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TONIGHT THE #WAITISOVER

**HUNGARY vs FRANCE**
6:30PM

**PORTUGAL vs GERMANY**
9:30PM

**SPAIN vs POLAND**
12:30AM



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WEATHER

 **Max:** 30.8°C
Min: 24°C
RH: 58%
Rain: Trace

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Moderate rain.
Max/Min temp. 31/22°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Jyeshtha Shuddha Navami
till 6.40 pm
Star: Hasta till 8.23 pm
Varjyam: 5.32 am to 7.04 am;
3.50 am to 5.20 am (Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 5.46 am to
7.30 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Zeeqad 7,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.32 am
Zohar: 12.27 pm
Asar: 4.54 pm
Maghrib: 6.58 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.42 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.23 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.58 AM

COUNTER POINT



It's a game changer in the next polls... let's promise to remove the gap between two doses of vaccine!

SHORT TAKES

SC won't cancel medical PG exam

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to direct the medical universities to cancel or postpone the final year post-graduate exams on the ground that the examinee-doctors have been engaged in Covid-19 duty. A bench of Justices Indira Banerjee and M.R. Shah said it cannot pass any general order to all the universities to not conduct PG medical examination.

3 minor quakes hit Northeast

Guwahati: Three earthquakes, including one having over 4 magnitude, hit the Northeastern region in the early hours of Friday. Assam was jolted by a 4.1 magnitude quake at 2.04 am, according to a National Centre for Seismology report. The epicentre was Sonitpur district and the depth was 22 km.

LAW OF LAND

House Committee tells Twitter that law of land is supreme

Tharoor-led panel puts Twitter on notice

New Delhi, June 18: Amid a tussle between the Union government and Twitter over the new IT rules, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on IT on Friday told the US-based social media giant that the rule of the land was supreme and the company must abide by the Indian laws.

During a 90-minute deposition before the panel, chaired by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, the Twitter India officials were asked "tough and searching questions", including why the company should

Cabinet call on unlock today

State may opt for night curfew; likely to reshuffle top officials

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has convened an emergency meeting of state Cabinet on Saturday to discuss and take a decision on whether to lift lockdown entirely from June 20 or continue only night lockdown for a few more days. The ongoing lockdown from 6 pm to 6 am will end on Saturday and the state government has to take a decision on the future

CM TO BEGIN DISTRICTS VISIT TOMORROW

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao will be on a spree visiting districts from June 20 to get a feel

of the people's pulse and take stock of the implementation of his government's schemes at the grassroots level.

■ Full report on Page 2

course of action. Against this backdrop, the Cabinet will meet at 2 pm at Pragathi Bhavan. The meeting is also expected to discuss matters such as

rainfall, kharif crop, lifting of Godavari water through Kaleshwa-ram project, hydel power generation, among others. The Chief Minister held

a meeting with a few ministers at Pragathi Bhavan on Friday ahead of the Cabinet meeting. Ministers T. Harish Rao, V. Srinivas Goud, Mohd Mahmood Ali and Koppula Eashwar were present.

The meeting triggered speculations that the CM discussed effecting a major reshuffle of IAS and IPS officers soon in the state, which has been pending for long.

■ Page 2: CM wants to streamline bureaucracy



'FLYING SIKH' MILKHA SINGH DIES OF COVID

Chandigarh, June 18: Indian sprint legend Milkha Singh died on Friday after a month-long battle with Covid, during which he lost his former national volleyball captain wife Nirmal Kaur to the same virus.

The Padma Shri awardee was 91 and is survived by his golfer son Jeev Milkha Singh and three daughters.

"He breathed his last at 11.30 pm," a family spokesperson said. His condition turned critical this evening as he developed complications and passed away. — PTI

MAN DISPLACED BY PROJECT SETS HIMSELF ON FIRE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Tension prevailed at Vemulaghat village in Medak district on Friday after Malla Reddy, a 70-year-old farmer displaced by the Mallanna-sagar project ended his life by jumping into a burning pyre. He formed the pyre from pieces of old wood taken from his demolished house.

The Opposition parties and locals alleged that the government failed to pay him compensation after demolishing his house for the project.

■ Full report on Page 2

Thanksgiving visit



Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana being accorded traditional temple welcome on his maiden visit to the Srisailem temple after taking over as the CJI on Friday. The CJI and his wife offered prayers at the ancient Shivaite shrine. — DC

Mamata links HC judge to BJP, seeks transfer of case

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, JUNE 18

A major controversy has hit Justice Kausik Chanda of the Calcutta High Court as West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress on Friday linked the judge to the BJP after he scheduled chief minister Mamata Banerjee's election petition, challenging her defeat to the leader of the opposition. Suwendu Adhikari at Nandigram in the Assembly polls, for hearing after a week.

In a letter to the secretary of the Acting Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's counsel Sanjay Basu sought reassignment of her petition chal-

lenging the election of BJP's Suwendu Adhikari from Nandigram, to another bench. The counsel claimed Justice Kausik Chanda, who is hearing her plea, was "an active member of the BJP" and asked the High Court Chief Justice to assign her case to another judge.

lenging the election of BJP's Suwendu Adhikari from Nandigram, to another bench.

The counsel claimed Justice Kausik Chanda, who is hearing her plea, was "an active member of the BJP". Since the adjudication of the election petition will have political ramifications, the counsel prayed that the matter be assigned to

another judge by the Acting Chief Justice, who is the master of the roster.

The CM's lawyer also stated in the letter that Banerjee "had objected to the confirmation of the Hon'ble Judge as a Permanent Judge of the Hon'ble High Court at Calcutta" and as such, apprehends there is a likelihood of bias on the part of the judge concerned.

Earlier in the day when the plea was listed for mentioning before Justice Chanda, the judge observed the petitioner's presence as mandatory during the hearing in such a case. When the CM's lawyer assured the judge of abiding by the law, the judge then fixed June 24 as the date of hearing.

SC will scrutinise Delhi HC remarks

Bars using HC remarks on UAPA as precedent

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to interfere with the Delhi High Court order granting bail to three student activists — Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal and Asif Iqbal Tanha — but said the High Court judgment will neither be treated as a precedent in any court in the country in all matters relating to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, nor will it be relied on by the parties.

A bench comprising Justices Hemant Gupta and V. Ramasubramanian expressed surprise over the 100-page order in a bail matter by the High Court and said: "The issue is important and has pan-India ramifications. We want to decide it for the good of the country." The bench said that this will require interpretation by the Supreme Court.

Justice Gupta said this soon after solicitor general Tushar Mehta referred to parts of the High Court judgment contending that the bail order "turns on its head the entire Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act along with the Constitution".

Telling the court to let the three accused remain out

● **SOLICITOR GENERAL** Tushar Mehta referred to parts of the High Court judgment contending that the bail order "turns on its head the entire Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act along with the Constitution".

on bail, Mehta said in "the interim the impact of judgment is stayed without affecting the bail granted to the accused".

Senior counsel Kapil Sibal, appearing for the student activists, opposed Mehta's plea for a stay of the High Court judgment. He added that if the Solicitor General has "much to say", on issues relating to the UAPA, then they (the students) too "have a lot to say".

Mehta noted that the HC judgment, which made a distinction between the charges levelled against three student activists and an act of terror, had said: "In our opinion, the intent and purport of Parliament in enacting the UAPA, and more specifically in amending it in 2004 and 2008 to bring terrorist activity within its scope, was, and could only have had been, to deal with matters of profound impact on the 'defence of India'. Nothing

more and nothing less."

The Solicitor General also took exception to a paragraph of the High Court judgment which read: "We are constrained to express, that it seems, that in its anxiety to suppress dissent, in the mind of the State, the line between the constitutionally guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity seems to be getting somewhat blurred. If this mindset gains traction, democracy would be in peril."

In its bail order, the High Court had noted that the prosecution has only made inferences about the three activists, using "hyperbolic verbiage".

"Allegations relating to inflammatory speeches, organising of chakka jam, instigating women to protest and to stockpile various articles and other similar allegations, in our view, at worst, are evidence that the appellant participated in organising protests, but we can discern no specific or particularised allegation, much less any material to bear out the allegation, that the appellant incited violence, what to talk of committing a terrorist act or a conspiracy or act preparatory to the commission of a terrorist act as understood in the UAPA," the High Court had said.

PM launches crash course to upskill 1L Covid warriors

New Delhi, June 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday launched a customised crash course programme that aims to skill and upskill over one lakh "Covid warriors" across the country, and said that the nation needs to stay prepared as the danger of Coronavirus and possibility of its mutation remain present.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the second wave of the pandemic has highlighted the challenges the virus can throw up, and the training of more than one lakh frontline warriors is a step in that direction. "We have to further enhance the preparedness of the country to meet the challenges ahead," Modi asserted.

He also said the central government is committed to providing Covid vaccination free to everyone, starting June 21.

With the country witnessing shortage of medical oxygen during the recent surge in Covid cases, the prime

minister said work is underway on a war footing to establish over 1,500 oxygen plants, with efforts to reach every district.

The customised crash course training will be imparted to people in six customised job roles, namely home care support, basic care support, advanced care support, emergency care support, sample collection support, and medical equipment support.

The course, launched from 111 centres across 26 states, has been designed by top experts, Modi said, adding that the Corona period has proved the importance of skill, re-skill and up-skill.

It is a special programme under the central component of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 3.0, with total financial outlay of ₹276 crore, the PMO said.

The programme will create skilled non-medical healthcare workers to fill the present and future needs of manpower in the health sector, it said. — PTI

CENTRE MAY TALK TO J&K PARTIES ON JUNE 24

New Delhi, June 18: The Centre is likely to hold a meeting with all regional parties in Jammu and Kashmir on June 24 as part of its initiatives to bolster political processes, including holding assembly elections, in the union territory, officials said here on Friday.

The meeting is likely to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other central leaders.

The central leadership has begun the process of inviting National Conference (NC) chief Farooq Abdullah, PDP chairperson Mehbooba Mufti, Altaf Bukhari of the Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP), and People's Conference head Sajjad Lone for discussions, the officials said.

Mehbooba said she had received a call from the Centre for a meeting on June 24. "I am yet to take a decision. I will discuss with my party members and take a call." — PTI

BSY will stay as CM: BJP

Bengaluru, June 18: Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Friday ruled out any political crisis, even as the rumblings within the ruling BJP have come out in the open during the visit of its national general secretary in-charge of the state Arun Singh, amid speculations in some quarters about his replacement.

The Chief Minister said that the BJP high command will decide on action against party MLC A.H. Vishwanath for his recent

"open statements," and rubbished as "baseless" his allegations against his younger son and the party's vice-president B.Y. Vijayendra of interference in administration and "kickbacks" in an irrigation project.

"There is no political crisis at all," the CM said.

Though Singh, who had earlier ruled out leadership change, did not make any direct comments on the issue, he is said to have made it clear at the

Karnataka BJP core committee meeting that Yediyurappa will continue as the Chief Minister.

Signifying that things in his favour, Yediyurappa, who did not make any comments on what transpired at the meeting on the leadership issue, flashed the victory sign as he left.

"The leadership issue was not discussed... Yediyurappa is our leader," said minister and core committee member R. Ashoka. — PTI

IN BRIEF

KTR to inaugurate 2BHKs next week

Hyderabad: Minister K. T. Rama Rao will inaugurate double bedroom houses for poor at six locations in the GHMC area from June 26 to July 4. He will declare open 330 dwelling units at Ambedkarnagar, which is on the banks of the Hussainsagar, 130 units at Potti Sriramulu Nagar in Secunderabad, 155 units at G.Y. Reddy Compound in Musheerabad, 10 units at Golla Komariah Colony in Secunderabad and some more in two other locations.

CM WANTS TO STREAMLINE BUREAUCRACY

FROM PAGE 1

The last major reshuffle of IAS officers was undertaken in February 2020, when 50 IAS officers at all levels including district collectors were transferred.

Similarly, the major reshuffle of IAS officers was undertaken three years ago in August 2018.

Most of the key departments have no full-time IAS officers and are handled by in-charge officials. The government is planning to streamline administration by removing in-charges and appointing full-time officials for key departments.

Several IPS officers though promoted in 2019 were still working in old positions and the government wants to give them suitable postings. A few districts have no full-time SPs. Those working for over four years in the same places are likely to be transferred.

DOCS STAGE STIR AGAINST ATTACKS ON THEM IN NIRMAL**DC CORRESPONDENT**
ADILABAD, JUNE 18

The doctors belonging to Nirmal branch of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) staged a protest against the attacks on doctors and raised slogans demanding the state and central government to take miscreants indulging in attacks on doctors without any reason in the Nirmal town on Friday.

The protests were in response to the call given by the nationwide protests.

Doctors have stopped the services to the outpatients and they gathered at one place in the town.

A team of doctors led by IMA state council member Dr Chakradhari, Nirmal IMA president Dr Ramkrishna and Nirmal Physicians president Dr Damera Ramulu and NDA president Dr Subhash submitted a memorandum to the collector Musharaf Ali Farooqui and SP Praveen and appealed them to take appropriate action against miscreants who attacks the doctors for their selfish motives.

Senior doctors Dr Swarna Reddy, Dr P. Santosh, Dr Krishna Mohan Mahipal, Dr Krishnam Raju, Dr Pramod Chandra Reddy, Dr Ch. Ravi, Dr Srinivas and government doctors association president Dr Rajender and leader Dr Vijay Reddy and other were present.

CBSE assessment bid gets mixed response

Students worry grading plan will hit overall result**HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC**
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

The CBSE assessment formula for Class XII results received mixed reaction from students. Most of them expressed concerns over the grading plan affecting their overall final result.

Laveena, an outgoing Class XII student in a private school said if the exams had taken place this year, the result would have been different for most students, and that their performance especially in Grade 11 exams could be the reason behind varying results of most deserving students.

Similar thoughts were echoed by students who said if they did not put in effort for the internal Class 11 exams, a 30 per cent weightage could affect the total marks.

"I don't think it will affect me personally because my higher education course doesn't require a certain number to be able to pursue a career. But for most students who are going to submit their marksheets under a cut-off criteria, it could result in a difficult situation," Manan, another student, said.

K. Srilatha, principal at the Global Indian International School, Uppal campus, also

said the finalised evaluation system would be useful to students only if the universities and colleges changed their admission process for this academic year in accordance with the evaluation pattern followed in Grade XII.

"As the pandemic is global, universities and colleges should strategise a comprehensive policy that no student is met with injustice in admission. The policy should be in such a way that it balances between rural and urban students. Also, the government and private universities and colleges must enhance seats for this academic year due to

pandemic to meet the increased pass percentage," she added.

The CBSE on Thursday announced the formula for assessment, after an approval from the SC for Class 12 results.

The results will be based on the student's past academic performance of Class 10, 11 and pre boards, and will be constituted in a ratio of 30: 30: 40 (X, XI, and pre-boards) formula. This means about 40 per cent of the weightage will be given to Class 12 pre-boards, and in the rest of the 60 per cent, 30 per cent will be based on class 11 final exams and 10th exams, respectively.

Covid no.s fluctuate in districts

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Continued recording of Covid-19 cases, though in single digits, across districts meant the spread of the virus is continuing. The numbers are not touching zero past the second wave.

Adilabad, Nirmal, Kamareddy, Komaram Bheem-Asifabad and Narayanpet continue to report such cases. If the figure is low one day, the next day could see a slight increase. Epidemiologists say the virus is taking advantage of errant human behaviour. As Delta variants are highly transmissible, this scenario would continue for more

Update: Cases Deaths	
Fresh Cases	1,417
Deaths	12
Tests Done	1,24,430
Active Cases	19,029
Total Cases	6,10,834
Total Deaths	3,546
Highest New Cases	Lowest New Cases
GHMC (Hyderabad)	149
Ranga Reddy	104
Khammam	93
Nalgonda	88
Suryapet	85
Nirmal	2
Adilabad and Komarambheem, Asifabad	6
Kamareddy	7
Narayanpet	8
Nizamabad	10

time.

Due to agriculture activity in rural areas, small gatherings are usual for work. This helps in easy transmission of the virus.

Experts say different strategies must be in place to deal with the virus scene in districts that have single digit cases. Equipping and reskilling of ASHA

and Anganwadi workers are required as they are the point of contact at the grassroots level to give a clear picture to the authorities about the existing situation.

With more than one lakh tests being carried out by the state every day, the surveillance is expected to improve. There is hope that the testing will continue after the unlocking too.

Testing, tracking and tracing will help the state to prepare better for the third wave and that will give an indication as to which all districts require additional resources from the government to effectively handle the situation.

KCR to embark on first multi-dist tour

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao will be on a spree visiting districts from June 20 to get a feel of the people's pulse and take stock of implementation of his government's schemes at the grassroots level besides launching a slew of development programmes.

The CM's hectic schedule is being loaded with surprise visits and scheduled tours to various villages and towns with an aim to bring the state administration closer to the people at a time the TRS is facing some odds.

The CM's districts' tour plans have kept the state administration on its toes, with public representatives of local bodies and officials rushing to complete long-pending works. The CM had recently warned them of action against those found slack in discharging their duties and said they could even face suspension or on-the-spot dismissal from service. Notably, this will be the CM's first-ever full-fledged tour of districts since he took office seven years ago, and would inspect the implementation of the welfare schemes and development programmes at the grass-root level and interact with people directly. On Friday, the CM spoke over the phone to Pogula Anjaiah, sarpanch of Vasalamarri village in Turkapalli mandal of Bhongir district and told him that he will be at the village on June 22.

The CM said he will have lunch

with the villagers and spend a full day with them to discuss and devise village development plans. The CM has asked him to identify two suitable land parcels to have community lunch and meet villagers. KCR had announced he would adopt this village and develop it in November 2020 but could not visit the area so far. The CM's district tours will begin with Siddipet on June 20, where he will inaugurate the new integrated collectorate complex.

Later he will take up surprise inspections in a few villages and towns in Siddipet and Kamareddy districts. On June 21, the CM will visit Warangal and lay the foundation for a 24-storied government multi-specialty hospital. Though the CM had promised a tour of all the districts at his very start of the first term, this never materialised.

Except for visiting districts to launch a few welfare schemes and development programmes and inaugurate completed projects, the CM did not tour districts to interact with the people directly and seek their feedback on the performance of the government.

In his second term as CM from 2018, Chandrashekar Rao had promised to show what 'real administration' meant to people. In July 2019, he made a statement in the Assembly that he will visit all the districts after August 15, by taking the entire official machinery with him and resolve issues of people on the spot. This too did not happen due to successive elections and outbreak of Covid-19.

Stop land sale or face protests: Oppn

Hyderabad: Leaders from the Congress and BJP slammed the state government's move to sell government land parcels and assets in order to raise funds. In separate statements issued on Friday, AICC spokesperson Dasoju Sravan Kumar and BJP leader Vijayashanthi warned of agitation if the government did not shelve the proposal immediately. They said they would block the auction process. Dr Sravan refuted the allegations levelled by ministers T. Harish

Rao and K.T. Rama Rao that Congress governments had sold thousands of acres of land. He reminded them that on the contrary, the N. Kiran Kumar Reddy-led government had tried to protect such lands by issuing GO 571 in 2012 by formulating guidelines besides taking a decision to reclaim land from the beneficiaries who were not using the land allotted to them for the prescribed purpose. "There is a big conspiracy behind the government's move

to sell the lands. However, it is clear that the government led by CM K. Chandrashekar Rao is trying to 'benefit' industrialists who were helping them," Dr Shrivani said and added that the TRS government had adopted GO 571 issued in 2012 and issued a new GO 61 on May 15, 2015 on the land allotment policy. "But the very same government, which adopted GO 571, is violating its guidelines. It exposes the dual standards of the TRS," he said.

IMA angry over attacks on docs, holds protests

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

Senior doctors of Indian Medical Association and other medical professionals protested against the violence against doctors during Covid-19 pandemic on Friday.

They said that the doctors were blamed for no fault of theirs. The protesting doctors wore black badges, black shirts and black masks to protest the violence against them.

They protested for a few minutes in hospitals, out-patient departments and at the IMA building in Koti and gave a representation to DGP Mahendar Reddy.

Dr Lav Kumar Reddy, president, IMA, TS chapter, said, "Attacks on doctors must be a non-bailable offence. Covid-19 is a new disease which is evolving and



Doctors hold protest at the Gandhi Hospital in Hyderabad on Friday.

— P. SURENDRA

blaming doctors does not help. Doctors died in both the first and second waves and some of them succumbed while treating patients."

In a meeting with various dignitaries from the non-medical sector, it was noted that there were attacks also by educated people on doctors. There were also planned attacks as was noted in a recent case in Hyderabad where a doctor was blamed for the

critical status of the patient. It was pointed out that this kind of behaviour was unacceptable and there must be strict rules which would deter people from taking these steps.

Members of the medical and non-medical fraternity urged the government to take action to protect doctors and to ensure that emergency wards have a security mechanism in place for their protection.

STAY MEDICAL COUNCIL POLLS, ORDERS TS HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

The Telangana High Court has extended the stay on conducting elections to the executive committee of TS Medical Council as the state government failed to explain the rationale behind dropping down the number of elected representatives from 13 to five, but not reducing the number of nominated seats from six.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijayen Reddy was dealing with a petition filed by Dr.B. Arundati and others, who challenged the GO issued reducing the elected representatives in the council. On April 27, while issuing stay orders on ensuing elections, the court asked the government how it would defend the continuation of the same number of seats in the nominated quota. At that time, the government submitted that it had reduced the elected quota because the seats were decided in the United Andhra Pradesh Medical Council, which had approximately 97,000 registered doctors.

Now, in Telangana State Medical Council, there were only around 17,000 doctors registered so far. On that ground, it had a reason to reduce the members in the elected quota, the government explained.

But the government failed in not reducing the number of representatives in the nominated quota as per the ratio. As per the ratio, there should be only two representatives under nominated quota, when the elected quota is reduced to five members.

The court had already expressed apprehensions that the government wanted to interfere in the affairs of the professional body, by appointing six nominated representatives of its choice, who automatically dominate the council.

On fresh hearing, the court did not find valid ground on the government's contentions in keeping the nominated representatives to six. The bench cautioned it would direct to decrease the nominated members if the government did not reduce it proportionally.

CJI recalls ties with Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JUNE 18

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, who visited Sri B h r a m a r a m b a Mallikharjuna Swamy temple at Srisailem on Friday, the first time after elevation, became nostalgic and said that he had been enjoying the pristine beauty and tastes of the homeland for the past five days.

The CJI was accorded a guard of honour by the state police and welcomed with Purna Kumbham and other temple honours. The CJI, recounting his affinity with Kurnool district, said he was mentored by legal stalwart E. Ayyapu Reddy with whom he worked as a junior advocate for 10 years. Speaking of his elevation to the highest judicial

office in the country, he said it was the good wishes and blessings of his seniors and their family members that made him work his way to the apex position in justice administration.

Justice Ramana said the Srisailem temple visit is a permanent fixture in his calendar as he has been visiting the shrine at least two to three times every year ever since he was a youth. He said Srisailem holds a special place in his life and career. A local priest said Justice Ramana performed special prayers before his elevation as the CJI and that he knew the temple priests by name.

State endowment minister Vellampalli Sreenivas, district collector G. Veera Pandian, district judge Radha Krishna

Krupasagar, superintendent of police K. Fakeerappa, temple executive officer K.S. Rama Rao, Nandyal MP Pocha Brahmananda Reddy, Srisailem MLA Chakrapani Reddy officially received the CJI couple with temple honours.

Later, the CJI couple performed special rituals at both Sri Mallikharjuna and Sri Bhramarambha Devi temples. They also visited Gathamatham renovation works and observed ancient plate inscriptions which were found during the recent excavation works. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) department Mysore unit director Muniratnam Reddy explained the history of the recent find and inscriptions on the plates.

Chennai lions catch delta variant

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, JUNE 18

In the first such case, at least four lions at the Arignar Anna Zoological Park (zoo) at Vandalur, near Chennai, were found carrying the high infectious delta variant, that dominated the second wave of the pandemic in India and elsewhere, causing concern among zoo officials.

Of the 11 lions in the zoo, nine had tested positive for Covid-19 earlier this month. Of these, two died of the disease and the rest are undergoing treatment.

Zoo director Debasish Jana told *Deccan Chronicle* on Friday that the 11 infected lions were housed in two sectors of the zoo; some in the safari park and the others in the display enclosure. "The two areas are at least a kilometre apart," Jana said. He said the samples from the lions were sent to the National Institute of High-Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD), Bhopal, in the last week of May in two batches. NIH-



A technician collects a nasal swab from a male Asiatic lion in a 'squeeze cage' at the Vandalur Zoo in Chennai.

— ARIGNAR ANNA ZOOLOGICAL PARK

SAD conducts research on exotic and emerging pathogens of animals in the country.

"We were not lucky, two of our lions have died from Covid-19. The other zoos in India, the Nehru Zoological Park, and the ones at Jaipur in Rajasthan and Etawah in Madhya Pradesh are lucky. They did not have any fatalities among their lions that caught Covid-19," Jana said.

Jana added: "This delta variant that Bhopal has found perhaps explains to

● **ANALYSES OF** genome sequencing of four of the samples taken from the lions showed that all of them belonged to the pangolin lineage B.1.617.2 and are delta variants as per WHO nomenclature.

— Director, National Institute of High-Security Animal Diseases, Bhopal

some extent what the animals were fighting against. The other zoos may have

had other Coronavirus variants, and their lions recovered from the brink. Here, two have died. Very sad."

He said the zoo's veterinarians have been working hard to treat and care for the lions. "Some of them have lost members of their families in these past few weeks but they did not go home. Instead, they stayed put at the zoo to look after the lions. Based on the experiences of the other zoos, our vets have been giving their best," he said. "It is clear that it was an asymptomatic person that was the cause of the infection. And there is a long chain. Captive animals have to be practically spoon-fed. From the time the meat leaves the supplier and it goes to the animals, it passes through various hands. It is not a foolproof system but the entire staff at the Vandalur zoo has been vaccinated against Covid19. Every day, basic temperature and symptom checks are conducted," Jana said.



SHORT TAKES

LEFT PARTIES TO LAUNCH STIR FROM TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JUNE 18

The Left parties-CPI-CPM and CPI (ML) New Democracy chalked out agitation from June 19 to 30 in protest against anti-people policies being implemented by state and Central governments.

CPI district secretary Potu Prasad, CPM district secretary Nunna Nageswara Rao and New Democracy district secretary A. Venkateswarlu explained the details of the stir. The activists of left parties will organise a rally followed by dharna in Khammam on June 19.

The left workers and people will stage protests before central government offices on June 24 and human chain at Ambedkar Circle on June 26. The parties will organize a collectorate muttadi programme on June 30.

CPM leader Nunna Nageswara Rao said that both the state and central governments failed in protecting the people from Covid-19. He said that the Central government did not take the vaccination programme as seriously and it changed its policies on prices of the vaccine in private hospitals.

CPI leader P. Prasad said that the idea of selling the government lands in Telangana is a bad one and it should take back the decision.

He said that the government should explain why the debts of the state touched to ₹4 lakh crore when Chief Minister claimed several times that Telangana is a rich state.

● **CPM LEADER** Nunna Nageswara Rao said that both the state and central governments failed in protecting the people from Covid-19. He said that the Central government did not take the vaccination programme as seriously and it changed its policies on prices of the vaccine in private hospitals.

ABVP: EXEMPT STUDENTS FROM PAYING SEM. FEE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, JUNE 18

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Friday demanded officials of Satavahana University to exempt students from paying biometric fees for the first semester as the university did not conduct any physical classes following the second wave of coronavirus.

ABVP district convenor, Naitham Mahesh, alleged that with the rapid spread of Coronavirus, parents of many students are facing hardships without any livelihood or are not getting salaries.

In this difficult situation they are not in a position to pay fees. He ridiculed that rather than giving fee exemption, varsity officials issued examination timetables in which they asked students to pay not only examination fees but also biometric fees.

In the absence of offline classes, how could students give biometric attendance, he wondered.

Later, ABVP city secretary Malial Rakesh, zonal in-charge Sai Charan and Sharath met the university registrar Bharath and submitted a memorandum to him.

PROMPT RELIEF Officials ordered to complete procurement in 2 days

Govt to buy entire paddy crop

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JUNE 18:

State Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and Rural Water Supply minister Errabelli Dayakarao said strict action should be taken against any negligence in the procurement of grain.

The minister on Friday inspected a grain procurement centre set up at Ramavaram village in Kodavandla mandal of Jangaon district and enquired about the procurement process from farmers. On the occasion, the Minister said that action has been ordered against the millers who

● **THE MINISTER** said Telangana was the only state to provide adequate gunny bags for grain procurement and pay the minimum support price for paddy like nowhere else in the country. He said that Telangana was the number one state in the country in terms of grain production.

are causing trouble to the farmers. The minister expressed dissatisfaction over the non-completion of grain procurement, though the government has already ordered officials to buy every grain brought by the farmers as the monsoon season begins.

The district collector has been directed to take action against the millers, who are causing trouble to the farmers in procuring

grain soaked by the recent rains. Authorities were ordered to complete the procurement of grain within two days.

“The government is working to buy all the grain from the farmers and the farmers need not worry. The state has procured a record 90 lakh metric tonnes of grain in excess of the target during the Rabi season. We are depositing cash in the farmers’ account within

three days,” he said.

The minister said Telangana was the only state to provide adequate gunny bags for grain procurement and pay the minimum support price for paddy like nowhere else in the country. He said that Telangana was the number one state in the country in terms of grain production and that this was possible only with the construction of irrigation projects by CM KCR.

He alleged that the state government was ready to collect the produce of the farmers and that the BJP government at the Center was not cooperating with the state.

Rivulets in spate, cut off many interior villages

Villagers have been urging govt to construct bridges

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JUNE 18

People from several interior villages are virtually cut-off from the world for quite some days now.

The villages have been disconnected from the outer world ever since streams and rivulets started overflowing with rainwater and put road connectivity in disarray.

Pregnant women and elderly people, suffering from seasonal diseases, are unable to move to hospitals and clinics because road connectivity has been disrupted. The most affected are Chinthakarra, Kishan Naik Thanda, Loddiguda and Thatiguda because of heavy rains in Komaram Bheem district's Jainoor mandal. A similar trauma is being faced by people in Chithabatta village in Indravelli mandal of Adilabad district.

Villagers from Kishan Naik Thanda were put to ordeal while crossing the swelling rivulet to reach their village after working in the fields on Friday.



The villagers of Kishan Naik Thanda wading through swirling waters following heavy rains, in Jainoor mandal in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district on Friday

The villagers have been demanding officials to construct a bridge on the rivulet to improve road connectivity to the surrounding villages like Chinthakarra, Kishan Naik Thanda, Loddiguda and Tatiguda.

The problems are more in places where there are low-lying bridges as rainwater is flowing over them. A pregnant woman Manisha Pawar of

Kishan Naik Thanda fell sick due to bad weather conditions. She and her family members had to walk through the rough terrain in the forest and hill region to reach Jainoor PHC for treatment. Also affected by the overflowing streams and rivulets were Narnoor, Gadiguda, Tiryan, Kerameri, Indravelli, Adilabad, Bejjur, Penchikalpet, Sirikonda,

Chinthalamanepalli and Sirpur (T) and many other mandals in old Adilabad district.

In some places, construction of high-level bridges replacing low-level bridges is going on in Adilabad Rural mandal.

Adilabad MLA Jogu Ramanna took a serious note of the hardships faced by the villagers and got approval for high-level bridges in some places.

‘Gulf companies denying salaries to migrants’

PILLALAMARRI
SRINIVAS | DC
ADILABAD, JUNE 18

Many Gulf-based companies are not paying salaries to their workers under the pretext of Covid-19 compulsions.

Several workers from Telangana employed in the Middle East had returned to their native villages because of coronavirus and absence of livel-

hood. Leaders from Pravasi Mitra Labour Union (PMLU) condemned the non-payment of salaries to the migrant workers and termed it as ‘wage-theft’.

PMLU is fighting for the legal rights of migrant Gulf workers of Telangana with their ‘Justice for Wage Theft’ campaign. It is creating awareness among Gulf returnees

about their legal rights and are preparing for a legal battle to get them their salaries.

Union leader Swadesh Parikipandla alleged that many Gulf companies were indulging in such a sordid evasion and had not paid workers their salary dues and other service benefits like gratuity. He said they have conducted an awareness programme

for repatriated migrant workers at Uttoor in Adilabad, Buggaram in Jagtial and Mothe in Nizamabad and Gudum village in Sircilla districts on Friday.

₹₹We are preparing for a legal battle in foreign labour courts in collaboration with the Indian Embassies abroad and international organisations”, said Shashimala Kommu.

CM not keeping promise on Vemulawada temple: Cong.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, JUNE 18

Even six years after a promise made by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao about sanctioning of ₹100 crore for development of the famous Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy temple, there is no further word on it, the state Congress general secretary and Vemulawada Congress party in-charge, Adi Srinivas said on Friday.

Addressing the media at the footsteps of the Vemulawada temple in Rajanna Sircilla district, Srinivas alleged that the Chief Minister did not sanction even a single rupee for development of the temple. What the faithful saw were colourful brochures distributed by TRS men.

During his visit to the temple, he said, KCR had promised that he would release ₹100 crore every year



Adi Srinivas

for development of the temple and the temple town, Vemulawada.

Yet, the temple and the town however remained the same as they were before the formation of the Telangana State. The temple entrance, queue lines and the guest rooms retain the old look.

With the absence of a local MLA for the past 18 months, the development is lagging behind, the Congress leader said.

“The TRS leaders did nothing for the development of the temple. The only thing they

did is they filled the tank adjacent to the temple and stopped drinking water supply to the people in temple town, he alleged.

The Congress leader said KCR had even promised the oustees of 12 villages that each family will be given a compensation of Rs5.04 lakh along with allotment of double bedroom houses. He did not keep that promise too and betrayed the people of 12 villages who are living in miserable conditions, he said.

Srinivas urged the TRS government to fulfill the promise of giving a compensation to the oustees of the 12 villages and take up developmental works of the temple soon. Congress leaders Sangha Swamy, Srinivas, Arun Teja, Rakesh, Srinivas, Krishna, Bhumes, Mallesh, Sabeer, Prakash, Raju and Shankar were among those present.

IRRIGATION PROJECTS OF TRS ARE OF NO USE: PONNALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JUNE 18

Former union minister Ponnala Lakshmaiah said that irrigation in the state is benefitting from the projects built during the Congress rule and the renamed projects brought by the TRS government were of no use at all.

In a statement, Ponnala Lakshmaiah said not even a single acre is being irrigated under the four new projects (Kaleshwaram, Palamuru, Ranga Reddy, Sitarama LIS, thupakula gudum barrage) taken up by Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao even though the total amount spent in the past six years (as of March 31, 2020) on these projects amounts to ₹76,764.80 crores against a total expenditure of ₹97,336.16 crores on all Telangana Projects.

All the old projects are covering the land from SRSP to Nagarjunasagar. Irrigation is being provided under projects constructed during the Congress regime alone.

The Irrigation Department has announced that 41 lakh acres are being irrigated under the old projects.

The Kaleshwaram project is being useful only to bring commissions to KCR and not irrigate the land, Ponnala alleged.

● **ALL THE** old projects are covering the land from SRSP to Nagarjunasagar. Irrigation is being provided under projects constructed during the Congress regime alone.

MLC RAGHOTHAM HAILS 30% FITMENT TO KGBV TEACHERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, JUNE 18

MLC Kura Raghotham Reddy welcomed the state government's decision to provide 30 per cent fitment to teachers working in Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) and assured them of resolving various issues they are facing.

A meeting was held with the teachers of KGBV of united Karimnagar district under the Telangana State KGBV Employees Welfare Association (TS-KGBV-EWA) here at the Press Bhavan in Karimnagar on Friday.

Speaking at the meeting, Raghotham Reddy said around 9,000 teachers working in about 475 KGBV schools were going to avail 30 per cent fitment benefit with the announcement made by the state government. They can also avail 180 days leave under maternity holidays.

The state president of the TS-KGBV-EWA, Srilatha, speaking on the occasion, said the KGBV teachers across the state were working without proper facilities required for the staff and they were facing several problems.

Apart from that, there was no job security for teachers working in KGBVs, she pointed out.

She requested the MLC for the implementation of time scale to the teachers working in KGBVs and to provide job security along with basic facilities to the teachers.

Responding positively to her request, Raghotham Reddy assured the teachers of resolving various issues they were facing after having discussions with the government.

Progressive Recognised Teachers Union district president P. Adharshan Reddy, general secretary M Tirupathi Reddy, vice president M Swapna, P Vasantha and Srinivas were among those who were present.

KU Prof gets fellowship of Royal Asiatic Society

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, JUNE 18

Professor B. Suresh Lal of Kakatiya University received the prestigious Fellowship of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain. Its president professor AJ Stockwell communicated this information to the university.

Suresh Lal is currently working as Professor, Head and Chair of the Department of Economics, Kakatiya University, Warangal. He has 25 years of teaching and research experience. Prof Lal is a reputed scholar on Environmental Health Economics, Development Economics and Agricultural Economics. He is serving as editor to the International Journal of Environment & Development.

He has to his credit authored and edited 20 books and 121 articles in international peer-reviewed journals and conferences. He completed five research projects, guided 15 PhD and M



TSRTC earned ₹46 cr through cargo services in one year, says Min.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, JUNE 18

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) shipped 32 lakh parcels during the past one year through its cargo services. The corporation earned ₹34 crore through regular parcels and another ₹12 crore through cargo buses.

Minister for transport P Ajay Kumar said that the RTC commenced its cargo services on June 19 last year and it witnessed good progress in one year. The cargo services were started on the directions of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao, he said.

The RTC had a memorandum of understanding with 810 transport agencies in shipping the goods, which are being transported from 177 bus stations in Telangana. “The RTC gained the confidence of people in a short time. The transport charges are affordable when compared to other transport companies,” he said.

RTC is doing home delivery services only in some areas in Hyderabad and it is planned to extend the service to all towns in the state. Ajay Kumar said the government corporations and departments like foods, horticulture, board of interme-

● **AJAY SAID** the RTC personnel, drivers and conductors were real leaders and they were working hard in increasing the income of the corporation

diated education, text books, trade promotion corporation, civil supplies, fertilizers and health were transporting their goods through RTC cargo.

Private companies like Bisleri, Heritage, Vasu Pharmaceuticals, Divya Pharmaceuticals, Swamy and Sons and others have chosen RTC cargo services to transport their products. “We are planning to expand the cargo business by next year. For it, all depot managers were asked to improve cargo business by identifying potential companies within its limits,” he said.

Ajay said the RTC personnel, drivers and conductors were real leaders and they were working hard in increasing the income of the corporation. It was time to set right the financial condition of the corporation and every employee should work for it, he said, adding that commuters could also extend their assistance by travelling in RTC buses and using its cargo services.

MOTHER, DAUGHTER FOUND DEAD

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, JUNE 18

A woman and her daughter were found murdered at their home in Brundavan Colony in Sunnambattiwada in Mancherial town on Friday. They were identified as Vijaya Laxmi, 47, and daughter Raveena, 23, said the police.

Both of them were strangled by unidentified assailants and it was suspected family disputes led to their murder, according to sources.

Local police visited the house and made preliminary investigations. It is learnt that Raveena was living with her mother after differences cropped up with her husband.

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SHORT TAKES

17 CHILDREN DIE OF COVID-19 IN MEGHALAYA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OWNER OF ‘BABA KA DHABA’ ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

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

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

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

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

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

The video was shot and uploaded by YouTuber Gaurav Wasan.

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

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

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

Light of hope



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

— PTI

Cong. MLA in Assam quits party, to join BJP

Says Rahul Gandhi is unable to shoulder the responsibility

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maken: Pilot is an asset and a star campaigner

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

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

has been out of Delhi for the last 10 days.

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

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

He added they were talking to everyone.

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

Mariani constituency since 2006. I have now realised that the party leadership doesn’t hear the voice of the small community and party workers,” said Kurmi while justifying his decision to switch over to BJP.

He said that the party also ignored his advice against any tie-up with the AIUDF and paid for it in the April-May election in Assam, in which the BJP was re-elected. “Rahul Gandhi’s decision to ally with AIUDF was a blunder and I had opposed it tooth and nail. The Congress is governed by a few senior leaders and there is no chance for the youth in the party, neither at the Centre nor in state,” he said.

“In these days I felt like

the Congress does not want the youth to grow. It does not want to promote young leaders from backward classes like tea garden workers or tribals, so I decided that I will quit the Congress,” he said.

The Congress leader warned that a few more MLAs are planning to leave the Grand Old Party. “I was the only MLA representing the Congress in the tea community. My departure shall leave a huge void in the party as far as tea votes are concerned,” he said, adding, “I did a lot for Congress, even slit my palms to draw the attention of the leadership but these things have no value in Congress,” he said.

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

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

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

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

He claimed that all is well in Rajasthan Congress.

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

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

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

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

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IIT study finds traces of Covid in Sabarmati river

Ahmedabad, June 18: A recent study by researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Gandhinagar has established the presence of Coronavirus in water samples from the Sabarmati river and two lakes in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat. While the study, funded by the UNICEF, did not reveal if the genes of Coronavirus found in the water samples were dead or alive, Professor Manish Kumar, who led the research, has emphasised the need for further probe on the subject to avert any future tragedy.

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

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

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

“Our aim was to detect the

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Tibet exile leader hopes to resume talks with China

Dharmasala, June 18: The new president of the Tibetan exile government said on Thursday he will do his best to resume a dialogue with China after more than a decade, and that a visit by the Dalai Lama to Tibet could be the best step forward.

The Buddhist spiritual leader “has expressed his wish to go to Tibet to his birthplace, Lhasa and some other places depending on his physical condition,” Penpa Tsering said in an interview with *The Associated Press*.

The Dalai Lama lives in Dharmasala, where the exile government is based.

Penpa Tsering, 53, said the Dalai Lama is eager to settle the China-Tibet dispute and he “will leave no stone unturned” to achieve that.

China doesn’t recognise the Tibetan government-in-exile and hasn’t held any talks with representatives of the Dalai Lama since 2010. Beijing accuses the Buddhist leader of seeking to separate Tibet from China, which he denies. Penpa Tsering supports the Dalai Lama’s position.

Penpa Tsering, the former speaker of Tibet’s parliament-in-exile, was sworn in last month as president in Dharmasala, where the Dalai Lama has lived since he fled Tibet after a failed uprising against Chinese rule in 1959. He said China should take “a middle-way approach” that would give autonomy to Tibetans allowing them to protect their culture and language,

without full independence. “That can bring some traction to the contacts or negotiations between the two sides,” he said. He strongly criticised China for restricting the Tibetan culture and language, which he said is the foundation of Tibetan Buddhism.

“The language is very important but today it has become something only taught in a language class. All other subjects at school are taught in Chinese, and the Chinese leaders are not even following a two-language system in which you give equal weight to both languages. That, as well as the government policy of not publishing official documents in Tibetan, is striking at the very root of Tibetan existence. If our language goes, the religion will also go away slowly.”

Penpa Tsering is taking over the Tibetan government-in-exile at a time when Chinese President Xi Jinping is seeking to put his imprint on virtually every aspect of life across the vast county. China’s ruling Communist Party is pushing to Sincize Tibetan life through programmes that separate Tibetans from their language, culture, and especially, their devotion to the Dalai Lama.

Tibet rights groups report frequent detentions, economic marginalisation, a suffocating security presence and heavy pressure for Tibetans to assimilate with China’s Han majority while pledging loyalty to the Communist Party.

— AP

BLAME | GAME

Vishwanath accuses BSY’s son of interfering in functioning of govt

BJP MLC alleges ₹21,473 cr ‘scam’ in K’taka

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Which minister is con-

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

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

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

Vishwanath also recalled that the rural development and panchayat raj minister

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

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

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

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

age and alleged interference by his son.

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

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

— PTI

Monsoon advances into Gujarat, Rajasthan, MP

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

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

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

next 24 hours, the IMD said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Maheesh Palawat from Skymet Weather said westerly winds have been blocking the advance of the monsoon in northwest India for the last three to four days.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

VERBAL TRUCE
BETWEEN FRANCE,
TURKEY: PARIS

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

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

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

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

UK ‘ASHAMED’
AT POOR RAPE
CONVICTION RATES

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

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

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

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

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

INDIA NAVY DENIES
IT HAD ATTACKED
LANKA FISHERMEN

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

A group of 13 local fishermen claimed that they had ventured into the sea on May 7 onboard trawlers “Thushan 1” and “Thushan II” and were physically assaulted by the Indian Navy in the international waters around Diego Garcia on June 4.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Delta variant becoming
globally dominant: WHO

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

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

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

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

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

Coronavirus variants were cited by CureVac when the German compa-

COVID CASES IN
MOSCOW TRIPLE,
FAN ZONES SHUT

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

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

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

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

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

study population.

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

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

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

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

UK Conservatives lose
safe seat in major upset

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

and plans to build more houses in rural areas.

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

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

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

BEAR KILLED
AFTER RAMPAGE
IN JAPAN CITY

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

The city of Sapporo tweeted that the bear had been “exterminated,” with a local television station saying hunters had shot the bear. Earlier, dramatic news footage showed the bear bounding along a residential street, crossing a busy road and clawing at the gates of a military barracks, causing alarmed troops to scatter. One soldier was injured in the bear’s rampage in the city, which will host the Olympic marathon and racewalking events in August.

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

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

War, crisis refugees double in decade: UN

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

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

cent of humanity uprooted and displaced.

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

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

placement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.7 million Palestinians.

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

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



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

‘Apple Daily’ increases
print run after arrests

Editors held on suspicion of foreign collusion

Hong Kong, June 18: Hong Kong pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* on Friday increased its print run to 50,000 copies as residents showed support for the beleaguered press freedom a day after police arrested five top editors and executives and froze \$2.3 million worth of assets on national security charges.

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

Police said the editors were arrested on suspi-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEPAL PREZ SAYS
SC CAN’T REVERSE
DISSOLUTION

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

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

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

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

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

ENDANGERED | SPECIES

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

Weird ‘living fossil’ fish lives 100 years

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

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

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

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

researchers figure pregnancy in the fish lasts about five years.

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

DECCAN Chronicle

19 JUNE 2021

CBSE formula less than perfect, but does the job

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grace needed in Lakshwadeep

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

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

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

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Subhani



Twitter vs Govt: Free speech, interrupted...



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

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

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

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

tor, a social media platform does not edit the content of what we write. It is far more democratic in that way than a newspaper. The role of social media intermediaries in the current framework is not quite as simple, but whether they are completely hands-off is debatable. Whether in the way algorithms are written, or the level of engagement, or other protocols, there is a process of message prioritisation that essentially means one message can attain more visibility than another. Sylogistically, assigning prominence to some content over other content should be seen as a form of editorial intervention. This form of editorialisation, however indirect and driven mainly by those who wrote the programmes, means that the social media business model that is fed to us — that the social media is truly a free marketplace of ideas — should be questioned. Users may assume that because of the sheer volumes, their posts have the same chance of visibility and impact as their neighbour's. Have social media platforms been transparent with us about how it all really works, and whether it is simply an organic process like Darwin's theory of natural selection?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Governments that promote nationalistic narratives, and societies that are hegemonised into those narratives, prefer images, walls and controls. The new rule is a flag-bearer of that philosophy.

LETTERS

CBSE XII RESULTS

The CBSE's methodology to award marks for Class XII is justified (*CBSE's 40:30:30 marks plan gets SC's nod, DC, June 18*).

There must be no bias in awarding marks and this must be discussed with parents. That will reduce disputes and discontent.

P.R. Ravinder
Hyderabad

PROTECT PADDY

The TS government should consider the suggestion of former MP Konda Vishweshwar Reddy (*Konda gives idea to protect paddy, DC, June 18*). We should honour people like Vishweshwar Reddy who try to give solutions.

S. Shoban
Hyderabad

RESTRICT GATHERINGS

Lifting of lockdown must be accompanied by strictly reducing the size of gatherings at events and public places. It must be made mandatory to take permission to invite guests. Neighbours must be allowed to call on emergency numbers to stop large gatherings. There should be a total ban on birthday parties for six months.

Suriseti Pankaj Kumar
Secunderabad

NADELLA ELEVATION

It is admirable that Satya Nadella was unanimously elected Microsoft chairman. It is a proud moment for India and Hyderabad in particular must be proud of his elevation. The government of Telangana state must explore opportunities to expand software business in Hyderabad using Nadella's good offices.

S.S. Rama Chandra Murty
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Union Cabinet discusses Telangana

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

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Shareholders of Videocon firms to get 'nil' money

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

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



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

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

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

IDBI Bank invites bids to divest stake in Arcil

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



100 commodity players get notice EOW summons brokers again

SANGEETHA G
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

In 2019, markets regulator Sebi had passed orders

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

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

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

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

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

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

By March 2020, the country went into lockdown and then the moratorium was announced. In December, the state government came up with the Microfinance Bill, which stipulated micro lenders to collect dues only at gram panchayat offices or public places.

Thereafter, during the elections, the political parties promised waiver of micro loans, which has taken the delinquencies higher.

Co-founder quits Grofers as Zomato circles it again

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

"This is the end of an era for Grofers," he said. "Over the last six months, SK had been yearning to invest in his

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

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

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



Saurabh Kumar

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

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

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

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

Hyundai to begin third production shift

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, JUNE 18

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

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



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

The Hyundai Alcazar competes

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

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

Centrum-Bharat Pe bid for PMC Bank gets RBI nod

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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



Bank Ltd., Mumbai," added the RBI.

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

In December 2020, Bharat Pe and Centrum Group were among the four groups that had made submissions to the RBI for the acquisition. While Centrum Group is co-promoted by Jaspal Bindra, a former Standard Chartered banker, BharatPe is a third-party unified payments interface (UPI) player. Both

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

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

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

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

KIMS SUBSCRIBED 3.86 TIMES, DODLA DAIRY 45.61 TIMES

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

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

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

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

INDIA PESTICIDES IPO FROM JUNE 23

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, JUNE 18

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Hyderabad FC rope in D'Silva

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

Ten new faces in India hockey team

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

Boxers head to Italy for training

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

Bottas sets pace for French GP

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

Romania banned for Games 'lifting

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

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

SAMBA MAGIC

Brazil outwit Peru 4-0 to qualify for knockout stage

Rio De Janeiro, June 18: A tearful Neymar inspired hosts Brazil to become the first side to qualify for the Copa America knock-out stages following a 4-0 win over Peru in Rio de Janeiro on Thursday. Goals from Alex Sandro, Neymar, Everton Ribeiro and Richarlison gave the holders a ninth straight win and a perfect six points from two games in Group B as Peru dropped to the bottom.

There was little between the two sides in the first half but Brazil's greater quality made the difference after the break as talisman Neymar inspired them to an ultimately comfortable victory. "It's emotional for me because many things happened in these last two years that were difficult,

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

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

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

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

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

defensive midfielder Fred, who fired over.

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

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

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

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

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

The third goal finally came a minute from time

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

VENEZUELA HOLD COLOMBIA

Venezuela held out under intense pressure in a fractious local derby against Colombia to secure their first point at the Copa America after a 0-0 draw in Goiania on Thursday.

Goalkeeper Wuiker Farinez made a string of fine saves, particularly in the closing stages, to keep out the Colombians, who saw a late Miguel Borja goal ruled out for offside.

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

— AFP

EURO | PREVIEW

Germany eye Portugal scalp

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

A tense 1-0 defeat by France in their opening Group F game leaves the Germans needing a result at the Allianz Arena against Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal. Loew's efforts to strengthen Germany's defence meant only a Mats Hummels own goal was the difference against world champions France.

However, the hosts managed just one shot on target on Tuesday. "If we can be more vigorous up front, we will be able to beat Portugal," said Loew.

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

However, much has changed in the last seven years.

FOCUS ON MORATA AS SPAIN MEET POLAND

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Osaka has been in the

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

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

ROHIT WANTS THINGS TO BE SIMPLE & REAL

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

Dominant Dutch in Last 16

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

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

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

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

DE BRUYNE FIRES BELGIUM INTO LAST 16

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

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

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

SWEDEN ON BRINK OF ENTERING KNOCKOUTS

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

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

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

EURO RESULTS	
Denmark (Yussuf 1)	1
Belgium (THazard 53, Bruyne 69)	2
Netherlands (Depay 11, Dumfries 67)	2
Austria	0
Sweden (Emil Forsberg 77-p)	1
Slovakia	0
Live on TV	
Group Stage: Hungary vs France from 6.30 pm; Portugal vs Germany from 9.30 pm; Spain vs. Poland from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD	



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

First day's play washed out

Southampton, June 18: The eagerly-awaited opening day of the World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand was rained out here on Friday, which is set to bring the reserve day into the equation.

As per ICC playing conditions guidelines for the WTC final, if required the reserve sixth day can now come into effect with six hours of play lost on Day 1 itself.

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

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

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

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

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

In the last five years, England has hosted 32

men's Test matches and only as many as four have ended in draws which is an indication that even if rain plays spoilsport, the final will go the distance.

Meanwhile, India's fielding coach R Sridhar ruled out the possibility of a change in the playing XI, insisting that the chosen players are capable of making conditions irrelevant.

"I think its the eleven which can play and perform on any given surface and any given weather conditions. This eleven that has been put on park. If need be, a decision will be taken." —PTI