

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 31 JULY 2020

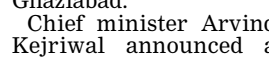
**TABLOID | 11**

Helping needy: Anushka, Virat have given an undisclosed amount to 3 organisation

Vol. 27 No. 165 | 16 PAGES | ₹5.00

MOONRISE TOMORROW 4.36 PM
MOONSET TODAY 2.15 AM

mony, was also seen standing next to the men. — *Agencies*



■ **More on Page 2**

An ambulance carries the mortal remains of West Bengal Pradesh Congress president Somen Mitra during his funeral procession in Kolkata on Thursday. Mitra passed away at a private hospital in the early hours of Thursday. He was 78. Hospital sources said Mitra passed away around 1.30 am after suffering a cardiac arrest. He had tested negative for novel coronavirus. The West Bengal Congress chief will be remembered as a key strategist, who, however, was unable to prevent a split in his party, which resulted in the creation of the TMC and the fall of the Congress as a political power in Bengal. **Report on Page 4**

There is little evidence to support Mr Trump's claims but he has long

“Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has also passed on to the CPWD and the Directorate of Estates, a full inventory of privately installed fittings, fixtures etc.,” it said. — *PTI*

IN BRIEF

4 arrested for duping people with fake loans

New Delhi: Four men were arrested for allegedly duping people on the pretext of providing cheap loans, police said on Thursday. The accused were identified as Kuldeep Mishra (23), a resident of Rama Vihar, Rajan Tiwari (23), a resident of Sultanpuri, Manish (24), a resident of Kirari's Suleman Nagar, and Vinod Paswan (40), a resident of Sarai Rohilla, they said. The police received a complaint on July 21. The complainant, Harsh, who had a private job and was pursuing his BCA, alleged that he received a call on July 13 regarding an interest-free loan to be given by a finance company from its Lajpat Nagar branch, a senior police officer said. The complainant also received a loan application form on WhatsApp, the police said. "After all necessary communications, they demanded money as commission and several taxes for clearing the loan of Rs seven lakh. The complainant transferred around ₹1.5 lakh. After receiving the money, the accused switched off their mobile phones," DCP (north-west) Vijayanta Arya said.

Woman jumps off building in Noida

New Delhi: A 62-year-old woman died on Thursday after she allegedly jumped off from her apartment on 19th floor in Uttar Pradesh's Noida. The police said she was suffering from depression for the past few months. The woman lived with her husband and a daughter in a residential society in Sector 78, where the incident took place early in the morning, an official said. "The woman was suffering from depression for the past few months and that appears to have triggered her extreme step. Her husband and daughter were asleep when she jumped off from the balcony of their flat," an official from the local police station said. The family hails from Kanpur district, the police said, adding that the body has been sent for post mortem and further proceedings are underway. Last month, in two separate incidents, a 28-year-old woman in Greater Noida had jumped off from her flat on the 16th floor while a 44-year-old in the area had hanged herself. Both the women were suffering from mental health issues, the police had said.

3 held for robbing man at gunpoint

New Delhi: Three men were arrested on Thursday for allegedly looting cash and jewellery worth lakhs from a house in Dayalpur area while holding the owner and his 63-year-old mother hostage at gunpoint, police said. With the arrest of Md Chand (30), a resident of Nehru Vihar and his accomplices — Javed (31) and Salim (19), both residents of Loni in Ghaziabad, police claimed to have recovered ₹3.77 lakhs of looted cash, silver coins and a mobile phone purchased from the robbed money. Chand knew the victim's family well and was aware of the cash and jewellery kept in his house. He had taken a loan of more than ₹10 lakh and was being constantly being pressurised by the lenders to pay back, they said.

Fake call centre busted, 4 arrested

New Delhi: Four people were arrested on Thursday for allegedly running a fake call centre in Ashok Nagar and duping people seeking jobs or loans amid the Covid pandemic, police said here. Soumya Ranjan Samal (26), Sonu Singh (24), Saurabh Kumar Gupta (31) and Kuresh (28) ran the fake call centre from a residential colony here and targeted people across the country on the pretext of providing lucrative jobs and loans with no guarantee or minimum interest, they added. The police said a probe was initiated after they received several complaints, including one from a Bhubaneswar-based man, Rohan Mohanty, who alleged that he was duped on the pretext of a job opportunity at a reputed bank. DCP (West) Deepak Purohit said a raid was conducted on the fake call centre situated in Ashok Nagar from where four people were nabbed and several mobile phones, registers, bank account passbooks, cheque books, debit cards, and laptop computers were seized.

Diesel gets cheaper in city by over ₹8/litre

SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, JULY 30

Diesel price in the national capital was on Thursday slashed by ₹8.36 per litre after the AAP government rolled back the value-added tax (VAT) hike that had made the fuel uncompetitive in comparison to adjoining cities of Gurgaon, Noida and Ghaziabad. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced a reduction in VAT on diesel from 30 per cent to 16.75 per cent, saying the move will help the city's economy recover from the impact of coronavirus pandemic.

The reduction in the VAT rate, which would be effective from midnight, will help bring down the price of diesel to ₹73.64 per litre. The Delhi government had on May 5 hiked VAT on petrol to 30 per cent from 27 per cent and on diesel from 16.75 per cent to 30 per cent.

The move was aimed at increasing Delhi's revenue, which had dipped by 90 per cent in April because of the Covid-19-induced nationwide lockdown restrictions, which were enforced from March 25.

With the reduction in



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VAT, the diesel prices in Delhi have come down significantly now as compared to other states. While a litre of diesel will cost ₹73.64 per litre in the national capital, it costs ₹82.64 per litre in Rajasthan; ₹81.29 per litre in MP; ₹79.81 in Maharashtra; ₹79.68 in Chhattisgarh; and ₹79.05 in Gujarat.

The May 5 VAT hike had translated into steepest ever price increase of Rs 7.10 per litre in diesel in Delhi. Rates of petrol also went up by ₹1.67 a litre.

The subsequent increase in the base price of diesel because of a surge in international rates led to an increase in the incidence of VAT as the tax is levied on an ad valorem basis.

The VAT hike made diesel costlier than it was being sold in adjoining cities — Gurgaon, Noida and Ghaziabad, putting local industries using the fuel at a cost disadvantage.

In comparison to pre-VAT reduction price of ₹81.94 per litre in Delhi, diesel was priced at ₹73.83 per litre in Noida, ₹73.68 in Ghaziabad and ₹73.98 in Gurgaon.

While Mr Kejriwal announced a cut of VAT on diesel, no reduction on petrol was announced. Petrol in Delhi costs ₹80.43 per litre while in adjoining Noida it comes for ₹81.08 and in Ghaziabad for ₹80.95 and is priced at ₹78.64 per litre in Gurgaon.

The May 5 hike in VAT

rates would have led to ₹900 crore additional revenue for the state government in a year. "Delhi Cabinet has decided to reduce VAT on diesel from 30 per cent to 16.75 per cent. This will reduce the price of diesel in Delhi from ₹82 to ₹73.64 i.e. by ₹8.36 per litre," Mr Kejriwal said.

Domestic petrol and diesel prices are determined broadly by crude oil and forex rates and vary from state to state due to VAT.

In the past few weeks, diesel prices have risen on 30 occasions, while petrol rates have risen 21 times. Oil companies began the daily revision of the two auto fuels from June 7 after keeping the price unchanged for 82 days during Coronavirus induced lockdown. Before the start of a daily price surge, petrol was being sold at ₹71.26 per litre in Delhi and diesel at ₹69.39 a litre on June 6.

Though Brent crude futures — the global benchmark for oil rates — have recovered from a 21-year low of \$15.98 per barrel registered in April, they are still down 33 per cent so far this year.

20-yr-old kidnaps toddler cousin for quick buck, 2 held

Noida, July 30: A 20-year-old man was arrested on Thursday for planning the kidnapping of his two-year-old cousin, who has been safely recovered, in Noida, police said.

Two friends of the main accused were also involved in the planning and one of them has been arrested while search is on for the other man, the police said.

On Tuesday, Sandeep Yadav, a resident of Sarfabad village in Sector 73, informed police around 12.30 pm that his toddler son was playing outside the house but went missing after 9 am. "Later he got a call from kidnappers who demanded some money in exchange of the child and threatened to kill the toddler otherwise."

An FIR was immediately lodged at the local Sector 49 police station and a probe launched," additional CP (Crime) Shriparna Ganguly said.

"The police immediately got cracking on the case and within an hour got an input that the child has been found abandoned in a park near Sector 51 metro station. The child was recovered

safely," Ms Ganguly said, adding that Crime Branch and SWAT teams were working on the case.

Further police investigation, however, revealed that the kidnapping was planned by Piyush Yadav (20), the toddler's cousin. He had roped in two of his friends for the job and helped them pick the child up from outside the house on Tuesday morning.

"The police were initially wondering if the kidnapping was done by a gang but you would be shocked to know that it was the cousin of the victim who had plotted this crime. The plan was made randomly by them when they were thinking of ways to make quick and easy money," Ms Ganguly told reporters.

During interrogation, Piyush told the police that he had taken the child outside their home on the pretext of playing on Tuesday morning. Soon his partners-in-crime arrived on a motorcycle and he handed over the child to them. Piyush returned home and informed the family that the child had gone missing. — PTI

Galwan soldiers to be honoured at War Memorial

New Delhi, July 30: The names of 20 Indian Army personnel, who were killed after valiantly fighting Chinese troops in Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh on June 15, will be inscribed on the National War Memorial here, officials said on Thursday. They said the process for inscribing the names of the Army personnel on the memorial may take a few months.

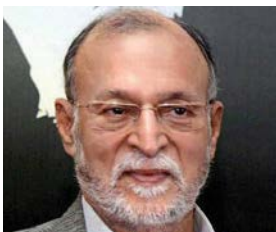
Chinese and Indian troops clashed in Galwan Valley for several hours on the night of June 15 in their deadliest brawl in the last five decades.

Colonel B. Santosh Babu, the commanding officer of the 16 Bihar regiment, was among the Indian Army personnel killed in the clash. The incident significantly escalated the border tension in eastern Ladakh with India calling it "a premeditated and planned action by China." The Chinese soldiers used stones, nail-studded sticks, iron rods and clubs in carrying out brutal attacks on Indian soldiers after they protested the erection of a surveillance post by China. — PTI

City riots: L-G overturns govt decision on lawyers' panel

New Delhi, July 30: Lieutenant governor Anil Baijal has overturned the Aam Aadmi Party government's decision rejecting the Delhi Police's panel of lawyers for arguing the cases related to the February riots in the city in the Supreme Court and the high court, an official statement said on Thursday.

The government said according to the Constitution, it is bound



Anil Baijal

to implement the L-G's order. Mr Baijal has directed

the home department to grant approval to the Delhi Police's proposed panel of lawyers, the statement said.

The L-G's office, however, did not react to the statement.

The Delhi cabinet, at a meeting chaired by chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday, rejected the panel of lawyers proposed by the city police, saying it would not help a "free-and-fair" trial of

the cases related to the northeast Delhi riots.

The government said Baijal has rejected the cabinet decision by exercising his special power under Article 239AA(4) of the Constitution.

The cabinet observed on Tuesday that there should not be any punishment or harassment of innocent people but the criminals should be punished severely. The cabinet had rejected the L-G's

suggestion to approve the Delhi Police's panel of lawyers.

It had observed that the courts have raised serious questions on the fairness of the investigation carried out by the Delhi Police in the riots cases. It had also observed that in such a situation, a free-and-fair trial of these cases would not be possible by a panel of lawyers selected by the city police itself. — PTI

Apologies says North DMC to AAP MLAs

New Delhi, July 30: A day after sending defamation notice, the North DMC, on Thursday, demanded apology from the AAP Mayor (North Delhi) Jai Prakash said that AAP leaders must apologise for allegations levelled against the corporation and its councillors.

Mr Jai Prakash, standing committee chairman Chhail Bihari Goswami, and Leader of House Yogesh Verma, in a press conference, said that AAP MLA Raghav Chadha and Atishi Marlena must apologise for the allegations they have made against the municipal corporation of Delhi and its councillors.



Children jump on a trampoline at a dumping site in a residential neighbourhood in New Delhi on Thursday. — AFP

City BJP to install big screens for live telecast of Ram temple puja

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 30

The Delhi BJP will install giant LED screens across the city for people to watch groundbreaking ceremony for a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya on August 5, and will celebrate the occasion by lighting diyas, party leader Adesh Kumar Gupta said Thursday.

The Delhi BJP president said Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be present during the 'Bhumi Pujan' ceremony in Ayodhya and it will be a "historic" occasion.

"The occasion will be remembered by the generations to come and it's our duty to make this historic moment a glorious one," Mr Gupta said in a statement.

Delhi BJP leaders and workers will join people in each of the 70 Assembly constituencies to watch the live broadcast of the 'Bhumi Pujan' on giant LED screens, he said. In the evening, party leaders will light earthen 'diyas' at their houses and also encourage their neighbours to do so to celebrate the

► DELHI BJP leaders and workers will join people in each of the 70 Assembly constituencies to watch the live broadcast of the 'Bhumi Pujan' on giant LED screens

occasion, he said.

The Delhi BJP will celebrate the day as a festival and ensure participation of a large number of people in it, the party's general secretary Rajesh Bhatia said.

"The dream of a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya is going to materialise after 500 years, on August 5. We are preparing to celebrate the day with the people of Delhi as Diwali," he said.

Prime Minister Modi had in February announced in Lok Sabha the formation of a trust to construct Ram temple in Ayodhya, following the Supreme Court verdict in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case in November last year.

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust has invited the prime minister to lay the foundation stone

for a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Meanwhile, lord Ram's images, 3D portraits of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be beamed across the giant billboards in the iconic Times Square to celebrate the groundbreaking ceremony of Ram Mandir on August 5.

Prominent community leader and president of the American India Public Affairs Committee Jagdish Sewhani said that arrangements are being made to celebrate the historic moment in New York on August 5, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to lay the foundation stone for construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Mr Sewhani also said that among the prominent billboards that are being leased for the occasion are the giant Nasdaq screen and the 17,000-square-foot wrap-around LED display screen, considered among the largest continuous exterior displays in the world and the highest-resolution exterior LED screen in Times Square.

Gambhir to support daughters of sex workers financially

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 30

East Delhi BJP MP Gautam Gambhir, on Thursday, announced a campaign, "Pankh," to take care of 25 girl children of sex workers of G.B. Road in the national capital. Under the initiative, Mr Gambhir has decided to adopt 25 children of sex workers of the city. He will bear their fees, health, and other miscellaneous expenses.

The Gautam Gambhir Foundation (GGF) of the cricketer-turned-politician is also taking care of 200 children of those brave-hearts who made supreme sacrifice for the country.

"Everybody in society has the right to live a decent life and I want to ensure more opportunities for these children so that they can live their dreams. I will take care of their living, education, and their health," said Mr Gambhir. Currently 10 girls have been selected for the programme. "We have selected 10 girls

who are studying in various government schools this session. We will sponsor their school fees, uniform, and food and provide medical help including counselling so that they can achieve their dreams," Mr Gambhir added.

The GGF also faces difficulties as several girls or kids are not sharing details due to the apprehension of intrusion in their lives. "In the next academic session, we will be reaching out to more children as my target is to bring at least 25 children under this programme. We aim to empower adolescent girls (5-18 years) by giving them regular counselling so that they do not drop out but complete their education," said the East Delhi MP.

Mr Gambhir also appealed to affluent people to come forward and help sponsor children based on their respective capacities. "Today is my Naani jee's (maternal grandmother) birthday. With her blessings I want to start this project for her and dedicate it to her," he said.

Man falls from building, gets stuck on grill

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 30

The Delhi police saved the life of a 40-year-old man who accidentally fell from the fourth floor of his house and got stuck after an iron grill pierced through his ankle in South Delhi's Malviya Nagar area.

The victim has been identified as Kishan Kumar, a resident of Malviya Nagar area.

According to a senior police official, on July 29, a police control room (PCR) call regarding the incident was received, following which a team was dispatched to the spot.

"Kishan was found in an upside-down position with his right ankle stuck in the iron grill and piercing his ankle. The police team brought a welder at once and with the help of an iron cutter the grill was cut. The injured was shifted to Batra Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment and is now feeling well," said the senior police official.

SHORT TAKES

Technician held for taking vaginal swab

Mumbai: In an incident that sent shockwaves across the state, the police arrested a lab technician in Maharashtra's Amravati district after he took swab samples from a woman's private parts. State woman and child development minister Yashomati Thakur has promised strict action against the accused. The police have slapped a rape case against him. The incident took place on Tuesday when the 20 to 25 staff members of a local mall, including the 24-year-old victim visited a local testing centre for Covid-19 test after one of their colleagues was tested positive.

However, after taking the nasal swabs of all staffers, technician Alpesh Deshmukh convinced the victim to also give swab sample from her private parts. The accused convinced the victim that vaginal swab was necessary for the Covid test. Later the victim realised that she has been cheated and she filed the police complaint.

Widows send rakhis to 'brother' Modi

Mathura, UP: Widows living in Vrindavan, who would miss meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi this Raksha Bandhan due to COVID-19 outbreak, have dispatched 501 hand-made rakhis and as many face masks to him, said an NGO on Thursday. The special rakhis are having images of the prime minister on them while the masks have been themed on the temple city of Vrindavan with messages like Stay Safe and Aatmnirbhar written on them. Till last year, some widows had been visiting the PM's residence in Delhi to tie rakhi on his wrist but this year they will not be meeting him due to the Covid-19 pandemic, NGO Sulabh Hope Foundation, which is supporting these women, said here in a statement. — PTI

Ollywood actor accused of abuse

Bhubaneswar: A female new artists has accused Ollywood and TV serial actor Pintu Nanda of abusing and misbehaving with her at a movie shooting set in Odisha capital. The girl has lodged a police complaint in this regard here at the Nayapali police station here. The complainant alleged that she was taken to the shooting set located at Annapurna Mandap, Nayapalli here by a junior artist supplier who promised her of providing a role in the film. The girl, a resident of Cuttack district in her complaint alleged that the Ollywood actor and his associates abused and misbehaved with her. He and his two friends also touched me inappropriately. They also threatened her of dire consequences if she revealed the matter to anyone.

Mining scam: ED to attach assets of Gayatri Prajapati

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JULY 30

More trouble seems to be in store for senior Samajwadi party leader and former Uttar Pradesh mining minister Gayatri Prajapati, as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is preparing to initiate the process to attach properties, worth several crores, linked to him and other accused (including IAS officers) in connection with its money laundering probe into the alleged illegal sand mining in Deoria and Fatehpur districts in the state. Sources said the agency has prepared a list of assets, linked to the accused, which will be attached under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). These properties are located in several parts of the country, they added. The agency last year registered a case of money laundering against Prajapati, then principal secretary Jiresh Nandan, special secretary Santosh Kumar, then district magistrates Abhay Kumar Singh and Vivek and unknown others. The ED had registered a criminal case on the basis of a CBI FIR registered in this connection. The ED has already questioned Prajapati. The CBI had also searched premises of Bulandshahr district magistrate Abhay Kumar Singh and former Deoria district magistrate Vivek, among others.



Congress leader and former Union minister Saifuddin Soz climbs up the wall of his house to speak to a media person in Srinagar on Thursday. — PTI

Soz: Will sue Centre for 'unlawful house arrest'

'Not a free man': Cong neta says he's under house arrest

Srinagar, July 30: Senior Congress leader and former Union minister Saifuddin Soz on Thursday said he would sue the government for his "unlawful house arrest" since August 5 last year, when the Centre revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, and termed the government's response in the Supreme Court that he was not under detention as "falsehood".

"I take a strong exception to the government stand before the Supreme Court that I had neither been put under house arrest nor had any restrictions been imposed on me since August 5, 2019," Mr Soz said in a statement here. He said the government has resorted to "falsehood as it had unlawfully incarcerated me since August 5, 2019".

"All this while, I was not allowed to move out of my premises. I left my premises twice, when I had to visit my ailing sister and I went to Delhi on 17th September, 2019 to 21st September, 2019 and 15th December, 2019 to 21st

I take a strong exception to the government stand before the Supreme Court that I had neither been put under house arrest nor had any restrictions been imposed on me since August 5, 2019

— Saifuddin Soz, Congress leader

December, 2019 for seeking medical advice. Whenever I went out of my premises since August 5, 2019, I had to obtain permission from the government," he said.

The former Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) president added that he has decided to sue the government for his "unlawful" house arrest.

"I have decided to sue the government for my unlawful house arrest since August 5, 2019. I will further sue the government for compensation for the incarceration and illegal suspension of civil lib-

Jammu to get wi-fi & vertical gardens

Jammu: Wi-Fi hotspots, vertical gardens and wayfinding signages will soon come up in Jammu as part of the measures to make it a smart city. J&K L-G G.C. Murmu has laid the e-foundation of four projects under Jammu smart city mission. "In the first phase, there will be a smart vertical garden from below the flyover from Dogra Chowk to KC Chowk at a project cost of ₹4.5 crore and junction improvement in 10 significant rotaries and crossings in Jammu at a project cost of ₹16.25 crore," an official said. — PTI

erties to which I am entitled under the Constitution," he said.

In an affidavit before the Supreme Court, the Jammu and Kashmir administration had said Soz was "never detained nor under house arrest" and there are "no restrictions on his movement subject to security clearance". — PTI



Villagers on a raft made of banana trees move to a safer place from the flooded area of Baksa district's Goalbil, Assam, on Thursday. — PTI

CBI books 4 Navy men for siphoning off over ₹6.5 crore

New Delhi, July 30: The CBI carried out searches at 28 locations across four states after registering a case against four Navy officers for allegedly siphoning off ₹6.76 crore by generating fake bills for purported supply of IT hardware to the Western Naval Command, officials said on Thursday.

The searches in Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Karnataka continued till Wednesday midnight and resulted in the recovery of ₹10 lakh cash, they said.

Captain Atul Kulkarni, Commanders Mandar Godbole and R.P. Sharma, and Petty Officer LOG (F&A) Kuldeep Singh Baghel allegedly prepared seven fraudulent bills of ₹6.76 crore, they said.

"All these accused naval officers abused their official position to defraud the naval authorities and rob the exchequer of public money which led to pecuniary gain to themselves," according to the CBI FIR.

The bills were allegedly raised between January and March in 2016 at the Western Naval Command in Mumbai for supplying information technology and networking related hardware.

"None of the items men-

► **SEARCHES IN** In Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat and Karnataka continued till Wednesday midnight and resulted in the recovery of ₹10 lakh cash

tioned in the bills were supplied to HQ, WNC (Western Naval Command). No documents pertaining to preparation of the bills i.e. approvals, financial sanction, purchase orders, receipt vouchers, etc. are available at HQ," the CBI FIR said.

The Navy had introduced a Financial Information System (FIS) in 2012 for budget monitoring and ensuring authenticity of the bills submitted. All bills bear a unique FIS number.

The bills of any work executed by the naval authorities are first entered on the FIS, thus generating a FIS number.

FIS user id is the personal number allotted to an officer and cannot be accessed by any other staff. The fraudulent bills were prepared by FIS user IDs of Godbole and Sharma, showing their active connivance in the offence, the FIR alleged.

The agency has alleged that Kulkarni was the supervising officer of the unit where the bills were generated, they said. — PTI

New chapter in Mauritius ties: PM inaugurates SC building

'No riders for cooperation,' says Modi in jibe at China

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, JULY 30

In a veiled barb at China, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday told his counterpart in the Indian Ocean nation of Mauritius that India's development cooperation "does not come with any conditions" and is "not influenced by political or commercial considerations". He added that India also "respects" its partner nations. The Prime Minister was addressing a virtual event of the inauguration of a new Supreme Court building at Port Louis through video link. The building has been built with Indian financial grant assistance.



Narendra Modi

The new building in Port Louis is a symbol of our cooperation and shared values, Mr Modi said.

PM Modi also referred to the lessons of History that "in the name of development partnerships, nations were forced into dependence partnerships" which "gave rise to colonial and imperial rule" and "global power blocks".

Observers point out that India's approach is being seen in contrast to that of China whose infrastructure projects in smaller countries have reportedly

led to these nations accumulating large debts owed to Beijing.

The new Supreme Court building in Mauritius is the "first India-assisted infrastructure project within the capital city of Port Louis to be inaugurated after the Covid pandemic" and this "landmark project has been completed with grant assistance of \$28.12 million from the Government of India," New Delhi meanwhile said in a statement.

Speaking on the occasion, he said, "For India, the most fundamental principle in development cooperation is respecting our partners. This sharing of development lessons is our only motivation. That is why our development cooperation does not come with any conditions. It is not influenced by political or commercial considerations."

LAC row: REC arm cancels contract to Chinese firm

New Delhi, July 30: State-owned REC Power Distribution Corp Ltd (RECPDCL) on Thursday said it removed a Chinese firm from the smart meter project in Jammu and Kashmir soon after the government order on sourcing of equipment from 'prior reference' nations.

RECPDCL, an arm of Rural Electrification Corp (REC), had in September 2019 awarded a project for installation of 1.155 lakh smart meters in Jammu & Kashmir to Techno Electric & Engineering Co Ltd.

In a statement, RECPDCL said the project was awarded to an Indian com-

pany, Techno Electric & Engineering Co Ltd. The company engaged subcontractors for different components of the project.

After the power ministry issued an order mandating prior permission of the government for any import of equipment from 'prior reference' countries or nations with which India shares borders, to check for possible cyber-attacks through malware/trojans, the company reviewed all new/ongoing contracts.

"After this order was issued, all new/ongoing contracts are being reviewed and as part of that review one of the

sub-contractors of the (J&K) project, which though a company registered in India and having manufacturing facilities in India, was found to be a subsidiary of a Chinese company.

"The said sub-contractor was directed to be removed from the project since the continuation of the sub-contractor would have led to the requirements of taking prior permission and testing of every equipment supplied thus leading to unacceptable delays in execution," it said. The principal contractor has informed RECPDCL that they have removed that sub-contractor, the statement said. — PTI

'Centre not obliged to pay for GST shortfall'

States may have to borrow from market to meet shortfall in revenue

New Delhi, July 30: The attorney-general has opined that the Centre has no statutory obligation to make up from its coffers any shortfall in GST revenues of states, which may now have to look at market borrowings against future revenue mop-up, sources said.

The Centre had in March sought views from attorney-general K.K. Venugopal on the legality of market borrowing to make good the shortfall in compensation fund — a corpus created from levy of additional tax on luxury and sin goods to compensate states for revenue shortfall arising from

their taxes being subsumed into the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

Sources said the AG in his view has said there is no obligation on the central government to pay the GST compensation shortfall from its coffers.

The AG has also said the GST Council has to decide on making good the shortfall in the GST compensation fund by providing the sufficient amount to be credited to it.

Sources said the options before the Council for meeting the shortfall could be to rationalise GST rates, cover more items under the compensation cess or increase the



K.K. Venugopal

► **SOURCES SAID** the options before the Council for meeting the shortfall could be to rationalise GST rates, cover more items under the compensation cess or increase the cess, or recommend higher borrowing by states

cess, or recommend higher borrowing by states to be repaid by the future collections into the compensation fund.

Since raising tax or cess rates might not be feasible in the current pandemic situation, the option that remains would be each state borrowing from the market against the consolidated fund of the state to

meet the shortfall in revenue.

Under GST law, states were guaranteed to be compensated bi-monthly for any loss of revenue in the first five years of the GST implementation from July 1, 2017. The shortfall is calculated assuming a 14 per cent annual growth in GST collections by states over the base year of

2015-16. Under the GST structure, taxes are levied under 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent slabs. On top of the highest tax slab, a cess is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods and the proceeds from the same are used to compensate states for any revenue loss.

During the eighth meeting of the Council held in January 2017, the then finance minister of Karnataka had said "the understanding should be that if the amount for compensation was inadequate in the GST compensation fund, then cess could be collected in the sixth year or subsequent year to adjust the payment." — PTI

PM's Ayodhya visit: UP areas close to Nepal border on alert

Maharajganj (UP), July 30: Uttar Pradesh police and Sashastra Seema Bal have been put on high alert in the districts bordering Nepal ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Ayodhya, Independence Day and the coming festival season, a senior official has said.

The forces have stepped up vigil along the border in Maharajganj, Siddharthnagar, Shravasti and Bahraich, additional DG of Gorakhpur zone Dawa Sherpa said.

They have been asked to ascertain the identity of people before allowing them through the open and porous border, he said. The ADG referred to "some intelligence inputs" but did not elaborate.

Prime Minister Modi is to visit Ayodhya on August 5 for the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the Ram temple.

"Cameras have been put on SSB posts besides the main roads. The dog squad and one platoon of women wing have also been deployed. Metal detectors have been installed at Sonauli and Tutibari outposts on Indo-Nepal border (in Maharajganj)," Mr Sherpa said. — PTI



A devotee pays respects to a mural depicting paintings of Hindu deities in Ayodhya on Thursday. — PTI

Odisha sends water from Lord Lingaraj's Bindu Sagar to Ayodhya

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, JULY 30

Several Bhubaneswar-based Hindu organisations, including Maa Jageswari Yuba Sangathan, Odisha Swabhimana Bharat Raksha Manch on Thursday sent a container of water from Lord Lingaraj's holy Bindu Sagar tank near the Lingaraj Temple of the old city to Ayodhya for the Bhoomi Pujan Ceremony to be held on

August 5.

"Devout Hindus from all over the country have been sending soil and holy water from religious shrines to Ayodhya since the last two weeks. Holy water from the Char Dhams, Sangam, Kurukshetra and other places has reached Ayodhya and will be used in the Bhoomi Pujan ceremony. More than 10,000 different urns have already been received, and many more are on their way.

MP woman sets herself on fire to save crop in field

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, JULY 30

A woman in a Madhya Pradesh village set her on fire in protest against the anti-encroachment drive being carried out in her farmland by the local administration.

A video showing the woman, identified as Shabra Bi (45), suddenly turning her into a ball of fire after pouring kerosene on her while protesting against the anti-encroachment drive, has gone viral in social media.

The incident occurred on Tuesday, but it came to light on Thursday when former chief minister Kamal Nath tweeted the video demanding a probe into it.

The woman, a resident of Atwas village under Satwas police station in Dewas district, received 20 percent burns following the incident. She has been admitted to a hospital in Indore. Her condi-

tion was stated to be stable. Her husband Ramzan Khan alleged that the authorities had started destroying the soybean crop in their farm field paying no heed to their pleading not to damage their crop. "I do not know from where Shabra brought kerosene to immolate her. She poured kerosene and lit her by the time we could take notice of it," he said.

However, Dewas district SP Shivdayal Singh said Shabra Bi and ten others attacked the team of police and revenue officials leading to injuries to two revenue inspectors. "There was a complaint that Shabra Bi and her family had encroached upon government land. The revenue court had settled the issue last week and the revenue team had gone there to free the land of encroachment when Shabra Bi and ten others attacked them", he said.

SHORT TAKES

Doc who doubted Shivraj's medical bulletin arrested

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, JULY 30

A doctor who questioned the veracity of medical reports of Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan who has been admitted to a dedicated Covid-19 hospital here after he tested positive for coronavirus last week, was on Thursday arrested here on charges of attempting to tainting the latter's image. Crime branch of MP police arrested Rajan Singh from a hospital here. The accused was admitted to a private hospital here after he complained of chest pain. The crime branch team arrested him soon after he was discharged from the hospital. According to the police, he had earlier questioned the medical bulletin released by the hospital where Mr Chouhan has been admitted, demanding a probe into it. A video in which he was heard making the allegation has gone viral in social media prompting the police to take action against him. He has been booked under relevant sections of the IPC.

Jaya Jaitley & 2 others get 4-year jail for corruption

Continued from Page 1

procuring letter of evaluation for the product of his company from the ministry of defence and also to arrange a meeting between him and accused Jaya Jaitley who would provide political cover to them in this regard."

"It was agreed that Samuel would pay ₹1 lakh each to Surekha and Murgai and ₹2 lakh to Jaitley," the court noted.

"Thus there had been an agreement between them to obtain the evaluation letter for the concerned product by illegal means, i.e. by resort to corruption and personal influence upon the concerned officials," it said, adding, "Accordingly, Pachherwal arranged the said meeting for December 28, 2000. He too was present in the said meeting in the room of Jaitley along with Surekha, Samuel and Murgai."

The court further said, "In that meeting, which took place in the official residence of the then Union minister for defence, George Fernandes, Samuel was introduced to Jaitley as a businessman whose company intends to enter the market of defence procurement. Samuel offered the sum of ₹2 lakh to Jaitley who instructed him to hand over the money to Pachherwal and accordingly, the money was received by accused Pachherwal knowing that it was bribe money. In lieu thereof, Jaitley assured Samuel that in case the product of his company is not considered, she would intervene by making a request to 'Sahib' (purportedly the defence minister, George Fernandes) to send a word to the concerned officer in this regard."

'Increase in 'horse trading rates after session announced'

Continued from Page 1

Mr Joshi, however, did not clarify whether the MLAs will continue to remain at the same hotel.

"It will be decided where to stay," he told the media, but ruled out any location outside the state.

Sachin Pilot and 18 rebel MLAs, meanwhile, are reportedly debating asking for protection to return to Jaipur to attend the Assembly session.

One of the rebel MLAs, asked whether they would attend the session by a TV channel, reportedly said, "Of course, we will attend."

The Congress has a total of 107 MLAs in the 200-member Assembly, but the numbers are precarious since Mr Pilot and 18 other dissident MLAs openly defied a party whip leading to their disqualification by the party which was subsequently challenged in the high court.

Mr Gehlot and his sacked deputy, Mr Pilot, have been locked in a power tussle in the state with the latter at one point claiming that 30 Congress MLAs were with him.

However, Mr Gehlot claims that with the support of Independents and allies he has the majority support in the House. The Congress numbers include six BSP MLAs who merged as a group with the ruling party after the 2018 Assembly polls.



An employee disinfects a store at a mall in Mumbai on Thursday. Malls and market complexes will reopen on August 5 in Maharashtra. — RAJESH JADHAV

Ailing Cong chief suffered cardiac arrest at Kolkata hospital

Master organiser who failed to stop spilt in Bengal Cong dies

Kolkata, July 30: West Bengal Congress chief Somen Mitra, who died on Thursday, will go down in history as a leader who could make friends with rivals with the consummate ease of a political craftsman but failed to prevent a debilitating split in the party and presided over its gradual decline.

The split sowed the seeds for the formation of the Trinamul (grassroots) Congress led by a fiery Mamata Banerjee who, in the years that followed, decimated both the mighty Left and the Congress.

A known bte noire of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, it was during Mitra's second term as Congress president in the late 1990s that his party lost the status of the principal opposition to the then seemingly invincible Left Front to the TMC.

Mitra passed away at a city hospital in the early hours of Thursday aged 78. He was in the hospital for 17 days due to heart and kidney problems. He died following a cardiac arrest, hospital sources said.

Born on December 31, 1941, in Jessore district of the erstwhile East Bengal (now Bangladesh), Mitra was the eldest of five siblings.

A stalwart in West Bengal politics, Mitra cut his teeth in politics during



Somen Mitra

EXCEPT FOR 1977, Mitra continued to win the Sealdah assembly segment, which has now ceased to exist after delimitation, for six consecutive terms from 1982 to 2006

A STALWART in West Bengal politics, Somen Mitra cut his teeth in politics during the tumultuous 1960s as a student leader.

the tumultuous 1960s as a student leader.

After his baptism in politics as a student leader in 1967, when Bengal had its first non-Congress government, Mitra, through his organisational and oratorical skills, quickly rose through the ranks and became one of the most popular leaders of the party along with late union minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi.

Mentored by Congress stalwarts like A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Mitra's first brush with electoral politics happened in 1972 when he became the youngest MLA in the West Bengal Assembly from the Sealdah seat at the age of 26.

Except for 1977, Mitra continued to win the Sealdah assembly segment, which has now ceased to exist after delimitation, for six consecutive terms from 1982 to 2006.

Addressed as "Chhorada" (younger brother) by his supporters, Mitra was one of the most firebrand politicians in the 1960s and 1970s, and

had played a crucial role in the fight against the Naxals in Kolkata during that period.

It was during that time that Mamata Banerjee, then the West Bengal Youth Congress president, was fast emerging as the rallying point against the Left Front dispensation.

Mitra and Ms Banerjee got locked in an internecine feud. The relations between the two hit rock bottom when Banerjee pitted herself against Mitra for the post of state Congress president.

Mitra managed to win the party election by 22 votes amid acrimonious scenes at Maharashtra Niwas in south Kolkata.

It was alleged that Mitra, backed by the then Congress national president Sitaram Kesari, cornered Ms Banerjee in the party. Banerjee broke away and launched the Trinamul Congress in 1998.

He left the Congress in 2008 to form his political outfit Pragatisheel (Progressive) Indira Congress. — PTI

Leaders across political lines condole death

Kolkata, July 30: Leaders across party lines condole the death of Somen Mitra describing him as a grassroots politician with deft organisational capacity.

Veteran CPI(M) leader Biman Bose recalled his personal equations with Mitra and said his death was a blow to "the secular and democratic forces in the state who are trying to forge a united fight against the BJP and Trinamul Congress".

Mr Bose recalled how Mitra rose above partisan politics and kept personal equations with him and leaders of other parties.

BJP state president Dilip Ghosh said it was a great loss for Bengal politics.

"Somen da's death means the end of an era. We might have differences in political ideology. But over and above this he was a people's leader who had a long chequered political innings," he said.

Trinamul Subrata Mukherjee said Mitra was instrumental in his baptism into politics as a student leader in early 70s and he (Mukherjee) and late Congress leader Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi got immense support from Mitra as they worked for the party in 70s. — PTI

Legislators will stay united, says chief whip

'Raj Cong MLAs to camp together till House meets'

Jaipur, July 30: Congress MLAs huddled in a hotel here for the last fortnight will continue to camp together till the Rajasthan Assembly meets on August 14, a party leader said Thursday.

This was discussed at the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting held at the Fairmont hotel on the outskirts of the city, where MLAs loyal to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot are staying since the July 13.

"All legislators will remain united and stay together till August 14," Congress chief whip Mahesh Joshi said after the CLP meeting chaired by Gehlot.

After rebuffing a Cabinet proposal three times, Governor Kalraj Mishra on Wednesday agreed to convene a session of the Vidhan Sabha on August 14.

Mr Gehlot and his now sacked deputy Sachin Pilot are locked in a tussle for power in the state.

Altogether, there are 107 Congress MLAs in the 200-member assembly, but Sachin Pilot and 18 other dissident MLAs have openly defied a party whip.

At one point, Pilot claimed that 30 Congress MLAs were with him. But the Gehlot camp claims that with the support of independents and allies it has the majority support



Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot speaks during a Vidhayak Dal meeting, organised under the Save Democracy-Save Constitution protest against the BJP-led Central government, at a hotel in Jaipur on Thursday. — PTI

Modi's 'wrong' policies proved 'disastrous' for country: Raj CM

Jaipur, July 30: Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday hit out at the Centre over its "wrong" policies, alleging that they have proved "disastrous" for the nation.

He shared on Twitter a post by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi attacking the Narendra Modi government over issues like

demonetisation and GST. "PM Modi's wrong policies have proved disastrous for the nation. As Rahul Gandhi ji pointed out, be it note ban, GST implementation, mismanagement during corona or sinking economy and as a result job loss, there is overall gloom. Fear of 10 crore job losses is shocking," he tweeted. — PTI

in the House. The Congress numbers include six BSP MLAs who merged as a group with the ruling party after the 2018 Assembly polls.

The merger is now being challenged in the high court by the BSP and a

BJP MLA. The BJP has 72 MLAs in the House.

While saying that the loyalist MLAs will stay together till the session begins, Mahesh Joshi did not clarify whether they will continue at the same hotel. — PTI

'Never overlooked crime, corruption, communalism'

NAYEAR AZAD
PATNA, JULY 30

Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday said that his government tried to establish "rule of law" in the state and never compromised on three "Cs" – crime, corruption and communalism.

He gave the statement while inaugurating 124 police buildings in Bihar through video conference. "My government never compromised on crime, corruption and communalism. The scenario earlier was completely different. There used to be massacres in the state before 2005 but the scenario has changed now," Mr Kumar said.

His statement has come at a time when the Opposition, especially the RJD, has been targeting Mr Kumar on various issues, including the Covid-19 crisis, floods and deteriorating law and order scenario in the



Nitish Kumar

state. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and the congress has also been hinting at using these issues as their

main agenda during the assembly elections scheduled to be held in October-November this year.

"Our police has played a crucial role in establishing the rule of law in Bihar. There has been a zero-tolerance on crime and communalism and our police have worked hard in maintaining peace in the state," the chief said.

During the event, Mr Kumar said that his government worked hard for the development of the state in the last fourteen years. He also used the occasion to appreciate the medical fraternity and the police for their efforts to control the coronavirus crisis in the state.

Ramp up Covid tests, MHA tells Nitish govt

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, JULY 30

Following feedback from the inter-ministerial team that visited Bihar in wake of sharp increase of corona cases, home ministry has advised the state government to go in for major increase in testing. Ministry officials said state government had assured ramping up testing to nearly 20,000 in the next couple of days even as testing kits and other assistance is being provided by Centre to Bihar.

Bihar has seen an unprecedented increase in Corona cases over the past more than 10 days due to which home ministry had sent a high level team from different agencies a few days ago to assist the state government to help deal with the crisis.

Ministry sources said the committee has suggested "aggressive testing, tracing and containment strategy" should be followed by the Bihar government.

Following these suggestion from the committee and the home ministry, Bihar government will now ramp up testing starting with 20,000 tests on daily basis within the next few days.

The Centre has already extended all possible assistance to the State administration sending testing kits, medical equipments, additional para-military and medical staff to the States.

"We are working closely with the Bihar government," a senior ministry official said.

Security agencies admit ex-militants still running pvt militia Bodoland arms haul raises worries

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, JULY 30

The presence of a large number of illegal weapons with former militants in Western Assam's Bodoland Territorial Council has become a major area of concern for security agencies which have succeeded in recovering some weapons while admitting that former militants are still running a private militia and may turn out to be a serious threat to law and order of the area.

Though, ministry of home affairs had made a major breakthrough by

forcing all the factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) signing a peace accord that led to ceremonial surrender of arms before Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal in January this year.

The separatist groups which announced the end of armed struggle however deposited only 178 weapons, raising the eyebrows of security agencies which feared that a large number of sophisticated weapons were withheld by these rebel groups.

It is significant that all together 1615 cadres which included 836 of the

NDFB-Progressive, 579 of the NDFB-Ranjan Daimary faction and 200 of the NDFB(S) led by B. Saoraigwra had laid down arms.

Pointing out that all the four factions claimed to have deposited 4,800 weapons, security sources said that on scrutiny of the arms, it was found that only 178 weapons that NDFB cadres used were surrendered and remaining arms were junk and unused old weapons.

Security forces recovered one HK-33 rifle, an M-16 rifle, an AK-47 rifle and 27 rounds of live cartridges on July 19 from

Ghaghra Part II in Udalguri district.

The police had also recovered a HK-33 Rifle with ammunition from No 4 Moinaguri under Bijni Police Station in Chirang district on Sunday evening. Earlier a day before on Saturday in two separate operations, the police recovered arms and ammunition from Kokrajhar and Baksa districts. Two AK-47 rifles, 2 9MM pistols and ammunition were recovered from Goreswar Police Station area and one AK-47 and ammunition from Simla Police Station area in the district.

NEP evokes mixed reactions from academicians

New Delhi, July 30: The new National Education Policy (NEP) has evoked mixed responses from academicians and experts as many of them referred to the reforms as "long due" and "groundbreaking", while others cautioned that "the devil lies in the details" and hoped the moves get translated into action on the ground.

Teaching up to class five in mother tongue or regional language, lowering the stakes of board exams, allowing foreign universities to set up campuses in India, a single regulator for higher education institutions except for law and medical colleges and common

entrance tests for universities are part of the sweeping reforms in the new National Education Policy (NEP) unveiled on Wednesday.

IIT-Delhi director Ramgopal Rao termed the new policy the "Morrill moment" for Higher Education Institutions in India (HEIs). In 1862, the United States had passed the Morrill Act to boost to higher education and set up institutions that would educate people in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other professions that were practical at the time.

"Creation of a National Research Fund with the involvement of all min-

A FEW experts cautioned that the 'devil lies in details' and called for a focused approach in translating the policy into action on the ground

istries will make our research impactful and visible to the society. This is the Morrill moment for HEIs in India," he said.

Former Delhi University vice-chancellor Dinesh Singh, who bore the Centre's ire for the introduction of a four-year undergraduate programme which was later rolled back, said the policy will create room for a healthy and synergistic blend between skill and

knowledge. "Some of the reforms outlined in the policy were long due. It allows a productive mix and match of different disciplines so that learning on discipline can provide ideas and connections with another discipline for a real-world outcome or application," he said.

However, a few experts cautioned that the "devil lies in details" and called for a focused approach in translating the policy into action on the ground.

"The policy has advocated major reforms in education, but as always, the devil lies in the details, and we will see how to get the NEP 2020 translated to action on the ground, true

to the spirit of the reforms envisaged to empower the students in the country, to discover and fully develop their unique potentials," said Rupamanjari Ghosh, vice-chancellor of Shiv Nadar University.

Indian National Teachers' Congress convenor Pankaj Garg said that allowing foreign universities to operate in India on their own norms is permitting foreign direct investment in education. "We believe the government is running away from its responsibility of funding educational institutions. Also, this will result in fees for the students becoming exorbitant." — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

31 JULY 2020

Devil in detail of new education blueprint

On the face of it, there is a lot to cheer about the new education policy. Coming as it is after a long wait of 34 years, it proposes to introduce multidisciplinary to courses, expanding their depth and scope, open the door to vocational training and options for earning livelihood by allowing students to step away from higher education and return when they can and bring much-needed relief to them from the pressures of the perform-or-perish Boards. These are commendable goals. However, read the fine print, and come away sceptical. The policy is a grand vision document indeed, but the devil lies in the detail of implementation. For this, the outlook is not hopeful.

Take the proposal regarding autonomy of institutions. The policy announces all higher education institutions are to become autonomous self-governing entities. But the record of the government in charge of implementing this recommendation repeatedly shows its supporters infiltrating boards and administrative bodies. According to the new policy, there will be a single regulator for higher education, the proposed Higher Education Commission of India, which will replace bodies such as the UGC and AICTE. This new body, as envisaged in the 2018 bill to form it, is to decide accreditation, grant of autonomy and appointment of vice-chancellors to universities, but it will be, in turn, bound by the guidance of an advisory body headed by the education minister. So once the policy is implemented, expect greater centralisation and commercialisation of education via indiscriminate entry of private parties. Next, the policy announces that the government's spends on education will be raised to six per cent of the GDP. As over the past six years of the rule of the Narendra Modi government, this figure has consistently fallen, that inspires little trust.

What was the compelling reason behind steamrolling the blueprint in a pandemic year, bypassing Parliament and not taking into confidence the governments of the UTs and states?

The language policy for primary schools is the elephant in the room. It has been proposed that English as a medium of instruction be dropped in these schools. This is even as the government has set, putatively, multilingualism as one of the cornerstones of its new learning strategy. But consider: What if the regional language where the school is located is different from the student's mother tongue? Will they be then taught in their mother tongue or the regional language? What if the student's mother speaks one language and the father a different language, in the case of children from mixed marriages? What if the parents have transferable jobs? How will they be expected to have a good learning outcome if they keep switching languages? In addition to these practical impediments, consider the fact that in a country as diverse and mobile as India, it is still English, not Hindi, that serves as a universal business language. To rob a child of their prospects of becoming a natural (as distinct from native) English speaker under these circumstances is to professionally and economically disempower them. It is all very well to bring in the study of Sanskrit and foreign languages at all levels, but at what cost? Already, there is opposition to the teaching of Arabic in Kerala from Hindutva elements.

It all points to the fact that this move has the blessings not only of the Cabinet but also the RSS. The government's ideological mentor has stated that 80 per cent of its suggestions were incorporated in the policy; thus, for it, this has been just the start it was looking for in this arena. Or else, what was the compelling reason behind steamrolling the blueprint in a pandemic year, at a time when schools and universities are nonoperational, bypassing Parliament and not taking into confidence the governments of the Union Territories and the states?

'Dangerous' for his views

The arrest and incarceration of Prof. Hany Babu Tharayil of Delhi University in the Bhima Koregaon violence case is yet another instance of how the NDA government at the Centre is using its investigating agencies to harass people who oppose its ideology. Dr Babu, a human rights activist and being vocal about it, is accused of having links with those involved in the violent incidents that took place as part of the Elgar Parishad event organised by the Kabir Kala Manch at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017. According to NIA, Prof. Babu propagated Naxal activities, Maoist ideologies and was being a "co-conspirator" in the case. The agency had arrested two other accused, writer and Dalit thinker Anand Teltumbde and journalist Gautam Navlakha, on April 14.

The case of an event of local violence was being investigated by the Maharashtra police when the Union government took over the case in February this year and handed it over to NIA. It may be recalled that Sharad Pawar, supremo of the Nationalist Congress Party, a partner in the Maharashtra's ruling coalition, had called the takeover "unfair" and said a special investigation team must probe the case.

The draconian provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which have been slapped against the intellectuals, will ensure that they will rot behind the bars as is the case of poet Varavara Rao, who has been jailed in the same case, for a long time. And it will happen at time when BJP leaders such as Kapil Sharma, who openly called for violent attack on people during the riots in Delhi, will roam about freely in the nation's capital with impunity. The message is clear: the ruling dispensation can put behind bars intellectuals opposed to it one after the other and allow the real trouble-makers go scot free. Not a comforting message at all.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Printer & Publisher: K. SUDHAKAR

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Registered as a newspaper at the Post Office in the United Kingdom

Air surcharge for Kathmandu and J&K ₹1

Published and Printed on behalf of and for

Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre,

219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

Mumbai: Dangat Media Pvt Ltd, Plot No 22, Digha MIDC, TTC Industrial Estate Area, Vishnu Nagar, Digha, Navi

Mumbai-400708. Kolkata: Satiyang Employees Cooperative Industrial Society Ltd, 13/A, Prafulla Sarkar Street, Kolkata 700 072. London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94 Postal registration numbers: DL(S)-05/4189-15-17

Sanju Verma



India has got a good start on path to self-reliance

Even as the coronavirus pandemic is bringing global economies to a grinding halt this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, undeterred by the enormity of the challenge, recently unleashed a ₹20.97 lakh crore mega stimulus package, equal to roughly 10.48 per cent of India's GDP. Another ₹90,000 crores is being spent for providing free foodgrain to over 80 crore people, which is more than double the population of the United States. From being an importer in March this year to becoming the world's second largest PPE kit manufacturer, producing over 4.5 lakh kits daily, Aatma Nirbhar Bharat has taken firm roots.

Reduction in corporate tax rate from 30 per cent to 22 per cent and for new companies to 15 per cent, allowing the private sector in commercial coal mining on a revenue sharing basis with no end use restrictions, 100 per cent FDI via the automatic route in defence manufacturing, single brand retail and real estate broking services and privatisation of power distribution companies in Union Territories underpin the essence of Modinomics.

In the first year of his second term,

Narendra Modi's landmark steps have been many — the decision to implement Rs 102 lakh crore worth of infrastructure projects via the national infrastructure pipeline, lowering employees' state insurance act (ESIC) contribution from 6.5 per cent to four per cent, which benefits 3.6 crore employees and 12.85 lakh employees, a monthly pension of Rs 3,000 to over 42 crore small traders and shopkeepers in the unorganised sector after they attain 60 years of age under the PM Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana, passing the Code on Wages Bill 2019, which will benefit over 500 million workers across the country and, of course, the recent historic decision to defang agricultural produce marketing committees and amend the Essential Commodities Act of 1955, to enable farmers to sell their produce to whomsoever they wish to sell to without any inter-state barriers or any price or quantity related restrictions are measures that showcase how good politics and good economics can peacefully co-exist.

More recently, measures like the ₹3 lakh crore of collateral free loans to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), liquidity support of ₹6,750 crore by bringing provi-

dent fund rate down from 12 per cent to 10 per cent, reducing the benchmark repo rate to four per cent, the lowest in 20 years, ₹2 lakh crore concessional credit for farmers and fishermen via Kisan Credit cards, throwing open six new air-ports for privatisation via the public-private partnership (PPP) route, allowing private sector in space exploration and, of course, decriminalising certain offences under the Companies Act have been commendable.

The Bank Nationalisation Act of 1969, a forgettable vestige of outdated Nehruvian socialism, has been a millstone for public sector banks. By merging SBI with its five associates and the Bharatiya Mahila Bank in 2017, Mr Modi created a banking behemoth with an asset size of over ₹41 lakh crores and over 370 million customers. The decision to thereafter consolidate 10 public sector banks into four, allowing the private sector to enter into non-strategic areas and, the decision to privatise power distribution companies in Union Territories, are a reflection of how Modinomics is following the path of minimum government, maximum governance.

Be it Ayushman Bharat, the largest healthcare scheme globally,

which has given free treatment to well over one crore people since its inception, the PM-Kisan initiative which gives ₹6,000 per annum to over 14.5 crore farmers, or the PM Ujjwala Yojana that gave free gas connections last year, to over eight crore households, the Modi government has given last mile connectivity a whole new meaning.

Clearly, Mr Modi has many firsts to his credit, including PM Jan Dhan Yojana, the largest financial inclusion scheme in the world with over 38 crore account holders, the Swachh Bharat mission, the largest sanitation scheme globally, with over 11 crore toilets built and, of course, the direct benefit transfer scheme, that till date has directly transferred cash worth ₹8.91 lakh crores, to various beneficiaries. Under an inept UPA, money meant for the poor was pilfered by wily middlemen, but under the Modi government, the policy framework has been overhauled to ensure that Nehruvian-style nepotism does not stand a chance. The Manipur water supply project, meant to provide clean drinking water to Greater Imphal and 1,700 villages in Manipur, is yet another example of how Modinomics is mainstreaming the North-east, which was neglected

by the Congress for decades together.

Giving self-reliance and India's domestic civilian nuclear programme a new dimension is the Kakrapar project, the country's first 700 MWe unit and the biggest indigenously developed variant of the pressurised heavy water reactor. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Aatma Nirbhar Bharat is inclusive, pluralistic, bereft of incrementalism and seeks to be globally competitive. This is evident from tech giant Apple's decision of manufacturing one of its latest offerings — the iPhone 11, at Foxconn's Chennai plant. Be it Google's decision to invest \$10bn in the next five-seven years via a digitisation fund, Samsung's decision to manufacture smartwatches at its Noida plant, Amazon setting up its largest facility centre in Hyderabad last year, or the 750MW solar power plant coming up at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh, Mr Modi's Make in India vision is shaping up robustly. With a forex war chest of over \$517 billion, clearly, the world is India's oyster.

The writer is an economist, chief spokesperson for BJP in Mumbai and author of Truth & Dare — The Modi Dynamic

Subhani



Reviving Congress will be a very difficult task



Sanjay Kumar

In a long political journey, political parties may win and lose elections, face ups and downs, but the crisis which the Congress Party is facing at the moment is much deeper than merely dissatisfaction, defection, disavowal and factional infighting. The way political events that have unfolded within the Congress during the last few years are clear signals of a grave crisis that the party may find it extremely hard to overcome.

The Congress has not only lost two Lok Sabha and many state Assembly elections one after another, it has also not been able to hold on to power even in the states where it managed to form a government or emerged as the single largest party in the Assembly. It remains in power only in a handful of states either on its own or in alliance with regional parties.

The Congress has been extremely marginalised in states where it has not been in power for some time, and its voteshare declined to single digits. In states where the Congress lost power in recent Assembly elections, it trailed behind the winner by a big margin of votes. What has added to the problems of the Congress is defections and desertions by some important leaders. Given these circumstances, a revival of the Congress is going to be extremely difficult as the problems are manifold.

The Congress is out of power at the Centre and will remain out of power at least till 2024. It has lost elections in many states and is currently in power only in three states — Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan, and is a coalition partner in the gov-

ernments of Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Puducherry. While that count might suggest that the Congress is sharing power in at least six states, some of them count for very little in national politics in terms of the number of members they send to Parliament.

Not only has the Congress lost many elections, it has even failed to hold on to power in the states where it formed the government. Defections have posed a huge challenge for the Congress in recent times. After it had formed the government in Karnataka in association with the JD(U), it lost power in the state due to defections, and recently lost power in Madhya Pradesh, could not form the government in Goa even after winning more seats than the BJP, and lost power in Arunachal Pradesh due to the large-scale defection of Congress MLAs to the BJP. In Manipur, the defection of Congress MLAs enabled the BJP to form government in the state. The Congress should have been in power in these states in an ideal situation, if the party had not faced defections.

The Congress also suffered a setback as many leaders either defected to other parties or left the party. While Bhubaneswar Kalita, Sanjay Singh and Jyotiraditya Scindia left the Congress and joined the BJP, Priyanka Chaturvedi, having left the Congress, joined the Shiv Sena, and Ajay Alok joined the AAP. The young leader from Haryana, Ashok Tanwar, left the party before the Assembly election, while spokesperson Sanjay Jha was recently suspended from the party.

The recent defections

and desertion from the Congress is mainly in the states where Congress has some stakes, but that does not indicate that all is well with the party in the remaining states. The party is lying very low in many states and it would be a herculean task for it to revive again. In Bihar, the Congress has been completely marginalised and its voteshare has fallen below 10 per cent in several elections during the last couple of decades: it was 6.7 per cent during the 2015 Assembly elections. The party which ruled Delhi for 15 long years polled only 4.2 per cent votes during the 2020 Assembly election. The electoral contest in West Bengal remains restricted mainly between the BJP and the Trinamul Congress, and the Congress is completely marginalised, with only 12.2 per cent of the vote during the 2016 Assembly election. In Uttar Pradesh, the state which sends the largest number of MPs to the Lok Sabha, the Congress has been pushed to fourth position, with just 6.2 per cent votes during the 2017 election. In Jharkhand, though it is a coalition partner in the Hemant Soren-led UPA government, its voteshare is a low 13.8 per cent.

When the India Gandhi-led Congress was decisively defeated in the 1977 Lok Sabha polls, the southern states had remained with the party, but now the Congress seems to have completely collapsed in the South. The Congress has been completely marginalised in Tamil Nadu for decades — in the 2016 Assembly election it polled only 6.4 per cent

The recent defections and desertion from the Congress is mainly in the states where Congress has some stakes, but that does not indicate that all is well with the party in the remaining states

votes. Ever since Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy broke away from the Congress, the party has been completely wiped out in Andhra Pradesh, polling only 1.1 per cent votes in the 2019 Assembly elections. Though the Congress remains the single largest party in terms of vote-share in Karnataka, the BJP has made heavy inroads. In Kerala, in the sea-saw change of government, the Congress-led UDF has been alternating with the CPI(M)-led LDF every five years, but the Congress is heavily dependent on the Muslim League in the state. There are other states where the Congress still has a sizeable support base — Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Odisha — but it is far behind the winner.

The story of the Congress remains the same in the Northeast. The party was wiped out in Nagaland, where it polled 2.1 per cent votes in the last Assembly elections; in Sikkim its vote-share was less than one per cent in the 2019 Assembly elections and in Tripura it polled 1.7 per cent votes in the 2018 elections. In Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram, the Congress may have a decent voteshare, but not enough to hold power. The mass defections in Arunachal Pradesh led to it losing power to the BJP, while in Manipur the defection of one Congress MLA enabled the BJP to form the government. In Mizoram, the Congress got 29.9 per cent votes but the MNF is in power in the state. In Meghalaya, similarly, despite getting 28.5 per cent votes in the 2018 election, the Congress failed to form the government, but the NDA did. In short, any revival of the Congress seems a herculean task at this juncture.

The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political commentator. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

SUDDEN LOSS

After Sushant Singh Rajput, it is Aashutosh Bhakre. It was heart wrenching to read this news. Known for films such as *Bhakar* and *Ichar Tharla Pakka*, the 32-year-old actor suddenly committed suicide at his residence in his hometown Nanded on Wednesday. His father has reportedly not blamed anyone. Bhakre had shared his analysis on why people commit suicide on Facebook days before his death. Goodbye, Aashutosh Bhakre.

N.R. Salam
Jammu

KOSI FLOOD FURY

THE FLOOD SITUATION in north Bihar has gone from bad to worse today. Floodwater entered areas, which were so far unaffected, in Purnia district during the last 24 hours. The water continued to flow through Madhepura town. Over 19 lakh people in 24 blocks of Madhepura, Araria, Supaul and Saharsa districts are reeling under the impact of the Kosi flood. It is not the first time. Floods can be controlled by retaining walls, levees, excavating lakes, dams, reservoirs and so on. Why do the state and central governments not take steps to erect them?

Noor Ahmad
Hyderabad

GRIN AND BEAR IT

THE UNLOCK 3.0 GUIDELINES unveiled by the government on Wednesday comes with slim pickings. As expected, the government has removed the restrictions on night curfew and allowed Independence Day celebrations at national, state, district, sub-division, municipal and panchayat levels and "at home" functions with social distancing. The move to open gymnasiums and yoga schools from August 5 must come as music to the ears of fitness freaks. But owners of cinema halls, swim pools, theatres, bars and assembly halls have to grin and bear it for the time being.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

IN BRIEF

Pak Senate nod to 2 FATF bills

Islamabad: Pakistan's Senate on Thursday unanimously approved two bills related to the tough conditions set by the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog FATF, a day after they were passed in the National Assembly amidst vociferous protest from the Opposition parties. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Amendment Bill, 2020, and the Anti-Terrorism Act Amendment Bill, 2020, were presented by Advisor to Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Senator Babar Awan. The bills include measures of freezing and seizure of assets, travel ban, and arms embargo on the entities and individuals, who are designated on the sanctions list of the United Nations and impose heavy fine and long-term jails for those facilitating militancy. The two bills passed by the National Assembly on Wednesday fulfil various requirements of the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force.

Indictment: Plea by Zardari

SHAFQAT ALI | DC
ISLAMABAD, JULY 30

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday submitted a plea in the court requesting to halt indictment proceedings against him in Thatta Water Supply reference. The accountability court has issued a notice to National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Mr Zardari's plea. The court had decided to indict Zardari in Thatta water supply reference on August 4. Earlier, NAB court had postponed indictment of Zardari and his sister Faryal Talpur in mega money laundering case till August 7. In December 2019, Zardari was released on medical grounds after an accountability court in Islamabad issued separate orders in the Park Lane Estate Company and the money laundering through fake bank accounts cases against him.

JAPAN GAS LEAK KILLS 1, INJURES 17

Tokyo: A sudden explosion from a suspected gas leak blew out walls and windows in part of a northern Japanese town Thursday morning, killing one person and injuring 17 others. There was no sign of a fire and investigators at the suspect a gas leak may have caused the blast, Koriyama fire department official Hiroki Ogawa said. Local media say a gas leak and explosion occurred at Onyasai restaurant. So far, one person was confirmed dead and 17 others have been taken to hospitals.

Two of them were seriously injured, Ogawa said. The area has been closed off and neighbours have been evacuated. NHK footage showed only a skeleton left of a building, the steel structure gnawed and pieces of wall and glass scattered around. Several employees and customers at a nearby bank were injured, NHK said. The explosion occurred in a crowded business and commercial district close to the city's main train station, where hospitals, schools and the city hall are also located. "I heard a 'boom!' and felt the ground shaking, so I thought it was an earthquake, but the shaking didn't last very long so I realised it wasn't," an employee at nearby Kuwano Kyoritsu Hospital told NHK. Nobody was injured at the hospital, although some of its windows were shattered. The restaurant was undergoing repairs, according to its owner, casual dining group Colowide Co.

India, China, Russia don't take care of their air: Don

President says this is why he withdrew from Paris climate accord

Washington, July 30: US President Donald Trump has alleged that India, China and Russia do not take care of their air, while America does, noting that he withdrew from the "one-sided, energy-destroying" Paris climate accord which would have made it a "non-competitive nation". Trump, in his address on energy and the Permian Basin in Midland, Texas on Wednesday, said that by imposing these punishing restrictions -- and beyond restrictions -- "the Washington radical-left, crazy Democrats" would also send countless American jobs, factories, industries to China and to other foreign polluting states. "They want us to take care of our air, but China doesn't take care of its air. In all fairness, India doesn't take care of its air. Russia doesn't take care of its air. But we do. Not on my watch, it's not going to happen -- I can tell you that. Because as long as I'm President, we will always put America first. It's very simple," he said.

"For years and years, we put other countries first, and we now put America first. As we have seen in cities and towns across our nation, it's not just Texas oil that the radical Democrats want to destroy; they want to destroy our country," he said. Such radical Democrats, he alleged, do not love the country in any way, shape or form. "There's no respect for the American way of life. There is no way of life ever in history that's been like the great American way of life."

— PTI

Chinese long-range bombers join South China Sea drills

Beijing, July 30: China said on Thursday that long-range bombers were among the aircraft that took part in recent aerial drills over the South China Sea amid rising tensions between Washington and Beijing over the strategic waterway.

The exercises included nighttime takeoffs and landings and simulated long-range attacks, Defence Ministry spokesperson Ren Guoqiang said. Among the planes were H-6G and H-6K bombers, upgraded versions of the planes long in use with the People's Liberation Army Air Force and the People's Liberation Army Navy Air Force, Ren said.

He said the exercises had been previously scheduled

and were aimed at boosting pilot abilities to operate under all natural conditions. It wasn't clear whether live bombs were used. Ren's statement appeared to distance the drills from recent accusations exchanged between the sides over China's claim to virtually all of the South China Sea, which it has buttressed in recent years by building man-made islands equipped with runways. The US this month for the first time rejected China's claims outright, prompting Beijing to accuse it of seeking to create discord between China and its neighbours. Five other governments also exercise claims in the South China Sea, through which around \$5 trillion in trade is

transported annually.

Previously, US policy had been to insist that maritime disputes between China and its smaller neighbours be resolved peacefully through UN-backed arbitration. But in a statement, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the Trump administration has begun to take all the "right actions" to rebalance the relationship with Beijing in a way that protects and secures freedom for Americans.

Pompeo also expressed hoped that the Chinese will decide that their commitments under the Phase one trade deal must be complied with. "Will wait and see if they come through with their obligations there," he noted. "From America's national security perspective, the threat the President (Donald Trump) identified when he campaigned back in 2015 from the CCP is very real. And so we've begun to take all the right actions to rebalance this relationship in a way that protects and secures freedom for the American people," Pompeo told Michael Knowles of The Ben Shapiro Show in an interview.

"You saw it first from the administration on trade. We had a deeply nonreciprocal set of trade relationships where the CCP stole intellectual property and then turned around and sold it back to us, dumped it with state-sponsored enterprises, conducted cyber-theft at levels that no other country can match the scale of today."

— PTI

THREAT FROM CCP VERY REAL, SAYS POMPEO

Washington, July 30: The threat from the Communist Party of China (CCP) is very real, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Wednesday asserting that the Trump administration has begun to take all the "right actions" to rebalance the relationship with Beijing in a way that protects and secures freedom for Americans.

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US Coronavirus death toll goes past 150,000

Washington, July 30: The US has recorded over 150,000 Covid-19 deaths, another grim milestone that comes amidst warning from a top Indian-American physician that the country has failed to arrest the spread of the deadly pandemic. America's Coronavirus death toll was 150,676 as of Wednesday — more than a fifth of the world's recorded deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

The US also had over 4,426,000 confirmed cases, making it the world's worst-hit country. The first death in the US was reported on February 29. The country reached 50,000 deaths 54 days later on April 23, and 34 days later, on May 27, crossed 100,000 deaths. It has taken 63 days to add another 50,000 to reach the 150,000 mark, CNN reported.

"I think the fact that we as a country have not been able to get our arms around this, have not prioritised preventing those deaths is all that much more maddening," Dr Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, said. "And so, for me it's frustration, it's sadness. And a resolve to try to figure out how we prevent the next 150,000," Jha told CNN. "I think we can, but we're really going to have to work for it," he added.

Some states in the US are seeing their highest death tolls. California on Wednesday reported 197 Covid-related deaths in a single day, according to state Department of Public Health. That total far outpaces the previous high of 159, recorded just

last week. Florida also reported a record 216 deaths on Wednesday. Infectious disease experts say the US is at a critical juncture, as debates about how and whether to reopen schools for in-person learning are taking place across the country.

Careless youth driving some COVID-19 spikes, says WHO

Beijing, July 30: China's Geneva, July 30: The World Health Organisation on Thursday warned that spikes in Coronavirus transmission in a number of countries were being driven by young people "letting down their guard". "Young people are not invincible," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual news conference in Geneva.

While the pandemic, which has killed nearly 670,000 and infected more than 17 million people worldwide, has disproportionately impacted the elderly and people with pre-existing conditions, he stressed that "younger people are at risk too".

He lamented that a major challenge in trying to rein in the Coronavirus was "convincing younger people of this risk". He said there was evidence that "spikes of cases in some countries are being driven in part by younger people letting down their guard." WHO's technical lead for Covid-19 Maria Van Kerkhove lamented that nightclubs had become "amplifiers" of transmission. Tedros insisted that "young people must take the same precautions to protect themselves and protect others as everyone else". — AFP

HK disqualifies 12 Oppn nominees

Hong Kong, July 30: At least 12 Hong Kong pro-democracy nominees including Joshua Wong were disqualified for a September legislative election, with authorities saying Wednesday they failed to uphold the city's mini-constitution and pledge allegiance to Hong Kong and Beijing.

Others who were disqualified include prominent pro-democracy activist Tiffany Yuen from the disbanded political organisation Demosisto, as well as incumbent lawmaker Dennis Kwok and three others from the pro-democracy Civic Party. It marks a setback for the pro-democracy camp, which had aimed to win a majority of seats in the legislature this year.

Earlier this month, they held an unofficial primary, with candidates like Wong topping the polls. Wong and many pro-democracy nominees had been asked to clarify their political stance earlier this week as their nominations were being reviewed. Other nominations were still being reviewed, the government said in a statement expressing support for the disqualifications.

"We do not rule out the possibility that more nominations would be invalidated," it said. Earlier Thursday, Hong

4 ARRESTED UNDER NEW SECURITY LAW

Hong Kong, July 30: Hong Kong police have signalled their intent to enforce a new Chinese national security law strictly, arresting four youths Wednesday on suspicion of inciting secession through social media posts. Three males and one female, aged 16 to 21, were detained, a police official said at an 11 pm news conference. All are believed to be students. "Our investigation showed that a group has recently announced on social media that they have set up an organization for Hong Kong independence," said Li Kwaiwah, senior superintendent of a newly formed unit to enforce the security law.

— AP

Kong pro-democracy activist Lee Cheuk-yan rebuked a tough national security law that Beijing had imposed following last year's massive protests calling for greater freedoms. He criticized authorities for arresting four youths on suspicion of inciting trouble.

Animal fair in Syria



A picture shows an animal market on the outskirts of the town of al-Dana, in the northwestern Idlib province of Syria, on Thursday ahead of the Muslim holiday of Id-al-Adha.

— AFP

Times Square to display Ram's images Aug. 5

New York, July 30: Images of Lord Ram and 3D portraits of the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya will be beamed across the giant billboards in the iconic Times Square here on August 5 to celebrate the temple's groundbreaking ceremony, with organisers describing the commemoration as a one-of-a-kind and historic event.

Prominent community leader and President of the American India Public

Affairs Committee Jagdish Sewhani on Wednesday said that arrangements are being made to celebrate the historic moment in New York on August 5, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to lay the foundation stone for construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Sewhani told PTI that among the prominent billboards that are being leased for the occasion are the giant Nasdaq screen

and the 17,000-square-foot wrap-around LED display screen, considered among the largest continuous exterior displays in the world and the highest-resolution exterior LED screen in Times Square.

Beginning from 8 AM on August 5 till 10 PM, images of the words 'Jai Shri Ram' in Hindi and English, Lord Ram's portraits and videos, 3D portraits of the temple's design and architecture as well as pic-

tures of the laying of the foundation stone by Modi will be displayed across several billboards, which are among the most striking and popular features of Times Square, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world.

Sewhani said that members of the Indian community will also gather at Times Square on August 5 to mark the celebration and distribute sweets. "This is not a once in a

lifetime or a once in a century event. This is an event that comes once in the life of mankind. We had to give it a befitting celebration and what better place than the iconic Times Square to commemorate the 'Ram Janna Bhoomi shilanyas' (ground-breaking ceremony). Under PM Modi, the construction of the Ram Temple is a dream come true for Hindus all over the world."

— PTI

COUNTRY'S | HERITAGE

MEA, enforcement agencies helping in restitution stolen smuggled antiquities

9th century Shiva statue to be returned to India

London, July 30: A rare late ninth century stone statue of Lord Shiva, which was stolen from a temple in Rajasthan and smuggled to the United Kingdom, will be returned to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Thursday.

The stone Nataraj/Natesha murti, in "chatura pose with jatamakuta and trinetra" and almost four-feet-tall, is a rare depiction of Lord Shiva in the Pratihara style.

It was stolen in February 1998 from Ghateshwar Temple in Baroli, Rajasthan. In 2003, it came to light that the statue had been smug-

gled out to the UK.

"When this information was received in London, the UK authorities were contacted and with their support the matter was pursued with the private collector, who was in possession of the idol in London. He voluntarily returned the idol to the Indian High Commission in the UK in 2005," said the High Commission of India in the UK.

In August 2017, a team of ASI experts visited the India House and examined the idol, which took pride of place inside the building's main lobby. The experts confirmed that it is the same

● **THE STONE**
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An official Indian govern-

ment communique said that in line with the government of India's renewed impetus to protecting India's cultural heritage and showcasing it to the world, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) along with India's law enforcement agencies have been actively pursuing investigations and restitution of stolen and smuggled Indian antiquities.

As a result, antiquities and idols have been returned to India from various countries, including the United States, Australia, France and Germany.

The High Commission of India (HCI) in London said it

has also been playing a leading role in the successful restitutions and repatriations of India's cultural heritage.

"HCI is presently working with various law enforcement agencies to trace, seize and retrieve stolen artefacts. HCI is working on many such cases at present. We are confident that in coming days, in partnership with the ASI, government of India, state and central authorities as well as UK law enforcement agencies and independent experts, we will be successful in returning more items of our cultural heritage to India," a

statement said.

Some examples of restitution from the UK include the Bramha-Brahmani sculpture, which was stolen from India and returned to the ASI in 2017.

It has found a prominent resting place at Purana Quila Museum in New Delhi, in the gallery curated by the ASI.

On August 15, 2018, a 12th century bronze statue of Bhagawan Buddha was restored to the Indian High Commission by London's Metropolitan Police and then handed over to the Indian government last year.

— PTI

NASA launches Mars rover

Cape Canaveral, July 30: The biggest, most sophisticated Mars rover ever built — a car-size vehicle bristling with cameras, microphones, drills and lasers — blasted off Thursday as part of an ambitious, long-range project to bring the first Martian rock samples back to Earth to be analysed for evidence of ancient life. NASA's Perseverance rode a mighty Atlas V rocket into the morning sky in the world's third and final Mars launch of the summer.

China and the United

Arab Emirates got a head start last week, but all three missions should reach the red planet in February after a journey of seven months and 300 million miles (480 million kilometres).

The plutonium-powered, six-wheeled rover will drill down and collect tiny geological specimens that will be brought home in about 2031 in a sort of interplanetary relay race involving multiple spacecraft and countries. The overall cost: more than \$8 billion.

— AP

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,736.07	-0.88
Nifty 50	11,102.15	-0.90
S&P 500*	3,241.97	-0.51
Dollar (₹)	74.84	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.16	-0.20
Euro (₹)	87.95	-0.04
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,860▲118	0.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	42.96	-0.79
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.825	-0.010
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.543	-0.038

German economy plunges 10% in second quarter

Germany's economy, Europe's largest, took a massive hit during the pandemic shutdowns, shrinking by 10.1 per cent per cent during the April-June period from the previous quarter, the official statistics agency said. It was the biggest drop since quarterly growth statistics began being compiled in 1970. The plunge far exceeded the previous worst-ever recorded performance, a fall of 4.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2009.

Local shops to make Prime Day debut: Amazon



Over 100 small and medium businesses and start-ups on Amazon.in will be launching more than 1,000 new products across 17 categories on Prime Day this year on August 6 and 7. Thousands of local shops on Amazon sellers will be also making their Prime Day debut in India, the e-tailer said in a statement. Start-ups and small businesses from Amazons Launchpad programme will be launching unique products, it said.

Safeguard duty on solar cells extended

The government has imposed safeguard duty on solar cells for one more year till July 2021 to protect local manufacturers and discourage cheap imports from countries like China. The move followed recommendation to the effect by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies. A duty of 14.9 per cent will be levied during July 30, 2020 to January 29, 2021 and then 14.5 per cent during January 30, 2021 to July 29.

GMR Infra Q4 loss narrows to ₹1,127 crore

GMR Infrastructure Ltd's consolidated net loss for the quarter ended March 31 narrowed to Rs 1,126.82 crore against a loss of Rs 2,341.24 crore in year-ago quarter, GMR said in a regulatory filing. Its consolidated income was at Rs 2,554.21 crore against Rs 2293 crore in Q4FY19. For the full year FY20, GMR reported a total loss of Rs 2,198.49 crore against Rs 3,466.41 crore in FY19. Revenues from airports stood at Rs 1,582.49 crore.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at BFL Infotech Ltd, C-9 Sector 3, Noida-201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: T.Venkatram Reddy, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

■ Net rises to ₹13,248 cr in June quarter

Reliance posts record profit

New Delhi, July 30: Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) on Thursday reported record net profit of Rs 13,248 crore in the June quarter after one-time gain from stake sale as well as bumper telecom revenues cushioned Covid-19-hit earnings from refining, petchem and retail segments.

The net profit in April-June was 30.6 per cent higher than it was in the same period a year back, and bettered the company's previous best of Rs 11,640 crore earning in October-December 2019, the company said in a statement.

The conglomerate said it had a one-time gain of Rs 4,966 crore from sale of 49 per cent stake in fuel retailing venture to BP plc.

This together with 183 per cent jump in Reliance Jio's standalone net profit to Rs 2,520 crore covered up drop in earnings from mainstay segments.

Ebitda (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation) declined by 11.8 per cent to Rs 21,585 crore "due to lower contribution from oil-to-chemical (O2C) business, which was impacted by significant demand destruction and margin pressure across transportation fuels and polyester chain."

Also, lower realisation in the export market also impacted profitability. "Closure of stores and restrictions on operations across the country due to Covid-19 contributed to a



COGNIZANT Q2 INCOME DOWN 29%, SEES STRONG GROWTH AHEAD

New Delhi, July 30: IT major Cognizant has reported a 29 per cent drop in the June quarter net income at \$361 million (around Rs 2,701 crore), but is confident of logging strong growth in the coming quarters on the back of strong bookings and demand for digital services.

The US-based company, which posted net income of \$509 million in the June 2019 quarter, said it expects its FY2020 revenue to be in the range of \$16.4-16.7 billion.

decrease in Ebitda of Retail business. This was partially offset by an increase in Ebitda of Digital services business due to improved margins and continued subscriber momentum," it said. RIL chairman Mukesh D

For the June 2020 quarter, Cognizant's revenue saw 3.4 per cent decline (2.5 per cent in constant currency) at \$4 billion from \$4.14 billion in the year-ago period.

Cognizant, which has about 2 lakh employees based in India, follows January-December as financial year.

"We delivered a solid second quarter performance whilst continuing to improve our competitiveness," Cognizant CEO Brian Humphries said.

Ambani said: "The severe demand destruction due to global lockdowns impacted our hydrocarbons business but the flexibility in our operations enabled us to operate at near normal levels and deliver industry-leading results".

J&J's Covid vaccine protects monkeys with single shot

JULIE STEENHUYSEN JULY 30

Johnson & Johnson on Thursday kicked off US human safety trials for its Covid-19 vaccine after releasing details of a study in monkeys that showed its best-performing vaccine candidate offered strong protection in a single dose.

When exposed to the virus, six out of six animals who got the vaccine candidate were completely protected from lung disease and five out of six were protected from infection as measured by the presence of virus in nasal swabs, according to the study published in the journal Nature.

"This gives us confidence that we can test a single-shot vaccine in this epidemic and learn whether it has a protective effect in humans," Dr. Paul Stoffels, J&J's chief scientific officer, told Reuters in a telephone interview.

The drugmaker said it had started early-stage human trials in the United States and Belgium and would test its vaccine candidate in more than 1,000 healthy adults aged 18 to 55 years, as well as adults aged 65 years and older.

The US government is backing J&J's vaccine effort with \$456 million in funding as part of a spending spree aimed at speeding production of a vaccine.

Audit found cybersecurity lapses at NPCI last year

New Delhi, July 30: A government audit of India's flagship payments processor last year found more than 40 security vulnerabilities, including several it called "critical" and "high" risk, according to an internal government document seen by Reuters.

The audit, which took place over four months to February 2019, highlighted a lack of encryption of personal data at the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) which forms the backbone of the country's digital payments system and operates the RuPay card network championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The March 2019 government document cited the storing of 16-digit card numbers and other personal information such as customer names, account numbers and national identity numbers in "plain text" in some databases, leaving the data unprotected if the system was breached.

The NPCI said in a statement to Reuters it is regularly audited in the interests of security and senior management reviews all findings, which are then "remediated to (the) satisfaction of the auditors".

National cyber security coordinator Rajesh Pant, whose office coordinated the audit, also said in a statement to Reuters that "all observations raised in last year's report have been confirmed as resolved by the NPCI".

The audit was undertaken to provide the National Security Council with an overview of the NPCI's



defences against cyberattacks. The PMO and the finance ministry did not respond to a Reuters request for comment.

The audit's findings underscore the data-security challenges faced by the NPCI which processes billions of dollars daily via services that include inter-bank fund transfers, ATM transactions and digital payments.

Set up in 2008, the NPCI is a not-for-profit company, which as of March 2019, counted 56 banks as its shareholders, including the State Bank of India, Citibank and HSBC.

RuPay has grown to account for almost two-thirds of nearly 900 million debit and credit cards issued in India as of October, according to NPCI and central bank data.

The audit followed a Reserve Bank of India inspection report on the NPCI in July 2017 that found lapses in its internal auditing practices, operational risks and improper whistleblower policies.

There was "lack of awareness of risks and

risk culture in the institution," according to a mostly redacted version of the 37-page report that was obtained by Reuters via the Right to Information Act (RTI) last year.

The 2019 government document about the audit also noted: "There is a strong need for proper governance."

The RBI conducted another inspection between November and December 2019. A 33-page report on that audit included its assessment of NPCI's governance and operational and credit risks. But most of the report, also obtained by Reuters via the RTI Act, was redacted by the central bank, which cited the need to protect India's and the NPCI's economic interests.

The March 2019 government document said a variety of card numbers were unencrypted within the NPCI database for the country's network of almost 250,000 ATMs, while unencrypted RuPay card numbers could also be seen in the organisation's server logs.

— Reuters

No obligation on Centre to meet shortfall in GST compensation fund, says AG

New Delhi, July 30: The attorney general has opined that there is no obligation on the central government to pay the GST compensation shortfall to the states and the GST Council has to decide on ways to make good any shortfall, sources said.

After the GST Council's meeting in March, the Centre had sought views from attorney general K. K. Venugopal on the legality of market borrowing by the council to make good any shortfall in the compensation fund.

The AG in his view said there is no obligation on the central government to pay the GST compensation shortfall, said the sources. The AG also said the GST Council has to decide on making good the shortfall in the compensation fund by providing the sufficient amount to be credited to it.

The payment of GST compensation to states became an issue after revenues from cess started dwindling since August 2019 and the Centre had to dive in to the excess cess amount collected during 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Sources said the Constitution provides for GST compensation to states for loss of revenue on account of GST implementation. "However, there is no obligation under the Constitution or GST laws to make good the loss on account of natural disaster, Covid or economic slowdown etc because they are not related to implementation of GST," a source said.

The GST Council has to decide how to meet the shortfall in such circumstances and not the central government, the source added.

While many states had demanded that compensation be paid from the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI), Parliament had in 2017 rejected an amendment which proposed to put an obligation on the Centre to pay from the CFI to meet the compensation shortfall. —PTI

Pharma, IT stocks rise in tumbling market

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JULY 30

Investors bought pharma and IT company shares which have done well during the first quarter despite Covid-19 pandemic led disruptions and are considered safe havens in turbulent times

Sensex and Nifty-50 fell 0.9 per cent on the futures & options contracts expiry day, with the Sensex closing below the 38,000 level at 37,736.0 down by 335.06 points and the Nifty-50 at 11,102.15, down by 100.70 points.

It was the second day of market fall, but BSE healthcare and IT stock indices closed in the green, bucking the broader trend where all other sectoral indices fell, led by the banks and financial services.

The BSE Healthcare Index outperformed with a huge gain of 2.01 per cent as blue-chip pharma stocks rallied after some of them had good first quarter performance, led by Dr Reddy's Laboratories (5.02 per cent), Sun Pharma (3.44 per cent), Divi's Laboratories (5.68 per

cent), Glenmark (4.14 per cent), Lupin (3.58 per cent) and Apollo Hospitals (4.55 per cent).

IT stocks were investors' other favourite after healthy first quarter performance; the BSE IT Index gained 0.64 per cent. The top gainers included Wipro (2.55 per cent) and Infosys (0.84 per cent). TCS saw profit booking after it touched a 52-week high of Rs 2,357.15 and closed at Rs 2,277.95, up 0.15 per cent.

Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Indian equity markets opened positive but drifted in red in second half; extending its losses for second consecutive day on the back of weak global cues and profit booking. Global cues were weak as the US Fed's pledge to use all its tools to support the US economy failed to reassure markets."

"Further market was cautious ahead of the US GDP data scheduled later during the day. On the domestic front, profit booking continued amidst weak global cues and expensive valuations."

SIDDHARTHA SINGH JULY 30

The finance ministry is considering an amnesty programme for residents with illicit stash of gold, as part of an effort to crack down on tax evasion and cut its dependence on imports, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

Under the proposition made to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government plans to ask people with unaccounted holdings of the metal to declare it to tax authorities and pay levies and penalty, the people said, asking not to be identified, citing rules on speaking to the media. The proposal is at an early stage and authorities are seeking feedback from concerned officials, they said.

Modi unveiled three government-backed plans in 2015 to try to tap the world's largest private gold stash of about 25,000 tonnes held by households and institutions to trim physical demand, and reduce imports by providing people with alternative avenues for investment. The programmes failed to

GOLD DEMAND FALLS 70% IN Q2

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JULY 30

Gold demand dipped 70 per cent in the lockdown-hit June quarter (Q2), the lowest in records.

As the lockdown kept the jewellery stores closed in April-May, demand for gold in Q2 2020 was at 63.7 tonnes down by 70 per cent against 213.2 tonnes in the same quarter last year, as per data from the WGC. Jewellery demand dipped by 74 per cent to 44 tonnes against 168.6 tonnes in Q2 2019 and Investment demand was 19.8 tonnes, down by 56 per cent in comparison to 44.5 tonnes in the year ago quarter.

Gold imports stood at 11.6 tonnes, down by 95 per cent compared to 247.4

tonnes in Q2 2019. This was the lowest import in a quarter in the past two decades of recorded data. Store closures prevented consumers from taking advantage of the gold price hike and recycled gold too fell 64 per cent to 13.8 tonnes against 37.9 tonnes a year ago.

A slow Q2 also pulled down gold demand in the first half by 56 per cent to 165.6 tonnes.

"Q2 2020 was defined by lockdowns and high prices, both of which acted in combination to keep India's gold demand record low at 63.7 tonnes, down 70 per cent. Demand for jewellery dropped by 74 per cent to 44 tonnes," said Somasundaram PR, managing director, India, World Gold Council.

generate interest. Consumers who declare their hoard will need to deposit some of the legalised gold with the government for a few years, they said. The administra-

tion had planned a similar programme last year; news reports said in late October. The tax office had denied any plans for an amnesty then.

—Bloomberg

Rural FMCG sales see 12.5% growth in June

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JULY 30

Unlock-1 in June saw FMCG sales growing in double digits in rural markets against stagnant growth in urban areas. However, the revival of demand in the rural market may not help the FMCG sector much, as it would end the year with flat growth, finds Nielsen.

The 12.5 per cent FMCG growth in rural markets in June was three times the all-India growth of 4.5 per cent. Urban markets recorded 0.04 per cent year-on-year growth in June as some key metros were still under lockdown.

Even during the April-May lockdown, de-growth in rural markets was lower than urban areas. Even in a de-growth of 11.2 per cent rural markets



fared better than urban markets, which contracted at 20.4 per cent. Across the country, the FMCG sector had de-grown by 17.1 per cent in April-May.

According to Nielsen, lower Covid-19 cases in rural areas helped the market bounce back faster and the latent demand saw sales growing in double-

INDIA INC EXPECTS REVENUE REBOUND BY JUNE 2021

New Delhi, July 30: Eighty-two per cent of Indian companies expect to get back to pre-coronavirus revenue run rate by June 2021, according to a PwC India report. The report is based on a survey of 225 CXOs across industries to assess the impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

The report suggests that infrastructure, real estate, industrials, retail, hospitality and media and entertainment suffered significant revenue decline due

to the crisis. Collapse in demand, supply-chain disruptions and liquidity constraints were the top reasons for the decline, the report said. "Sectors such as information technology, healthcare, pharma, telecom, utilities and consumer essentials were somewhat resilient." It said 73 per cent respondents are expecting lower revenues in 2020-21, but only 15 per cent expect the decline extending to the next fiscal.

Better monsoon and increased availability of labour saw increased kharif sowing and this improved sentiments.

While the rural market may arrest FMCG de-growth, it will not help the overall growth for the entire year much. Urban markets account for 64 per cent of the national sales,

while rural markets contribution is just 36 per cent. As per Nielsen's forecast, FMCG sales will record a flat growth of either negative one per cent or positive one per cent in 2020. Earlier, Nielsen had predicted that the FMCG sector would grow by 5 to 6 per cent in 2020.

JEEP COMPASS NIGHT EAGLE'S GLOBAL EDITION LAUNCHED

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JULY 30

Jeep, the iconic American sports utility vehicle maker, on Thursday introduced the global limited edition Jeep Compass Night Eagle in India, to celebrate the third anniversary of the Compass SUV in India.

Prices for the Jeep Compass Night Eagle start at Rs 20.14 lakh. India will get only 250 units of the Compass Night Eagle.



SHORT TAKES

Anand at loss of moves at Legends

Chennai: Indian chess ace Viswanathan Anand's signed off second from bottom after his disappointing campaign at the Legends of Chess online tournament ended with a loss to long-time rival Vasily Ivanchuk in the ninth and final round. It was Anand's eighth loss in the \$150,000 tournament. The 50-year-old ended in ninth position behind GM Peter Leko who finished last.

After all the four games ended in draws, the Anand-Ivanchuk contest went into the Armageddon (a tie-breaker), which also ended in a stalemate.

The Ukrainian emerged victorious as he played black in the decider late on Wednesday. Anand started the match with a 57-move draw and the tie progressed in a similar vein with the players opting for quiet draws.

The Armageddon game was a 59-move affair before the former world champion signed peace with Ivanchuk.

— PTI

Shooting coach is Corona positive

New Delhi: A shooting coach at the Dr Karni Singh Range here has tested positive for Covid-19 but the development will not force a closure of the facility, where the Olympic core group will start training from August 1. The Sports Authority of India (SAI), in a press release, said the woman coach intimated the result of her test to it on Thursday but since she did not come in contact with any of the shooters, the facility will remain open for training.

The Karni Singh range was reopened for use on July 8. "The coach had visited the centre's administrative department only on July 24. She did not visit the field of play or interacted with any athlete training at the centre," the SAI stated.

The Olympic core group of 34 Indian shooters is also scheduled to return to training from August 1 at the range after the National Rifles Association of India (NRAI) made attendance compulsory. — PTI

Monetary help for wushu player

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday sanctioned ₹5 lakh for Shiksha, a Haryana-based wushu player, who was forced to work as a farm labourer due to severe financial distress in times Covid-19 pandemic.

According to a release issued by the sports ministry, the 22-year-old athlete, who has won 24 gold medals at the state Wushu Championship, was sanctioned the money through the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay National Welfare Fund for Sportspersons.

Shiksha, who is also pursuing her BSc in sports science said she is grateful to the Sports Minister for his intervention. "I don't have words to thank the Sports Minister for his noble gesture and sending across ₹5 lakh at a time like this. I am absolutely determined to get back to my training at the earliest and it's so good to see such a proactive minister who cares for the athletes," she said.

— PTI

INDEPENDENT PROBE INTO OZ GYMNASTICS

Sydney: An independent review of Australian gymnastics was announced on Thursday after a host of former athletes went public with accounts of physical, mental and emotional abuse in the sport.

The probe will be carried out by the country's Human Rights Commission, which will look into the culture and practices of the sport at the request of governing body Gymnastics Australia (GA).

"Over the last couple of weeks athletes have shared their personal experiences of gymnastics in Australia. Many of those experiences narrated are quite simply not acceptable," said Gymnastics Australia chief Kitty Chiller, who was Australia's chef de mission at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

— AFP

Champs thumped Juve crash to humiliating defeat in Italy

Milan, July 30: Juventus crashed to a humiliating 0-2 defeat at Cagliari on Wednesday, days after sealing their ninth consecutive Italian league title, prompting coach Maurizio Sarri to consider fielding his Under-23 team in Saturday's finale to conserve resources ahead of their Champions League challenge.

Cagliari's 20-year-old forward Luca Gagliano tapped in the opener eight minutes into his first Serie A match, beating veteran Juventus keeper Gianluigi Buffon to score his first top division goal.

And the young Italian then teed up Giovanni Simeone in first half stoppage time to give Cagliari their first win over Juventus in 11 years.

Cristiano Ronaldo missed the chance to keep pace with Serie A's leading scorer Ciro Immobile, the Portuguese now four goals behind the Lazio forward's tally of 35 with one match remaining.

The five-time Ballon d'Or winner had a goal ruled offside after 16 minutes and was denied twice by Cagliari goalkeeper Alessio Cragnano as the 13th-placed Sardinians ended their eight-match winless run.

It was a worrying performance for Sarri's side, who have won just two of their last seven games, with key forwards Paulo Dybala and Douglas Costa fighting for fitness ahead of the Champions League showdown with Lyon on August 7 in Turin, when they need to overturn a 1-0 first-leg deficit.

— AFP



Cagliari's Luca Gagliano (left) celebrates after scoring during their Italian league match against Juventus at the Sardegna Arena stadium in Cagliari, Italy, on Wednesday. Cagliari won 2-0.

— AP

Criminal case against Fifa prez

Geneva, July 30: A criminal case against FIFA president Gianni Infantino was opened Thursday by a Swiss special prosecutor, plunging world football's governing body in a new scandal.

Special prosecutor Stefan Keller has concluded there is enough evidence to take the case to court after investigating the circumstances of a

meeting with Swiss attorney general Michael Lauber, who offered his resignation last week.

"Keller has uncovered elements that make up reprehensible behavior," according to a statement from the Swiss authority overseeing the federal prosecutors' office.

Keller opened a criminal case against Infantino as

well as Valais prosecutor Rinaldo Arnold, and has sought authorisation to open a legal case against Lauber, too, according to a statement from the Swiss authority.

Keller, a legal expert named to the post of special prosecutor on June 29, found possible infractions included abuse of public office, breach of official secrecy, assisting

offenders and incitement to these acts, the supervisory authority for the office of the attorney general said in its statement, adding other criminal acts and proceedings could also be considered.

The Bahraini is senior vice president of FIFA so would be in line to replace Infantino temporarily if he was suspended due to the criminal case. — AP

Willey whips Irish cream

Southampton, July 30: David Willey marked his return to England duty with four quick wickets during an Ireland collapse at Southampton on Thursday as One-Day International cricket resumed for the first time since the Coronavirus lockdown.

The left-arm paceman was appearing in his first ODI since being left out of England's World Cup-winning squad for Jofra Archer.

And he responded by taking 4-20 as Ireland slumped to 139-7 in 37 overs after losing the toss in a match that launches the new World Cup Super League, which will determine qualification for the 2023 50-over showpiece in India.

Given the first over by England captain Eoin Morgan, Willey need just four balls to have Ireland dangerman Paul Stirling chipping an inswinger to the skipper at midwicket.

And Ireland were 7-2 when captain Andy Balbirnie was caught behind driving at Willey.

Ireland ODI debutant Harry Tector was then



Ireland's Lorcan Tucker (right) walks off after losing his wicket to England's David Willey (left) during the first One-Day International cricket match at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton, Southwest England, on Thursday.

— AFP

bowed for a nine-ball duck by Saqib Mahmood. Gareth Delany hit five fours in his 22 before he struck Willey straight to Tom Banton at backward point. And next ball the 30-year-old Willey, the son of former England bats-

man and umpire David Willey, had Lorcan Tucker lbw for a duck on review to leave Ireland in dire straits at 28-5 inside seven overs. The match is England's first home ODI since beating New Zealand in a dramatic

Super Over in last year's World Cup final at Lord's.

BRIEF SCORES

■ Ireland 139/7 in 37 overs (Gareth Delany 22, Kevin O'Brien 22, Curtis Campher batting 50; David Willey 4/20) vs England. — AFP

PACER AMIR TO JOIN PAK SIDE FOR ENG TEST

Derby, July 30: Left-arm fast bowler Mohammad Amir has joined the Pakistan squad here after clearing two consecutive Covid-19 tests following his arrival in the United Kingdom.

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Thursday confirmed that Amir has integrated with rest of the squad after serving his mandatory quarantine period, during which he tested negative twice.

"Amir left for England from Lahore on 24 July and, as per the UK government's guidelines, was in isolation for a period of five days during which he was tested twice," the PCB said in a statement on its website.

Amir will feature in the three-match T20 series against England to be played in a bio-secure environment at the Old Trafford, Manchester starting August 28.

Pakistan's tour of England starts with three Test matches starting August 5. — PTI

Eoin credits IPL for WC

Southampton, July 30: England's limited-overs captain Eoin Morgan has revealed that his teammates' participation in the 2019 IPL, which was part of a well thought out plan, played a key role in helping the side claim its maiden World Cup title.

Morgan said he pushed chairman of England and Wales Cricket Board's Cricket Committee, Andrew Strauss to take the decision because he felt the pressure associated with a world event can only be matched by the cash-rich IPL.

"Playing in IPL was part of Strauss's plan. I pushed him to make that call because in international bilateral series, it's so difficult to replicate the pressure that's there in Champions Trophy or the World Cup," Morgan told Harsha Bhogle on Cricbuzz in Conversation.

"He asked me what's different? One, you play as an overseas player so there's huge expectations. If you play in IPL, there's differ-

NO INDIAN CAMP BEFORE INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

New Delhi, July 30: The top Indian cricketers are unlikely to have a national camp at Motera prior to the Indian Premier League, taking into account their health and safety amid a surge in Covid-19 cases in the country.

There is a high possibility that all the centrally contracted cricketers, save Cheteshwar Pujara and Hanuma Vihari (who don't feature in IPL), will be joining their respective IPL teams training camp in Dubai from the start.

While BCCI Apex Council had zeroed in on the state-of-the-art Motera Stadium for the conditioning camp, the Gujarat Cricket Association (GCA) is yet to get any formal intimation from the BCCI.

"There were media reports that camp will start from August 18 and go on till September 4 but we have no formal intimation from the BCCI till now," a GCA official said on conditions of anonymity.

— PTI

ent pressure and different expectation. Sometimes you can't get away with it and you have to find a way to deal with it."

Morgan said IPL helps players come out of their comfort zone.

"It takes you out of your

comfort zone. It is completely beneficial to play in IPL. That was a big mindset shift for us. And I hope Indian cricket is alright with us because we are using it as a vehicle to try and grow players," he said.

— PTI

No.1 Barty says no to US Open

Sydney, July 30: World number one Ashleigh Barty pulled out of the US Open Thursday over "significant risks" from the Coronavirus pandemic in a major blow for the Grand Slam, which is scheduled to start in New York on August 31.

The Australian is the biggest name so far to withdraw from the tournament, with her decision coming as the United States marked a grim milestone when its Covid-19 deaths topped 150,000.

"My team and I have decided that we won't be travelling to the US for the Western and Southern Open and the US Open this year," she said in a statement to Australian media.

"I love both events so it was a difficult decision but there are still significant risks involved due to COVID-19 and I don't feel comfortable putting my team and I in that position."

"I wish the USTA all the best for the tournaments and look forward to being back in the US next year," she added.

Her decision came despite the New York area keeping Coronavirus cases

My team and I have decided that we won't be travelling to the US for the Western and Southern Open and the US Open this year. There are still significant risks involved due to Covid-19 and I don't feel comfortable putting my team and I in that position.

— ASHLEIGH BARTY

World No.1 tennis player on pulling out of US Open

at a relatively low level since spiking in March and April while areas such as Florida, Texas and California have become hotspots.

It was not unexpected from Barty, who last month expressed concerns about the US Open going ahead, and she won plenty of support Thursday on social media for her "sensible" decision to give it a miss.

Barty, who surged to the top of the rankings last year and has stayed there since, said she would continue to monitor the situation before deciding on participation. — AFP

FAN FRAME



K. Vaitheeswaran took this photo with Indian cricketer Dinesh Karthik at Surat Airport during the Mushtaq Ali domestic T20 tournament.

Had a dream fan kid moment with a sports personality? Whipped out your smartphone for a quick selfie with the star?

Send us your snaps with celebrities mentioning when and where they were taken, to sportsdesk@deccanmail.com.

Deccan Chronicle will publish your cherished pix.

4 MORE SHUTTLE EVENTS PUT OFF DUE TO COVID-19

New Delhi, July 30: The Covid-19 pandemic continued to take a toll on international badminton with the game's world governing body (BWF) on Wednesday cancelling four more tournaments, including the prestigious China Open and Japan Open, from its revamped 2020 calendar. The four tournaments cancelled are Taipei Open (September 1-6), Korea Open (September 8-13), China Open (September 15-20) and Japan Open (September 22-27).

"These decisions to cancel tournaments are made in the best interest of the health of the players, spectators, volunteers and Member Associations. We are deeply disappointed to have to cancel tournaments, but feel that the well-being of everyone involved is most important at this time," BWF Secretary General Thomas Lund said in a release.

"I would like to acknowledge the significant efforts made by our Member Associations in the regions throughout this process for their patience and commitment to the BWF. We share the disappointment of many around the world who were looking forward to the return of badminton ... as we continue to navigate the remainder of the 2020 season," Lund added. — PTI

Danish cries foul over Umar case

New Delhi, July 30: Former Pakistan spinner Danish Kaneria, who has been trying to get his life ban for spot-fixing lifted, on Thursday said PCB's decision to reduce Umar Akmal's suspension for failing to report corrupt approaches smacks of double standards.

The likes of Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Asif and Salman Butt, who too were found guilty of spot-fixing like Kaneria, have been allowed back into the PCB fold.

"You call it zero tolerance policy for corruption. Umar was proved guilty but still his ban has been halved. They showed compassion in his case. Amir, Asif, Salman too were allowed to come back, why leave me out?" he asked.

"Why don't they show the same compassion in my case? They say I talk about my religion (he is a Hindu) but what do I say when the

● **Former Pakistani spinner Kaneria calls out the Pakistan Cricket Board for reducing Umar Akmal's ban by half.**

discrimination is crystal clear. I am just going by simple logic," he said from Karachi.

Independent adjudicator Faqir Mohammad Khokhar stated in his order on Tuesday that the case against Akmal was proved to the hilt but he reduced the sentence from three years to 18 months out of compassion.

"Umar has been involved in controversy for the major part of his career due to disciplinary issues. If there is sympathy for him, where is the same sympathy for me? Did he bribe someone to get this done?" asked Kaneria.

— PTI