain from those that made money.

Data from website Robintrack.net suggested

retail investors have been part of the forces behind some of the parabolic gains.

Vaxart Inc has soared 2,500 per cent this year as it was selected to take part in the Trump administration's Operation Warp Speed, meant to crank up development of a Covid vaccine. The price explosion coincided with a surge in ownership on brokerage platform Robinhood. From fewer than 2,000 owners in January, the number of shareholders on Robinhood has jumped to near 90,000 this summer.

"If the Micros truly can keep up with the Bigs, investors should consider diversifying some of their S&P 500 allocation," said Leuthold's Paulsen.

—Bloomberg

M&M unveils new Thar, launch in Oct.

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, AUG 16

Mahindra & Mahindra, India's biggest utility vehicle maker, has unveiled the all-new Thar, the much anticipated off-road tough SUV to boost sales in Asia's third biggest economy.

The Mumbai-based automaker will launch this new capable vehicle for sale on October 2 when the price would also be revealed. Experts estimate it to be tagged at Rs 10 lakh-Rs 15 lakh.

It will face competition from the new Force Gurkha, which is also expected to arrive in the coming months.

"Thar is an icon," Ramkripa Ananthan, chief designer of automotive business at M&M, said proudly.

"There were many aspects that were intrinsic to its character. We retained them and at the same time, we also addressed some of the customer requirements," he said.

Of course, the classic proportions of the Thar had to be changed. Mahindra increased the track to 1,820 mm to liberate more space inside the cabin. The company has also unsized the tyres, and now Thar sits on R18 tyres. Thar's wheelbase was increased for easier ingress and egress.

Thar, which was first launched in India back in 2010 promises more comfort and convenience, apart from its par excellence driving capabilities.

Given their shared heritage, the Thar resembles the Jeep Wrangler and its overall proportions are similar.



SHORT TAKES

Former cricketer
Chetan no more

New Delhi: One of Indian cricket's most well-known batsmen without an international hundred, former opener Chetan Chauhan died on Sunday due to Covid-19 related complications after being put on life support for nearly 36 hours.

Chauhan, who was 73, was serving as the Minister of Sainik Welfare, Home Guards, and Civil Security in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet. He is survived by his wife and son Vinayak.

"My elder brother Shri Chetan Chauhan has left us today after fighting a good battle. I sincerely thank everyone who had prayed for his recovery. His son Vinayak will be reaching anytime and we will then perform last rites," his younger brother Pushpendra said.

Chauhan, who was the legendary Sunil Gavaskar's longest serving opening partner, was admitted to Sanjay Gandhi PGI in Lucknow on July 12 after being testing positive for Covid-19. Due to kidney related ailments, his health deteriorated and he was shifted to Medanta hospital in Gurugram.

— PTI

Lyon roar past
crumbling City

Lisbon: Moussa Dembele broke his Champions League drought in timely fashion in Lisbon on Saturday after Maxwel Cornet again proved a thorn in Manchester City's side with his fourth goal in three games against the Premier League heavyweights.

Quite remarkably, no player has struck more often versus Pep Guardiola's City since the start of the 2018-19 season than the Ivory Coast international, with only Tottenham forward Son Heung-Min breaching their defence as many times.

Converted into a wing-back this season by Lyon coach Rudi Garcia on the left of a 3-5-2 formation, Cornet has adjusted seamlessly to the new role after spending most of his time at the club as a right-sided attacker.

While Cornet's magnificent first-time finish gave Lyon the lead against City on 24 minutes, it wasn't until the introduction of top scorer Dembele that the French side administered the knockout blow to one of the competition's favourites for the title. — AFP

Hamilton claims
Spain Grand Prix

Barcelona: Lewis Hamilton claimed his 88th Formula One career victory and, with it, an outright record 156th podium finish on Sunday when he drove his Mercedes to a masterful victory in the Spanish Grand Prix. It was the world championship leader and six-time champion's fifth win in Spain and his fourth in consecutive years, extending his record run of finishes in the points to 39.

Hamilton came home 24 seconds ahead of nearest title race rival Max Verstappen of Red Bull who finished 20 seconds ahead of Valtteri Bottas in the second Mercedes.

Hamilton had shared a record 155 podium finishes with Michael Schumacher whose other records for championships and wins are in the Briton's sights this year. His victory increased his lead in the drivers' title race to 37 points ahead of Verstappen. Sergio Perez was fourth ahead of his teammate Lance Stroll and Carlos Sainz of McLaren. — AFP

STAGE SET FOR
NBA PLAY OFFS
IN ORLANDO

Miami: An NBA season unlike any other shifts into high gear on Monday with the start of the playoffs in the league's quarantine bubble in Orlando, Florida.

Antetokounmpo's Bucks arrived at the bubble virtually assured of the top seed in the Eastern Conference and own the best record in the league as they head into a first-round meeting with the Orlando Magic. — AFP

NBA Playoffs: Boston Celtics vs Philadelphia 76ers from 4 am (Tuesday) on Sony Six; Los Angeles Clippers vs Dallas Mavericks from 6.30 am (Tuesday) on Sony Six.

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20
Printed and Published by
K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Plot No. 9 Alwai Village, Vallabh Nagar Taluk, Medchal Malkajgiri Dist. Telangana and Published at 36, S.D. Road, Secunderabad-3.
RNI Registration No. 3081/1957.
Editor: Aditya Sinha

THERE IS ONLY ONE 7

Fans, teammates want BCCI to retire Dhoni's jersey number

New Delhi, Aug. 16: Players and fans Sunday urged India's cricket board to retire Mahendra Singh Dhoni's number seven jersey in a tribute to the two-time World Cup winning captain.

Dhoni, 39, called time on his 16-year-old international career Saturday with a cryptic message on his *Instagram* post that read "From 19.29hrs consider me as retired".

The Board of Control for Cricket in India confirmed the news in a statement, saying: "The boy from Ranchi, who made his One-Day International debut in the year 2004, changed the face of Indian cricket with his calm demeanour, sharp understanding of the game and astute leadership qualities."

Dhoni's legions of fans including 7.8 million *Twitter* followers and former teammate Dinesh Karthik said they did not want to see 7 on the back of any other Indian cricketer's jersey.

"I hope the @bcci retire the #7 jersey in white ball cricket Good luck with your second innings in life, I'm sure you'll have a lot of surprises for us there too," Karthik, a wicketkeeper-batsman, tweeted.

Former batsman Mohammad Kaif agreed, writing on *Twitter*: "Can't imagine any one else wearing a Number 7 India jersey again."

There is no provision to retire jerseys in cricket, unlike in football.

But the BCCI unofficially retired batting great Sachin Tendulkar's number 10 shirt a few years after his retirement.

Dhoni, a flamboyant wicketkeeper-batsman who led India to win the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in 2007 and lifted the 50-over showpiece event in 2011, was born on July 7.

He is a self-confessed fan of Portuguese football megastar Cristiano Ronaldo, who also wears a famous number seven jersey.

"@BCCI should retire 'Jersey Number 7' as a Tribute to Legend MS Dhoni," a fan wrote on *Twitter*.

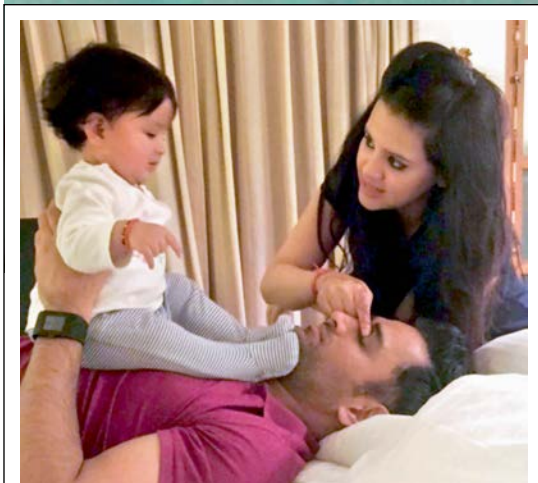
Dhoni, dubbed 'Captain Cool' because of his unflappable style, will continue to lead his team Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League starting in the United Arab Emirates next month.

The Indian women's team's ODI captain Mithali Raj also congratulated him.

"The man who immortalised jersey no.7, whose sharp mind and a cool head earned him the tag of #CaptionCool, the man who fulfilled billion indian dreams by two World Cup trophies and who bid adieu in his inimitable style. Congratulations #MS Dhoni on an outstanding career," she tweeted. — PTI



Former Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni in this file photo.



Former Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni spends some quality time with his daughter Ziva and wife Sakshi in this file photo.

Proud of you,
says Sakshi

New Delhi, Aug. 16: For someone who has the reputation of keeping his emotions in check, Mahendra Singh Dhoni must have held his tears back when he decided to quit international cricket, felt his wife Sakshi while lauding the legend's phenomenal accomplishments.

Sakshi, in a social media post which she shared both on *Instagram* and *Twitter* along with a picture of the former India skipper, congratulated Dhoni on his career.

"You should be proud of what you have achieved. Congratulations on giving your best to the game. I am proud of

your accomplishments and the person you are!" wrote Sakshi.

"I am sure you must have held those tears to say goodbye to your passion. Wishing you health, happiness and wonderful things ahead!" she posted.

Called 'Captain Cool' for his calm demeanour and exceptional leadership qualities, Dhoni has etched his name as one of world cricket's great.

Sakshi ended her post with American poet Maya Angelou's quote, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." — PTI

WARNE WANTS
MAHI TO PLAY
THE HUNDRED

Melbourne, Aug. 16: Retirement from international cricket done, Australian spin legend Shane Warne now wants Mahendra Singh Dhoni to get on with the game and consider being part of his team London Spirit in next year's The Hundred tournament.

Two-time World Cup-winning former India captain Dhoni retired on Saturday, putting endless speculation about his future to rest.

Spinner Warne said he should give serious consideration The Hundred now.

"I just wonder if I could get him down to the London Spirit next year for The Hundred. I might put out a call to see if he wants to play at Lord's. I'll find the money, MS!" Warne told *Skysports*.

The Hundred' is a 100-balls-per-side tournament of the England and Wales Cricket Board which was scheduled to be launched in June this year but had to be postponed to next year due to the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic. — PTI



Former Indian cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni (left) poses for a photograph with Indian wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik after their 2019 World Cup semifinal loss against New Zealand.

DHONI THE WORDSMITH

God helps those who help themselves. I said God is not coming to save us.

— JOKED LATER ABOUT THE DRESSING ROOM TALK BEFORE THAT TOUGH CHASE AGAINST SRI LANKA IN 2011 WC FINAL, WHICH HE FINISHED WITH A SIX.

— ON HANDING JOGINDER SHARMA THE LAST OVER IN 2007 T20 WC FINAL

You die, you die. You don't see which is the better way to die.

— AFTER HAVING BAD AWAY SERIES' AGAINST ENGLAND AND AUSTRALIA

Actually...Virat used a knife. He stabbed Shikhar, who just recovered out of that then we pushed him to bat. These are all stories...maybe Warner Bros or somebody should pick up this and make a nice a movie out of it.

— ON THE CONTROVERSEY REVOLVING AROUND VIRAT KOHLI AND SHIKHAR DHAWAN

Words fall short a lot of times in life and I think this is one of those moments. All I can say is that you will always be that guy who sat in the last seat of the bus. We have shared a great camaraderie, friendship, understanding because we have always played for the same roles, same goals, which was to make the team win. I have said it before, I will say it again, you will always be my captain.

— VIRAT KOHLI

One of the most influential man in the history of Indian cricket. His impact in and around cricket was massive. Will surely miss him in blue but we have him in yellow. See you on 19th (Sept.) at the toss.

— ROHIT SHARMA

In any list of cricket's greatest, not greats but the greatest, you have to include this man. This man is second to none. And coming from where he did he changed cricket for all times to come. And his beauty is he did it in all formats. I salute you Lieutenant Colonel M. S. Dhoni.

— RAVI SHASTRI

Congrats @msdhoni on a brilliant international career. I loved and enjoyed every contest we had as players and now I still have to find ways to stop you winning games against the @DelhiCapitals. Look forward to saying it in person in a few weeks time.

— RICKY PONTING

Welcome to the retirement club, MSD! What a magical career!

— KEVIN PIETERSEN

Congrats @msdhoni on a fantastic career, he is one of the coolest guys I've played against on the park.

— DAVID WARNER

Dhoni's retirement style sets a precedence

Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

In many ways August 15th, India's Independence Day, may have heralded a new nomenclature to the 'eras of cricket' in the new normal of today. The words BC and AD can now be known as 'Before Coronavirus' and 'After Dhoni' in Indian cricket's parlance.

"Thanks a lot for ur love and support throughout. From 19.29 hrs consider me as Retired." With these words on his *Instagram* handle, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (MS) walked into the sunset of international

cricket. It was not a lengthy post swooning with words but a simple statement of saying it was all over from international cricket for the man from Ranchi. One who had taken the job of a ticket checker in the Indian Railways which would enable him to play cricket at a national level. And play cricket he did, with aplomb and a style never seen before.

Just the way he had announced his retirement from Test cricket, through a press release, mid-series while in Australia, MSD's

'announcement' on an important day turned out to be without fanfare, a trait he is known for. He played his cricket with a certain proclivity based on hunches inclining towards unpredictability, never seen before in the history of the game in India. No wonder, his boss and former president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India called him an 'instinctive cricketer.'

An incident recounted to me by former Bombay (Mumbai) skipper Milind Rege in 2009 will put MS's psyche in perspective. Rege was in charge of the Brabourne Stadium, the venue of India's third and final Test against Sri Lanka. A few days before the match, Rege asked MS if he would like to take a look at the pitch which was being prepared.

"You can give us whatever pitch you want, it's fine by me. We will play on it," was his polite reply as he continued practicing with the team. India ended up winning the Test by an innings and 24 runs taking the team to the top of the International Cricket Council (ICC) Test rankings.

MS's penchant for doing things his way made him unique from others, as a player and captain. Whether it was honouring a senior colleague — inviting former skipper Sourav Ganguly to lead the team in the field for the final time against Australia in 2008 — or not picking up VVS Laxman's call in 2012 regarding VVS's retirement, the acts had the MS stamp all over them. When Zaheer Khan's hamstring gave way during the

2011 Lord's Test match, MS pulled off his gloves to drive home the point that Khan wasn't match fit when the match began.

That MS would retire was a given considering the ICC Twenty20 (T20) world Cup was moved ahead a month ago. Though he never made a statement, his desire to wear the number 7 jersey for India must have been his last wish before he called it a day. Many believe that his body wasn't that of the MS they knew while playing the shortest and most testing formats of the game and he should have called it quits after India's loss to New Zealand in the 2019 ICC World Cup.

Continuing or retiring from the game is a personal decision taken by the

player himself even whatever the writing on the wall may be.

If Sunil Gavaskar was post-partition India's first cricketing superstar, MS can well be called the country's first cricket rockstar. From sporting long locks during his early days to wearing a military logo on his gloves during the ICC World Cup, 2019, he loved making statements. While Gavaskar created symphonies that would have made Beethoven proud, MS took fans through the purple haze of a Jimi Hendrix experience, signing each gig with a unique stamp.

The colour yellow will now replace the blue as MS embarks to play his 13th season of the Indian Premier League (IPL). This would have been one where he would give his all

to try and make the team for the ICCT20 World Cup which now stands postponed.

Pushing 40, MS's energies will be now be directed towards pleasing his (and his IPL team's) fans. One is bound to see a refreshed MS leading his band of faithfuls with a complete sense of freedom.

After leading his country to three ICC championships (including two World Cup wins) and the number one spot in ICC Test rankings, there's not much MS would have wanted to prove as a player and captain. His retirement will, thankfully, end the debate concerning his future and may start another one. The future of Indian cricket (short-format games) in AD — 'After Dhoni.'