

SHORT TAKES

NOVEL APP: JUST SHAKE PHONE & GET POLICE HELP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 25

Home Minister Mekatothi Sucharita has appealed to girls and women to learn about the Disha mobile phone application and use it for their safety and protection. She launched a special drive to promote Disha mobile application in an event at Nallapadu High School in Guntur on Friday.

The Minister said 15 lakh people so far have downloaded Disha application on their mobiles and are using this. Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had called for the special drive to spread awareness Disha. Some 50,000 persons downloaded this in the past two days.

HC TO REVIEW CLOSED CASES AGAINST JAGAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 25

AP High Court Judge Justice Kanneganti Lalitha directed the High Court registry to present the administrative committee decisions before the court regarding the closure of 11 cases related to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Earlier, the HC registered 11 suo motu revision petitions on the closure of cases by lower courts pertaining to certain comments made by Jagan Mohan Reddy when he was in the opposition.

Justice Lalitha sought the details of administrative committee decision in the sealed cover. She said the court would issue fresh orders after reviewing the decisions.

Advocate general Subramanyam Sriram said the court did not provide the details on which the suo motu decision was based. Justice Lalitha said that if the court decided to issue notices to Jagan Mohan Reddy and other respondents then the details would be provided. The court did not mention the date of next hearing of the 11 suo moto cases.

AP'S RECOVERY IS HIGHER THAN NATIONAL AVERAGE

From Page 1

In six districts, it is even less than five percent and has a recovery rate of 96.67 per cent, which is higher than the national average. The officials informed that 76.51 per cent of beds in private hospitals are occupied by patients under AarogyaSri and the number of calls to 104 dropped significantly with just 1,021 calls on June 25.

With regard to black fungus, officials said that there are about 3,148 such cases. Surgeries were performed on 1,095 persons and 1,398 have been discharged. About 237 people have succumbed to black fungus, they said.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, DGP Goutam Sawang, Covid command control Chairman Dr K. S. Jawahar Reddy, health principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, health Secretary M. Ravi Chandra, health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, 104 call centre in-charge A. Babu, VC and MD of AFMSIDC Vijayarama Raju and other officials were present.

FIGHT AGAINST SHIV SENA TO CONTINUE, SAYS MP NAVNEET

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUNE 25

Amaravati MP Navneet Kaur made it clear that her fight against Shiv Sena would continue, no matter how many obstacles come in her way.

The actress-turned-politician claimed that she is on a thanksgiving trip to Tirumala with the Supreme Court stayed the Bombay High Court judgment, which had cancelled the caste certificate obtained by her. She had darshan of Lord Venkateswara on Friday morning.

Speaking to the media outside the temple, Navneet Kaur, responding to her caste certificate case, accused the Shiv Sena leaders of making a false case against herself for not being able to bear their defeat in Amaravati MP elections. She said though the Bombay HC cancelled her caste certificate, the SC has put on hold the HC order cancelling her SC Certificate.

WAR-OF-WORDS

TS stealing water meant for AP, says top engineer

Water for agriculture costlier than water for power generation

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, JUNE 25

Following rains in the upper reaches of the Krishna, the Srisailem reservoir received 19,987 cusecs of water from the Jurla project, the first project in Telangana state on the river, on Friday. The water level in Srisailem stood at 816 feet against the total height of 885 feet. It has a capacity to store 215.832 tmc. Srisailem gets water from the Krishna via the Priyadarshini Jurla project and from and Tungabhadra from the Sunkesula barrage.

Kurnool district irrigation chief engineer Muralinath Reddy said that though rains began on June 1, still the levels in the reservoir are not building up. He said "it is a matter of concern. Unless the reservoir builds up water levels, it is difficult to cater to the needs of the Rayalaseema and Nellore regions. Even the water supply to Chennai under Telugu Ganga is likely to be affected if Srisailem does not store sufficient water in the reservoir."

Pointing out at Telangana government's alleged indiscriminate use of water coming to Srisailem for producing hydro-electricity, Reddy said that the neighbouring state was sucking all the water as and when it was flowing, leaving nothing for storage. There is no need to produce hydro-electricity as the prices have fallen to ₹2 per unit since consumption has been affected in the country.

The Chief Engineer said "water for agriculture is costlier than the water for power generation." He appealed to TS Genco to desist from utilising all the water for power generation.

Reddy is presently camping in New Delhi seeking an early clearance for the Rayalaseema lift scheme.

NANI SAYS STATE WANTS CORDIAL TIES WITH CENTRE

From Page 1

He stated that TD Chief N. Chandrababu Naidu and TD leaders and a few leaders in Telangana were talking bad about YSR for political mileage.

The Minister said AP maintains cordial relations with neighbouring states including Telangana. He said that there are a lot of ideological differences between YSR Congress and BJP, but their government seeks good relations with the Central government and would not let any prickly issues come in between.

He criticised Chandrababu Naidu, Lokesh and TD leaders for claiming credit over the cancellation of SSC and Intermediate exams. He lamented that the future of the students would be bleak without exams and, hence, the government following precautionary measures decided to conduct the exams but the opposition never thought about the future of the students.

He said the HC dismissed a petition filed against the new college accreditation policy hence the government was going to start the process afresh from June 28.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 25

Farmers' unions and public associations demanded that the AP government's Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme meant to cater to the drinking and cultivating water needs of the famine-stricken Rayalaseema, Nellore and Prakasam districts be built by increasing the capacity of Srisailem



TS opposes AP's attempt to divert Krishna waters

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 25

The TRS has intensified its attack against neighbouring Andhra Pradesh over the proposed Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (RLIS). Several ministers raised their voices against what they described as 'stealing of Telangana water by AP' and even personalised their attacks to the extent of calling Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy a 'dacoit' and his father and former Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy a 'thief'.

Telangana tourism minister V. Srinivas Goud went a step further and blamed Rajasekhara Reddy for the death of popular Congress leader P. Janardhan Reddy who was insulted by the then dispensation for his relentless fight against diversion of Krishna waters into Rayalaseema through the Pothireddypadu project. "YSR was a devil in the form of a human being,"

he said.

The TRS revived the attack on RLIS in the past few days and accused the Jagan Mohan Reddy government of carrying out civil works relating to the project. The AP government, on the other hand, informed the National Green Tribunal (NBT) on Friday that no works of RLIS were taken up. The Telangana state government pressed the Centre to send Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) officials to verify the genuineness of AP's claims.

The RLIS turned a bone of contention between the two states last year when both the government traded charges against each other on constructing illegal projects on Krishna and violating the KRMB directions. The fresh attack on RLIS gains significance against the backdrop of the political atmosphere getting charged in the run up of Huzurabad bypolls.

Energy minister Jagadish Reddy questioned the silence of the

BJP and the Congress over illegal projects taken up by AP.

"Instead of fighting against the AP government, the opposition is targeting us," he said.

The minister also accused the BJP-led government at Centre for creating rift between the two Telugu states by not finalising the sharing ratio even seven years after the bifurcation.

Agriculture minister Niranjan Reddy asked the Congress leaders to come out of the mindset of remaining as 'slaves' to Seemandhra rulers even after formation of Telangana state. He alleged that they were slaves to Rajasekhara Reddy in undivided AP and kept mum when he constructed Pothireddypadu project to divert Krishna water and accused the BJP leader D.K. Aruna who was then in the Congress of offering 'Mangala Harathi' to Rajasekhara Reddy, when he came to Mahbubnagar district to loot Telangana water.

CENTRE TO SEND TEAM TO CHECK RLIS WORKS

From Page 1

Meanwhile, Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat is learnt to have called Chandrashekar Rao over the phone on Friday and discussed the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (RLIS) works. He reportedly assured the CM that his ministry would soon send a team from the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) to the RLIS site to assess the actual position of works.

Chandrashekar Rao is said to be of the view that he had extended a friendly hand to Jagan Mohan Reddy soon after he became the CM of AP by offering to share surplus water in the Godavari with AP since the availability of water in Krishna is comparatively low. It is felt that Jagan Mohan Reddy ignored him and unilaterally decided to take up the RLIS on the Krishna like his father Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy did by constructing the Pothireddypadu project, hurting the interests of south Telangana districts including Hyderabad.

Added to this, the Jagan Mohan Reddy government constructing a parallel canal along the Rajoliabanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) to divert even Tungabhadra water from erstwhile Mahbubnagar district angered Chandrashekar Rao even more. For these reasons, he is against holding talks with Jagan Mohan Reddy at this stage unless the AP CM withdraws those projects.

It may be remembered that the two CMs has exhibited unusual bonhomie by meeting over half a dozen times in less than eight months after Jagan Mohan Reddy became the CM of AP in May 2019 to hold talks to resolve several contentious issues between both the states post bifurcation of state in 2014.

During the talks, they discussed constructing joint projects over the Godavari to meet irrigation and drinking water needs of both the states and utilise surplus water in the Godavari for the betterment of both the states.

This bonhomie was short-lived after Jagan Mohan Reddy issued orders in May 2020 to construct the RLIS over the Krishna to divert water. Soon after, both the states filed cases in courts and tribunals accusing each other of taking up illegal projects on the Krishna. There have been no meetings between the two since then.

Intense lobbying for TTD board slots

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUMALA, JUNE 25

As the curtain fell on the two-year-tenure of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Trust Board led by Y. V. Subba Reddy, intense lobbying is on — by those within the state and from the Centre — to find a slot in the largest temple's governing body.

The term of the last board ended on June 21, after which the temple administration was handed over by the state government to a newly appointed authority led by TTD EO Dr K. S. Jawahar Reddy as its chairman and additional EO A. V. Dharma Reddy as convener.

The membership of the board running the money-spinning Lord Venkateswara temple and four dozen other Hindu shrines, is both beneficial and prestigious. This gives them an opportunity to have a direct access with top politicians, ministers and businessmen on frequent visits to the sacred shrine.

In addition, the trusteeship enables members to have direct access to the temple whenever they want and get their quota of free darshan tickets. Several top figures including the ruling YSRC leaders, industrialists and celebrities are now throwing their hat in the ring.

The state govt has made a stop-gap arrangement as of now to run the temples. This meant it would take its time to decide on the members of a permanent board. CM Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will have the final say.

Sources said that there are chances of inducting two or three members from neighbouring Tamil Nadu and Karnataka into the new board. While two from Telangana would be nominated, the remaining posts could go to Andhra Pradesh and two posts to nominees from the Centre.

"A senior politician from Chittoor district is lobbying for his confidants. Jagan is likely to take a final call on the new members by next week," sources said.

TS HC ticks off THB for neglect of pensioners

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 25

The Telangana High Court fumed at the Telangana Housing Board for not paying pension benefits to its retired employees belonging to Andhra Pradesh.

A division bench, headed by Justice M.S. Ramachandra Rao observed that it was nothing but discrimination by the Board against those who have Andhra Pradesh nativity. The bench cautioned the government that if the pension benefits were not given to the petitioners within the next four weeks, then it would be treated as contempt of court and hand over punishment for the breach.

The bench was dealing with a contempt case filed by 227 retired employees of the Housing Board. They complained that despite court orders in 2020, the Board had been silent on payment of pension benefits to them.

The petitioners brought to the notice of the court that a single-judge bench had in 2020 ordered the government to pay the

arrears and other benefits to them. However, the Board has not acted upon the order and in the meanwhile 19 retired employees passed away, they pointed out.

In a sharp rebuke, the bench wanted to know if the state government would pay the amount in the employees' next birth. It is outright discrimination against the petitioners, just because they were natives of Andhra Pradesh, the bench chided.

The court also observed that payment of pension benefits were not a mercy bestowed by the government, but an obligation on its part.

If the Board was not in a position to pay pensionary benefits, then it should go for a loan from the government but the statutory rights of retired employees should not be affected, it said.

Making it clear that it would take the issue seriously, the bench cautioned the Housing Board to get ready to face the heat if the orders of the single judge were not implemented in four weeks.

High Court sees no hurry for counting votes

FROM PAGE 1

He claimed that the SEC did not follow the Supreme Court guidelines in the conduct of Parishad elections.

Lawyer Niranjan Reddy said that the HC can use its powers for conducting elections according to the Constitution and not for the stalling of elections. He said the election process was completed and urged the court to dismiss the verdict calling for fresh polls.

The HC bench opined that a thorough hearing of the case should be conducted and said that they

would hear the case in the first week of August.

Niranjan Reddy said that the ballot boxes were brought from other states, hence they should be returned. The HC bench said that there were no elections so there was no hurry to return them. Reddy then said that there were elections in Tamil Nadu and appealed the court to hear the case as early as possible preferably in the first week of July month.

The HC bench said that there are important cases in July first week and postponed the case to July 27.

HC APPROVES BIDDING BY SBI FOR AGRIGOLD PROPERTY AT LABBIPET

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, JUNE 25

The Telangana High Court on Friday approved the bidding process by State Bank of India (SBI) on the commercial property of Agrigold Pvt Ltd situated at Labbipet in Vijayawada.

The court directed AP government to register the property on the highest and successful bidder, the Vision Estates, which quoted ₹22.45 crore for the property. It was the only bidder in the process held by SBI on May 28. SBI had lent ₹100 crore to the Agrigold.

Agrigold depositors association raised objections before the High Court on Friday on approving the bidding process. Its said the prop-

erty would fetch ₹28 crore if the auction notice was placed on another website or the High Court's website.

The court rejected the objections and said it was not the fault of the successful bidder if any other bidder has not shown an interest to participate in the bidding. Auction notice had been issued twice, but no other bidder came forward. If this was further delayed, it would become a non-performing asset, the court observed.

Rejecting the apprehension that the successful bidder might be a benami for Agrigold, Andhra Pradesh advocate general Sriram submitted to the high court that the CID wing of AP had concluded that this was not so.

Farmers protest against illegal TS projects

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, JUNE 25

Farmers' unions and public associations demanded that the AP government's Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme meant to cater to the drinking and cultivating water needs of the famine-stricken Rayalaseema, Nellore and Prakasam districts be built by increasing the capacity of Srisailem

right main canal, GO No. 203 and putting pressure on the Krishna River Board management over the construction of illegal projects undertaken by Telangana.

Rayalaseema Karmika Karshaka Samithi leaders Ch. Chandrasekhara Reddy, YSR Rythu Vibhag district convener Sambaturu Prasad Reddy, Rayalaseema Sagunithi Sadhana Samithi leaders Devagudi

Chandramouliswar Reddy and others were present at the roundtable meeting chaired by AP Rythu Sangham District General Secretary Gali Chandra at Kadapa Press Club on Friday.

They said that in Nellore and Prakasam districts, which have become home to drought, migration and suicides, the groundwater level has dropped significantly every summer,

which is creating drinking water problems.

The Srisailem minimum water level will be maintained by 854 feet to provide water to the people of Rayalaseema, the Krishna-Pennar project and Tungabhadra, as well as projects of SRBC, KC Canal and Telugu Ganga have net water share in Krishna river and Galeru-Nagari, Handrineva and Velugonda which have

built in surplus flood water.

The TS govt is pumping water from Srisailem in the name of electricity needs. In May 2020, AP govt brought in GO No. 203, the Rayalaseema lift irrigation scheme from Rameshwaram on the Krishna River, to increase the capacity of Srisailem right main canal, for providing relief to famine-stricken districts.

SHORT TAKES

₹72 CRORE FOR FACELIFT OF RUSHIKONDA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

The oldest tourism resort located along the coast at Rushikonda near the city will receive a facelift soon, with state government recently sanctioning ₹72 crore for redevelopment of the resort and the road connecting to it on a priority basis.

AP Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) owns this resort.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, a tourism official pointed out that the old block of Rushikonda resort had been completed during the period 1984-89. The new block with restaurant and conference halls had been added between 2002 and 2007.

The officer said mostly tourists from West Bengal stayed in this resort, which is unique, as it gives a direct view of the scenic beauty of the sea. It is located 20 km from Visakhapatnam and 10 km from Bheemili.

APTDC has nearly 50 resorts across the country. But the Rushikonda one is oldest and best, attracting both domestic and international tourists, the official added.

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SPECIAL TRAINS TO MUMBAI AND BENGALURU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

The railways decided to run two special trains via Vizag to Mumbai and Bengaluru.

Train No. 08575 will start after 11 pm on June 30 at Vizag and reach LTT Mumbai on July 2 at 4.15 am.

In the return direction, train no. 08576 will leave LTT on July 2 at 6.55 am to reach Vizag the next day at 10.40 am.

Another train No. 08415 will leave Vizag at 7.10 pm on June 30 and July 1 to reach Krishnarajapuram the next day at 12.05 pm.

In return, train No. 08416 will leave Krishnarajapuram on July 1 and July 2 at 4.55 pm to reach Vizag at 10.25 am the next day.

BACKWATERS CUT OFF ROAD TO 40 VILLAGES

From Page 1

Dandangi-Thoyeeru road has got cut off due to flood waters. As a result, transportation facility to nearly 40 villages has been affected from Devipatnam.

Rampachodavaram ASP G. Bindu Madhav said police personnel are on high alert and creating awareness among people of various villages to reach safer places.

Rehabilitation and Resettlement Committee member Thailam Gangadhara Rao said flood waters have affected villages including Devipatnam, Thoyeeru, Gangugula Gondi, Yenugulagudem, Mulapadu, Agharam, Madipalli, Manturu, Kachuluru, Penikalapadu, Gonduru, Talluru, Kondamodulu, Thativada, Kathanapalli and Somarlpadu.

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy maintained that there is no flood threat at present in Polavaram Project-affected villages, as only 15,000 cusecs of water is being released.

DMHO REJECTS KMC DATA ON DEATHS

From Page 1

District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr Rama Giddaiah rejected the KMC data and said the abnormal death cases in May were improbable. He said the Covid bulletin issued by the state government was accurate as far as this district was concerned.

KGGH superintendent G. Narendranath Reddy noted that there are several private nursing homes in the KMC area. Most of the deaths could have happened there. Dr Praveen, a private nursing home doctor, however, said the deaths were abnormally higher in the second wave in the last three months

11.62L MOMS GET FIRST VACCINE JAB

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 25

Amid speculations about the third Covid wave affecting children the most, the Government of AP took a proactive initiative to vaccinate young mothers.

At a Covid review meeting that took place at the Tadepalli camp office, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewed the Covid prevalence in the state.

As infants need their mothers the most, it was decided that the mothers with children aged 5 and below would be inoculated.

A total of 11,62,811 mothers have already been administered the first jab, amounting to 62 per cent of young mothers in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

The Chief Minister instructed the officials to concentrate on the completion of vaccination of the young mothers at the earliest.

RAIN ALERT OVER AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Amaravati Centre, on Friday, stated that there would be light to heavy rainfall over coastal AP and Rayalaseema in the next three days.

Favourable weather conditions like cumulonimbus clouds and semi-active southwest monsoon would trigger the thunderstorms associated with lightning.

On Friday, Amadalavalasa in Srikakulam district received 23-mm of the state's highest rainfall while Gajapathinagar in Vizianagaram district received 19-mm of rainfall. Many parts of north coastal AP received light to moderate rains on Friday, said the IMD officials.

GVMC REMOVES ENCRONCHMENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

The makeshift fruit shops were removed by the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) in the presence of police at the LIC Visakhapatnam regional office here on Friday.

The fourth zone GVMC City Planning wing removed the encroachments, upon responding to a complaint from the Waltair division of East Coast Railways.

Sputnik vaccine unit to come up at Jadcherla SEZ

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

Visakhapatnam Special Economic Zone (VSEZ) on Friday approved Hetero Biopharma's Unit-2 at the Jadcherla SEZ for manufacturing up to 120 million doses of Sputnik-V Covid vaccine per annum. A committee headed by development commissioner A. Rama Mohan Reddy accorded the approval.

He said the unit will be able to export vaccines worth ₹1,150 crore when permission is accorded. But in the interim, supplies will be confined to the domestic sector.

The committee, in its third virtual meeting, approved large-scale manufacture of various life-saving drugs for treating coronavirus, including vaccines, in Telangana, besides granting routine approvals for broad-banding and procurement of duty-free material worth hundreds of crores for the upcoming SEZs like Phoenix, TCS and Laxmi Infobahn. There are 61 SEZs operational under VSEZ as on date, with 523



People of various age groups stand in a line to get their dose of Covid vaccine at Swarna Bharathi Urban Primary Health Centre at Resapuvanipalem in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

Covid brought under control in Vizag city

Daily cases now being reported are between 100 and 120

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 25

As the Port City of Visakhapatnam nears 100 days of Coronavirus second wave on Friday, authorities have succeeded in bringing the dreaded disease under control.

From the time second wave began in March this year, Vizag Medical and Health officials say daily cases now being reported are between 100 and 120, compared to 2,000 cases a day when Covid-19 was at its peak in second half of April.

Similarly, less than 10 cases of mucormycosis or black fungus are being reported daily against 50 in May. Only five cases of fungus have been reported on Friday at all nine designated hospitals in the city, including KGH, ENT, and VIMS.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Visakhapatnam District Medical and Health officer Dr P.S. Suryanarayana said, “Yes,

Delta+ found in samples collected in April

FROM PAGE 1

Coronavirus treatment was given and the person recovered and was discharged.

Dr Srihari Rao said that at that time the health officials collected 40 samples randomly which were sent to the CCMB for tests in April.

He said a report was received from the CCMB

the cases have been brought under control. People need not panic over the pandemic now. But they must take utmost care by properly following Covid-19 protocols, including maintaining physical distance, wearing masks and sanitising hands. They are the best preventive methods to completely eliminate this disease at

on June 23 which confirmed that this person was infected from Coronavirus Delta plus variant.

He said that officials are monitoring the person and he is in perfect health.

He further said that the staff collected 16 samples from the area where the person lives and sent them to CCMB for tests.

the earliest.”

Andhra Medical College principal Dr P.V. Sudhakar, who is the Covid-19 special officer for north coastal Andhra, said the positivity rate now being reported is less than 5 per cent.

It is a good sign that Coronavirus has been brought under control within 100 days in the sec-

ond wave, much earlier than the first wave. “But people's role will be now crucial to cut the chain of virus and prevent the third wave,” he underlined.

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) chief medical officer Dr K.S.L.G. Sastry said the second wave led to a panic situation in April and May, when more than 10 deaths had been reported daily. Graveyard at Gnanapuram witnessed traffic jams with ambulances carrying the dead bodies.

“Now, we can heave a sigh of relief from the trauma. We attribute this to various factors like the state government's curfew orders and extensive vaccination programmes at our 32 health units,” Dr Sastry told DC.

The corporation administered nearly 12 lakh vaccines on a single day as part of the state-wide mega vaccination drive, he added.

Dip in new Covid-19 cases in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 25

The Covid-19 infections slightly decreased in AP on Friday with the registration of 4,458 Corona new infections in the past 24 hours as against 4,981 cases on Thursday.

As many as 6,313 patients were discharged after recovery and 91,849 samples were tested, of which 4,458 were found infected.

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● As many as 6,313 patients were discharged after recovery and 91,849 samples were tested, of which 4,458 were found infected.

tests in the 13 districts of the state so far.

The total Covid-19 infections in the state are 18,71,475. Total recoveries were 18,08,262. A total of 38 new deaths were regis-

tered, increasing the death toll to 12,528.

East Godavari district is on the top in the highest daily new infections with 909 new infections, followed by Chittoor with 708 new infections, West Godavari 591, Kadapa 370, Prakasam 335, Krishna 331, Guntur 239, Anantapur 224, Nellore 212, Visakhapatnam 198, Srikakulam 151, Kurnool 126 and the least number to 64 new infections was registered in

Vizianagaram district.

The East Godavari also tops the list of total Corona cases with 2,59,452 infections, followed by Chittoor 2,17,246, Guntur 1,60,888, West Godavari 1,59,390, Anantapur 1,53,168, Visakhapatnam 1,47,752, Nellore 1,26,383, Kurnool 1,21,413, Prakasam 1,19,625, Srikakulam 1,17,956, Kadapa 1,05,508, Krishna 1,00,123 and Vizianagaram reported the least number of 79,676 cases.

Temple city grabs five spots in India Smart Cities Award Contest – 2020

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, JUN 25

The Tirupati Smart City bagged first place in two categories, besides grabbing the second and third spots in the India Smart Cities Award Contest (ISAC) – 2020.

The temple city took the first slot in categories like Sanitation and Social Aspect, and stood second in categories like City award (second round) and Economy. It also secured third place in the category of Urban Environment.

The ISAC is organised

under the Smart Cities Mission of the ministry of housing and urban affairs.

This is one of the most important activities initiated under the mission, where pioneering city strategies and projects are recognized on the yardsticks of innovation, impact and ‘replicability’ or scalability.

ISAC will recognise and reward cities, projects and innovative ideas that are promoting sustainable development in urban areas, as well as stimulating inclusive, equitable, safe, healthy and collaborative

cities, thus enhancing the quality of life for all.

Tirupati Smart City won the first place in Sanitation, by attaining a record of having no open defecation, a full supply of toilets based on population, wastewater management, and having a good solid waste management system that removes household and commercial garbage, and disposes of these in an environmentally and economically sound manner.

The temple city also stood on top in the category of social aspects, with

AP to SC: Experts will frame formula to award marks

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday informed the Supreme Court that it has decided to cancel Class 12 board examinations and a high-powered expert body will devise a scheme for awarding marks to the students.

Informing a bench comprising Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice Dinesh Maheshwari about the state government's decision, senior counsel Dushyant Dave said he had personally conveyed the “sentiments” expressed by the court to Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy.

He told the court that when the entire country is going in one direction, AP has no reason to go a separate way.

Appreciating the decision, Justice Khanwilkar said, “All is well that ends well” and observed that if the decision was taken earlier, then much of that transpired in the proceedings could have been avoided.

In a stern message to the Andhra Pradesh government that it has little option but to cancel the exams, the top court had on June 24 said, “Nobody knows how Delta strain of Covid is going to roll out”, “It is a question of safety and security of everybody. You have to see practical and ground realities” and “Unless we are sure that you are prepared to conduct exams without any uncertainty and fatality, we will not let you have the exam. When others have cancelled you cannot hold it

to show you are different.”

While conveying the state government's decision to the top court, Dave referred to the conduct of state assembly elections in five states, including Assam and West Bengal, and huge gatherings at Kumbh Mela at Haridwar.

He informed the court that a high-powered expert committee will devise a scheme for the evaluation of marks within 10 days and the results will be announced by July 31 as ordered by the court.

Recording the statement by Dave, who was appearing for the Andhra Pradesh government, the court in its order said, “He (Dave) informed the Court that after re-examining the situation, the State Government has now been well-advised to cancel the XII standard Examination, to be conducted by the concerned State Board. We place that statement on record.”

Reiterating its earlier order directing the state boards to put in place a scheme for the evaluation of marks within ten days starting from June 24, and the declaration of results by July 31, the court said that since the respective states have already decided to cancel the examination, it does not wish to examine any other issue and disposed of the matter.

The top court was hearing a plea by child rights activist Anubha Shrivastava Sahai and seven others on behalf of students from different states and Union territories seeking to cancel all examinations in the wake of the Covid pandemic.

Domestic air cargo terminal commissioned

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JUNE 25

The domestic air cargo terminal was commissioned in Rajamahendravaram airport on Friday. On the first day, a consignment of Covid-19 vaccine (Covaxin) was received and auto spare parts were dispatched to Hyderabad.

Inaugurating the terminal, Airport director Manoj Kumar Nayak said that the airport had crossed another milestone with the commissioning of the long waited domestic cargo terminal.

The terminal is operated by AAI Cargo Logistics and Allied Services Company Limited (AAICLAS), a subsidiary of Airports Authority of India.

Nayak said that the Bureau of Civil Aviation (BCAS) had recently given security clearance for operation of the terminal. He said that the cargo terminal would help to boost the economy, and Industry of East and West Godavari districts.

Indigo Airlines will handle cargo operations to various destinations from the airport.

Abraham Lincoln, AAICLAS incharge of Visakhapatnam branch, AAI and security officials, Indigo Airlines cargo agents and other stakeholders were present.

SURRENDER & SAVE LIVES: COPS TO REDS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, JUNE 25

The East Godavari district police has given a call to the Maoist leaders and members to come out and get treatment for Covid-19.

They stated in a press note that as per reliable information Maoist leaders and members of Galikonda Dalam, BK-EG DVC and Kunta area committee dalams and also their militia members, who are moving at Andhra-Odisha Border and Andhra Pradesh-Chhattisgarh are suffering from fever, cough, cold, body pains and others which are the symptoms of Covid-19. The police told them that if not treated in time, Covid may turn fatal.

It may be recalled that Maoist leaders Hari Bhushan and Bharathakka who worked in CPI (Maoist) party for a long period were infected with Covid-19 and died as they could not get treatment in proper time.

The cops assured the Maoists and their family members that they would provide quality treatment and care if any Maoist suffering from the symptoms of Covid-19, turns himself or herself over.



SHORT TAKES

PAYAL ROHATGI
'THREATENS'
RESIDENTS, HELD

Ahmedabad, June 25: Bollywood actor Payal Rohatgi was arrested by the Ahmedabad city police on Friday for allegedly threatening the residents of her housing society, an official said.

An FIR was registered against her on Thursday based on a complaint lodged by society chairman Dr Parag Shah, inspector A.S. Roy of Satellite police station said.

The 36-year-old actor, who has been living with her parents in a posh society in Satellite area for the last over one year, was booked for uttering obscene words (IPC section 294-b), intentional insult (504) and criminal intimidation (506), said Roy, quoting the FIR. In his complaint, Shah claimed that Rohatgi has been harassing society members including children for some time, and she once even threatened children that she would "break their legs" if they played in the common area of the society.

Although she does not own a house in the society herself, she attended its annual general meeting with her parents on June 20 and refused to leave despite being pointed out that she was not a member, Shah alleged. Rohatgi abused society members during the meeting and posted an abusive message on the society's WhatsApp group, the FIR alleged.

She also threatened the members that she could get them arrested in false cases, the complaint alleged. Shah also claimed that the actor targeted him and other members on her Instagram account. Probe is on, the inspector said.

WB FAKE VACCINE
RACKET LINKS
BACK TO TMC

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
& PRANMOY
BRAHMACHARI | DC
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE,
JUNE 25

The major fake Covid-19 vaccination racket, which Tollywood actor and Trinamul Congress MP of Jadavpur Mimi Chakraborty claimed to have busted with the help of Kolkata Police, after getting a false dose administered at a camp run by a bogus IAS officer, has boomeranged to her own party and its government in West Bengal within two days.

The backfire unfolded after photos featuring three TMC MLAs, including two heavy-weight cabinet colleagues of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and a Rajya Sabha MP allegedly with the arrested kingpin Debanjan Deb, at various events were revealed by the BJP on Thursday evening.

The two state cabinet members are Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee. While Hakim is the state transport minister, Mukherjee is the state panchayat minister. Accused in the Narada sting bribery, they were arrested and chargesheeted by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) last month.

The third TMC MLA is Debashish Kumar who was elected from Rashbehari seat this time. He is also a member of the board of administrators under Hakim at the Kolkata Municipal Corporation where Debanjan claimed to have been posted as a joint commissioner and allegedly forged official documents, signatures and emblems to run the racket.

TMC Rajya Sabha MP is Dr Santanu Sen who is now the Indian Medical Association West Bengal branch state secretary.

Homebound



President Ram Nath Kovind boards a special train on Friday to his birthplace in Uttar Pradesh from Safdarjung railway station in New Delhi. He will interact with his old acquaintances from school days and the early days of his social service. It would be after a gap of 15 years that an incumbent president is travelling by train.

— PTI

Rajnath: INS Vikrant will
be commissioned next year

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

Defence minister Rajnath Singh, who was in Kochi on Friday to review the construction progress of first Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) INS Vikrant, said that Indian Navy's proactive forward deployment of its assets in sea during the Galwan standoff with China signalled "our intent that we seek peace but are ready for any eventuality."

Defence minister said that the Indian Navy also played a crucial role on the Northern sector (with China) too. He said that combat capability, reach and versatility of the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC) will add

formidable capabilities in the defence of the country and help secure India's interests in the maritime domain.

INS Vikrant, being built by Cochin Shipyard will begin sea trails in July-August this year and will be commissioned in first half of 2022 projecting India's naval power and its reach. It would be India's most potent sea-based asset. The ship shall operate MiG-29K fighter aircraft, Kamov-31 Air Early Warning Helicopters, the soon to be inducted MH-60R multi-role helicopter and the indigenously manufactured Advanced Light Helicopters. It would offer an incomparable military instrument

with its ability to project air power over long distances, including air interdiction, anti-surface warfare, offensive and defensive counter-air, airborne anti-Submarine warfare and airborne early warning.

Indian Navy currently operates only one aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya.

"Commissioning of the IAC next year will be a befitting tribute to 75 years of India's independence," Singh said. The defence minister accompanied by Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh visited the construction site and was briefed about the successful Basin Trials completed during November 2020.

Maha tightens curbs to
tackle Delta plus variant

SONU
SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, JUNE 25

In the wake of Delta plus variant found in the state, Maharashtra has decided to impose stricter Covid restrictions in all districts notwithstanding weekly positivity rate and hospital beds availability. Maharashtra also became the first state in the country to administer more than three crore vaccine doses. Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte on Friday issued a notification stating that the first two levels having maximum relaxations have been removed till further order.

The government notification said, "given that the virus causing Covid is undergoing mutations in various geographies, and that these mutations are displaying more transmissibility and potential reductions in monoclonal antibody response, a state-level trigger

INDIA RECORDS 49 CASES OF DELTA
PLUS VARIANT FROM 11 STATES

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

The Centre on Friday said 49 cases of the Delta plus variant of Covid-19 have been found in 11 states from over 45,000 samples that have been sequenced for this mutated strain of the virus. The Union health ministry said till now the cases are "very localised".

The Delta plus has been termed as a "Variant of Concern" by the World Health Organisation. The states with Delta plus cases are Maharashtra (21), Tamil Nadu (9), Madhya Pradesh (7),

Kerala (3), Punjab (2), Gujarat (2), Andhra Pradesh (1), Orissa (1), Rajasthan (1), Jammu (1) and Karnataka (1). So far two deaths due to Delta Plus have been reported from Madhya Pradesh and one in Maharashtra. The Centre has written to all these states asking them to take immediate steps to contain the spread of Delta Plus.

India on Friday recorded 51,667 fresh cases and 1,329 Covid related deaths. Union health ministry officials said the numbers are higher on some days because the second wave has not subsided completely.

mandating all the administrative units, irrespective of values of the indices of weekly positivity rate and oxygen bed occupancy percent-

age, to remain at a level not below 3 is to be in operation till withdrawn by specific order of the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA)."

COVID | HORRORS

Gross discrepancy in the data recorded: Report

Panel: Delhi O2 claims exaggerated

New Delhi, June 25: The sub-group constituted by the Supreme Court to audit Oxygen consumption in hospitals in national capital during the second wave of Covid-19 said that the Delhi government 'exaggerated' the consumption of oxygen and made a claim of 1,140 MT, four times higher than the formula for bed capacity requirement of 289 MT.

The five-member panel headed by AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria said the Delhi government had made the claims for allocation of 700 MT oxygen on April 30 of medical grade Oxygen using a wrong formula.

The top court had on May 6 named a sub-group for carrying out the audit exercise for Delhi's health infrastructure and allocation of

oxygen and said that it shall consists of Randeep Guleria of AIIMS, Sandeep Budhiraja of Max Healthcare and two IAS officers not below the rank of Joint Secretary — one each from the Centre and the Delhi government.

The panel in its report pointed out that four model hospitals in Delhi have claimed extremely high Oxygen consumption with very few beds and the claims appeared to be clearly erroneous, leading to extremely skewed information and significantly higher Oxygen requirement for entire state of Delhi.

The panel said that during the meetings of the sub-group, it was repeatedly noted that there was a gross discrepancy in the data recorded from proformas. — PTI

MY CRIME, I FOUGHT FOR BREATH OF 2 CR
PEOPLE: KEJRIWAL OVER PANEL'S REPORT

New Delhi, June 25: In face of the BJP's accusation of "criminal negligence" citing a report that the Delhi government "exaggerated" oxygen requirement during Covid-19 second wave, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said his only "crime" was that he "fought for the breath of two crore people". He also said that those who lost their loved ones due to the shortage of oxygen should not be called "liars".

A sub-group constituted by the Supreme Court to audit oxygen consumption in the national capital's hospitals has said that the

Delhi government "exaggerated" consumption of the life-saving gas.

The five-member panel, headed by AIIMS director Randeep Guleria, said that during the second wave of Covid-19 infections, the Delhi government had made claims for allocation of 700 MT of oxygen on April 30 using a "wrong formula".

Kejriwal took to Twitter to say, "My crime — I fought for the breath of my two crore people. When you were doing an election rally, I was awake all night arranging for oxygen. I fought, pleaded to get oxygen for people." — PTI

J&K unhappy with leaders' show

Netizens ridicule leaders for their failure in presenting the case of people

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, JUNE 25

The sequel of Thursday's all-party meet on Jammu and Kashmir is a huge disappointment for many people in the Union Territory (UT) who took to social media platform to ridicule the invitees for their perceived failure in presenting the case of the people they claim to represent before Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, "expressly".

More importantly, as some of them pointed out, the mainstream leaders from the Valley did not speak in unison on the vital issue of restoration of the erstwhile state's special status with some of them taking refuge under the pretext of it being sub judice.

"The BJP leaders including ministers have been repeatedly and vociferously saying Articles 370 and 35A can't come back even as the matter is before the

Supreme Court. If it is not sub judice for them why are some of our so-called leaders so apologetic about it?" asked one of them.

Senior journalist Altaf Husain tweeted, "All-party meet on Kashmir yields nothing. Some leaders have, by their statements after the meeting, proved that they are collaborators. Others have proved they are spineless and inconsequential".

But Mushtaq Ahmed Alaqaband, a Srinagar resident, disagreed with him. He said, "I don't think major political decisions can be made in a single meeting, but require a continuous and comprehensive negotiation process, and Thursday's meeting was the beginning".

Arshad Ahmed, another resident, said, "People here as well in Jammu had attached several hopes with the meeting. But once again, they have been dis-

appointed."

Elaborating, he said, "If you wanted to win the hearts of the Kashmiris you should have sent through these leaders a gift, big enough to restore their faith in you and these leaders as well. Had you done it, people would have begun to trust you, these meetings and the entire system."

However, Sheikh Danish — also a Valley resident — was of the view that no one was any optimistic about this whole exercise. "In these two years, everything is finished. People here are living a miserable life. I think all those invited to the Prime Minister's meeting are running for chair."

They have always deceived people," he said and added, "Article 370 and 35A were taken away by Parliament and it alone can return these to us...neither Mehbooba Mufti nor Omar Abdullah."

Mehbooba must go
to Pak: UP minister

Ballia (UP), June 25: A UP minister has accused the Congress and Samajwadi Party of being allies of Islamic terrorists, and said madrassas are helping in the religious conversion of the poor with people involved in it getting money directly in their accounts from Muslim countries.

The allegations were made by Uttar Pradesh minister of state for parliamentary affairs Anand Swaroop Shukla while talking to reporters on Thursday late night.

The minister also attacked PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti saying "her heart is in Pakistan" and asked her to go to Pakistan.

Facts have come to light

that help of madrassas and voluntary organisations is being taken for the conversion and the people involved in the religious conversion of the poor and the deaf-mute children are getting money from Muslim countries in their personal accounts, Shukla said while talking to reporters at his residence here.

The conversion by inducing fear, greed and delusion is completely illegal and unconstitutional.

The Yogi government and the ATS is taking and will take strict action against this, Shukla said, referring to the recent arrest of two men allegedly involved in running a campaign to convert the poor and deaf-mute children to Islam. — PTI

Rain alert



An LPG cylinder delivery man wades through a flooded street during high tide in Ganga river, at Kalighat area in Kolkata on Friday. Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday issued an 'orange' alert of heavy to very heavy rainfall for several districts in Madhya Pradesh and also a 'yellow' alert of heavy rain in some other areas. The forecasts are valid till Saturday morning.

— PTI

HC GRANTS BAIL
TO AYESHA
SULTHANA

Kochi, June 25: The Kerala High Court on Friday granted anticipatory bail to Lakshadweep filmmaker Ayesha Sulthana in a sedition case registered against her by the Kavaratti police.

A case was registered on June 9 under section 124-A (sedition) and 153 B (hate speech) of IPC on the basis of a petition lodged by a political leader hailing from Kavaratti.

Granting bail, Justice Ashok Menon said there was no apparent indication in her statement, which amounts to imputations or assertions prejudicial to the national interest, nor does it propagate any class of persons against another group of persons.

— PTI

ED searches Deshmukh's five
premises in Mumbai, Nagpur

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, JUNE 25

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday conducted searches on the five premises of former Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh in Mumbai and Nagpur in connection with a money laundering case.

According to sources, the searches have been carried out as the ED has found a money trail of Rs four crore that was allegedly extorted from few bar owners in Mumbai by now suspended Assistant Police Inspector Sachin Waze at the behest of Deshmukh.

The probe agency has also recorded statements of some of the bar owners.

The ED had registered a case against Deshmukh soon after CBI registered an

● **ED REGISTERED** a case against Deshmukh soon after CBI registered an FIR against him in the case relating to the alleged demand of ₹100 crore as extortion from bars and hotels in Mumbai.

FIR against him in the case relating to the alleged demand of ₹100 crore as extortion from bars and hotels in Mumbai.

The agency has so far conducted a series of raids and searches in the city on Deshmukh and his son's associates including chartered accountants.

In Mumbai, the central probe agency also searched the premises of Deshmukh's personal assistant Kundan Shinde and personal secretary Sanjeev Palande.

In April the CBI had also carried out searches in Mumbai and Nagpur in this case registered with the Central Bureau of Investigation.

The CBI registered a case against Deshmukh following a preliminary inquiry against him. The high court had ordered the CBI to conduct the inquiry on the complaint of city based lawyer Jayshree Patil.

Patil had filed a petition seeking inquiry into the allegations made by Param Bir Singh, former Mumbai police commissioner, in a letter written to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray alleging corruption charges against Deshmukh. Patil had filed the petition claiming that the police didn't take any action on her complaint against Deshmukh.

Narada scam: SC annuls HC order

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Calcutta high court to reconsider a plea by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and state law minister Moloy Ghatak to take on record their reply affidavit countering the CBI's plea that they had obstructed the arrest and subsequent production of the accused TMC leaders in the Narada scam case before the trial court on May 17.

Remanding the matter back to the high court and asking it to consider the matter afresh, a vacation bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and Dinesh Maheshwari said the June 9, 2021 high court order

refusing to take on record the reply affidavit by the Chief Minister, law minister and the state of West Bengal stands annulled.

The high court by its June 9 order declined to take on record the counter (reply) affidavits by Ghatak and the state government, noting that the affidavits were filed belatedly after the proceedings had begun and the arguments were at an advanced stage.

Noting while filing the reply affidavits late, they were not accompanied with an application giving the reasons for delay, the court said on Friday that in de-novo proceedings the affidavits by Ghatak and the West Bengal government will be accompanied with an application giving the

reasons for delay in filing them (affidavit). This should be done on or before June 27, with an advance copy being given to the CBI and other "necessary parties".

Sending the ball back to the high court, the Supreme Court said Friday: "We request the high court to first decide the aforesaid applications of the petitioners herein, for taking the counter affidavit/affidavits in response on record, before proceeding to decide the merits of the case."

The court further said that to avoid any prejudice to any of the parties, the June 9 order "shall stand annulled" and "the high court shall decide the matter de-novo".

Similarly, the Supreme

Court ordered that the CBI, if it so desired, would file a reply to the applications by June 29, 2021, after serving an advance copy to Ghatak and the State of West Bengal by June 28.

The hearing on the CBI's plea for transfer of cases outside West Bengal and other matters are due to be heard by the high court on June 29.

In its June 9 order that was challenged by Ghatak, the high court had said the chief minister, law minister and the state government had "waited for the arguments in the case to be substantially completed before seeking to place on record their pleadings in response... It is nothing else but filling the lacunae or supporting the accused."

SHORT TAKES

UK POLICE SEIZE \$114 MILLION IN CRYPTOCURRENCY

London: London police have seized a trove of cryptocurrency worth £114 million (\$159,000) that criminals were planning to launder, the UK's largest-ever seizure of digital currency.

The Metropolitan Police said late Thursday that detectives had seized the digital currency after receiving information about the transfer of criminal assets.

The statement did not say what type of cryptocurrency was involved.

"As technology and online platforms develop, some are moving to more sophisticated methods of laundering their profits", said deputy assistant commissioner Graham McNulty.

"But we have highly trained officers and specialist units working day and night to remain one step ahead," McNulty added.

FIVE DEAD, MANY HURT IN CZECH REPUBLIC TORNADO

Prague: A rare tornado believed to be the most devastating in the Czech Republic's modern history has torn through the country's south-east, killing at least five people and injuring hundreds, rescue services and police said on Friday.

The tornado touched down late Thursday as strong thunderstorms hit the entire country. Seven towns and villages sustained heavy damage that included buildings turned to rubble and overturned cars. The storms were accompanied by hail which in some cases was as big as tennis balls.

Hrusky Deputy Mayor Marek Babizb told Czech public radio that half of his town was almost completely wiped out. "The church is without the tower, the elementary school has no roof and insulation any more, only walls remain from what were houses ... It's really terrible." Some 360 extra police officers were dispatched to the area, along with army personnel.

FIRE KILLS 18 AT CHINESE MARTIAL ARTS SCHOOL

Beijing: At least 18 people, mostly children, were killed and 16 others injured when a deadly fire ripped through a boarding martial arts school in China's Henan province in the early hours of Friday.

The children, aged between seven and 16, were asleep on the first floor when the blaze broke out at the Zhenxing Martial Arts Centre.

A total of 34 students were enrolled at the boarding school in Shuangqiu city's Zhecheng county.

Four people were severely injured and 12 sustained minor wounds in the fire, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post newspaper quoted local official media reports as saying.

An eyewitness said he heard the children screaming for help. "All the children screamed and we tried to help by pouring water on the fire, but it didn't stop. It eventually got so fierce there was simply no way for adults to get close," the eyewitness said.

SINGAPORE SHIP CATCHES FIRE IN INDIAN OCEAN

Colombo: A fire broke out on a container ship sailing toward Singapore in the Indian Ocean, the Sri Lankan Navy said on Friday, a week after a cargo ship carrying tonnes of chemicals sank near the country's main port in Colombo nearly a month after catching fire.

Navy spokesperson Indika de Silva said the Liberian-flagged MSC Messina ship had left the port of Colombo on June 22 heading for Singapore and it caught fire outside the island's international maritime borders. He said the Navy was alerted to the ship's fire early hours of Friday and since the ship is still within Sri Lanka's search and rescue limits they were obliged to respond.

The fire was reported from the engine compartment of the vessel, which is currently located some 483 nautical miles away from Kirinda, the southern most tip of the island, the Navy spokesman said. A merchant vessel in the proximity had been alerted to provide assistance and at this point it was unlikely that Sri Lanka Navy would be called upon to launch any rescue missions, the spokesperson said.

Over 160 missing in Miami mishap

Crews comb rubble of collapsed condo

Surfside (US), June 25:

About 160 people were still unaccounted for Friday a day after an ocean-side condominium building collapsed into a pile of rubble, and searchers combing through a twisted, shifting pile of concrete and metal feared the death toll of at least four could go much higher.

With scores of firefighters working overnight to reach any possible survivors both from under and atop the remains of the building, hopes rested on how quickly crews using dogs and microphones to sift through the wreckage could complete their grim, yet delicate task.

"Every time we hear a sound, we concentrate on those areas," said Assistant Miami-Dade Fire Chief Raide Jadallah.

Three more bodies were removed overnight, and Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez said authorities were working with the medical

examiner's office to identify the victims. Eleven injuries were reported, with four people treated at hospitals.

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said rescuers were at "extreme risk" going through the rubble.

"Debris is falling on them as they do their work. We have structural engineers on site to ensure that they will not be injured, but they are proceeding because they are so motivated and they are taking extraordinary risk on the site every day," she said.

With searchers using saws and jackhammers to look for pockets large enough to hold a person, Levine Cava said there was still hope of finding people alive.

The missing at what was left of the 12-story Champlain Towers South included people from around the world: A beloved retired Miami-area teacher and his wife. Orthodox Jews from

Russia. Israelis. The sister of Paraguay's first lady. Others from South America.

State Sen. Jason Pizzo of Miami Beach told the *Miami Herald* he watched as tactical teams of six worked early Friday to sift through the debris. He said he saw one body taken in a yellow body bag and another that was marked. They were taken to a homicide unit tent that was set up along the beach.

Many people remained at the reunification center set up near the collapse site early Friday morning, awaiting results of DNA swabs that could help identify victims.

Officials said no cause for the collapse has been determined. Video of the collapse showed the center of the building appearing to tumble down first and a section nearest to the ocean teetering and coming down seconds later, as a huge dust cloud swallowed the neighborhood. — *AP*

N-deal: Iran told time running out

Paris, June 25: The United States and France on Friday warned Iran that time was running out to return to a nuclear deal, voicing fear that Tehran's sensitive atomic activities could advance if talks drag on.

On the first high-level visit to Paris by President Joe Biden's administration, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his French hosts saluted a new spirit of cooperation after four years of turbulence under Donald Trump.

But the two sides said that one key Biden promise — to return to the 2015 accord on the Iranian nuclear programme that was trashed by Trump — was at risk if the clerical regime does not make concessions during talks that have been going on for months in

Vienna. Blinken warned that the United States still had "serious differences" with Iran, which has kept negotiating since last week's presidential election won by hardliner Ebrahim Raisi.

"There will come a point, yes, where it will be very hard to return back to the standards set by the JCPOA," Blinken told reporters, using the formal name of the accord.

"We haven't reached that point — I can't put a date on it — but it's something that we're conscious of," Blinken warned that if Iran "continues to spin ever more sophisticated centrifuges" and steps up uranium enrichment, it will bring nearer the "breakout" time at which it will be dangerously close to the ability to develop a nuclear bomb. — *AFP*

Facing deportation, Indian youth seek White House aid

Washington, June 25: A group of Indian youngsters from across America, facing imminent prospects of deportation, has met senior Biden administration officials at the White House and influential lawmakers, appealing them to "let us stay in the US".

There are 2,00,000 such young Americans, who have spent their entire childhood and teenage in the US, who are facing the prospects of imminent deportation to the country of their origin as they have either attained the age of 21 or about to reach that age, after which they can no longer be dependent on their parent's visas.

A significantly large number of these parents are in a decades-long wait for a Green Card. A Green

Card, known officially as a Permanent Resident Card, is a document issued to immigrants to the US as evidence that the bearer has been granted the privilege of residing permanently in the US.

The young Indians, led by Dip Patel, a clinical pharmacist in Illinois, surprised many of the congressmen and senators, who greeted them at the Capitol last week, as they were probably the first batch of lobbyists at the US Congress, after the recent lifting of social distancing restrictions by the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC).

Patel, 25, is founder of Improve The Dream, a youth-led organisation and bringing awareness for children who face ageing

out and self-deportation, was joined by Pareen Mhatre, 21, a senior at the University of Iowa majoring in Biomedical Engineering and minoring in Business Administration; Naga Raghav Sreeram, 21, a senior at the University of California, Davis majoring in Computer Science.

Lakshmi Parvathinathan, 18, a sophomore at Drexel University majoring in Biological Sciences; Sarvani Kunapareddy, 18, a rising freshman at the University of Illinois at Chicago majoring in Computer Science and French Ashley Pardo, 17, a rising freshman at the University of California, Berkeley studying Political Science and Human Rights also joined them.

— *PTI*



Participants dance while being showered with water during the first Tel Aviv pride event since before the Covid-19 pandemic on Friday even as officials urged marchers to wear masks amid a surge in infections. Organisers called it the largest parade of its kind held worldwide since the outbreak of Covid-19.

Australia, Israel bring back mask rules as variant spreads

Sydney, June 25: Australia and Israel, which had been successful in fending off Covid-19, reimposed restrictions on Friday as cases surged of the highly contagious Delta variant which also threatened Africa with a brutal third wave.

The centre of Australia's largest city Sydney entered lockdown, a shock for a population that had returned to relative normality after months of recording very few local cases, while vaccination success story Israel reimposed indoor mask-wearing less than two weeks after it lifted the measure.

And in Fiji, another country that saw early successes against the virus, health authorities admitted for the first time that Covid transmission is widespread in the community.

While vaccination campaigns have helped bring down infections in numerous — mostly wealthy — countries, the rise of the Delta variant which was first found in India has led to fears of new waves of a virus that has already killed nearly 3.9 million people.

In Australia, which has been one of the most successful nations in containing the Coronavirus after shutting its borders, around a million people in four eastern and central Sydney neighbourhoods were ordered to stay home for at least a week.

The premier of the state of New South Wales, Gladys Berejiklian, called it the "scariest period" since the pandemic began. — *AFP*

Covid-19 adapted to human cells: Study

Melbourne, June 25: The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid-19, is most ideally adapted to infect human cells, rather than bat or pangolin cells, according to a study which raises questions about the origin of the virus.

The researchers from Flinders University and La Trobe University in Australia used high-performance computer modelling of the form of the SARS-CoV-2 virus at the beginning of the pandemic to predict its ability to infect humans and 12 domestic and exotic animals.

The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports on Thursday, aimed to help identify any intermediate animal vector that may have played a role in transmitting a bat

virus to humans. The researchers used genomic data from the 12 animal species to painstakingly build computer models of the key ACE2 protein receptors for each species. These models were then used to calculate the strength of binding of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein to each species' ACE2, which acts as the receptor for SARS-CoV-2 and allows it to infect the cell.

The results showed that SARS-CoV-2 bound to ACE2 on humans cells more tightly than any of the tested animal species, including bats and pangolins. The researchers explained that if one of the animals species tested was the origin, it would normally be expected to show the highest binding to the virus. — *PTI*

JAPANESE COLD CHAIN WORTH \$9.3 MN TO INDIA

Tokyo, June 25: Japan on Friday announced that it will provide \$9.3 million worth cold chain equipment and related assistance to India to help in the country's fight against Covid-19 pandemic.

The assistance, under Japan's Emergency Grant Aid scheme, will provide India with cold chain equipment including medical equipment such as cold-storage facilities, as "Last One Mile Support" to ensure vaccination in each country, through the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

India's coronavirus tally rose to 3,01,34,445 on Friday after a single-day rise of 51,667 Covid-19 infections. — *PTI*

UK health minister admits virus breach with embrace

London, June 25: Britain's health minister apologised Friday for breaching national restrictions after a newspaper ran pictures of him embracing a woman with whom he allegedly had an affair.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock, who has led the country's response to the Coronavirus pandemic, is the latest in a string of

government officials to be accused of breaching restrictions imposed on the rest of the population to curb the spread.

The tabloid *Sun* newspaper ran images appearing to show the married Hancock and a senior aide embracing in an office at the Department of Health. It said the closed circuit television images were

taken May 6 — 11 days before lockdown rules were eased to allow hugs and other physical contact with people outside one's own household. Hancock said in a statement that "I accept that I breached the social distancing guidance in these circumstances." "I have let people down and am very sorry," he said. — *PTI*

EU divided on meeting Putin

Brussels, June 25: European Union countries bordering Russia rejected a Franco-German plan to resume official meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin, with one leader likening the move to an attempt to talk a bear out of stealing honey.

In a statement in the early hours of Friday morning, EU leaders said only that they "will explore formats and conditionalities of dialogue with Russia." There was no mention of any high-level meetings or

plans for a summit with Putin. The European Union is deeply divided in its approach to Moscow.

Russia is the EU's biggest natural gas supplier, and plays a key role in a series of international conflicts and issues linked to Europe's strategic interests, including the Iran nuclear deal, and conflicts in Syria and Libya. European heavyweight Germany has strong economic interests there, notably the NordStream 2 under-sea pipeline project, and a

number of countries, including France, are reluctant to continue waging a sanctions battle with Russia, including over the poisoning of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

The EU is concerned that Putin is turning increasingly authoritarian and wants to distance himself from the West. Both the 27-nation trading bloc and the NATO military alliance are struggling to bring Russia to the table. U.S. President Joe Biden's meeting with Putin this month

was a rare exception.

"We have to deal with Russia, but being very cautious about the real intentions of Putin's regime," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda told reporters at an EU summit in Brussels. "So far, we don't see any radical change in the pattern of behavior of Russia." "If, without any positive changes in the behavior of Russia, we start to engage, it will send very uncertain and bad signals," Nausėda said. — *AP*

UNHEALTHY | TREND Many countries saw rise in use of cannabis during the Coronavirus pandemic

275 mn used drugs worldwide in 2020: UN

Geneva, June 25: Around 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders as 275 million people used drugs worldwide in 2020, according to the 2021 World Drug Report which was released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on Thursday.

As per the report, in the last 24 years, cannabis potency had increased by as much as four times in parts of the world during the Covid-19 pandemic. In surveys of health professionals across 77 countries, 42 per cent asserted that cannabis use had increased.

"Lower perception of

drug use risks has been linked to higher rates of drug use, and the findings of UNODC's 2021 World Drug Report highlight the need to close the gap between perception and reality to educate young people and safeguard public health," said UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly.

"The theme of this year's International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is "Share facts on drugs. Save lives", emphasising the importance of strengthening the evidence base and raising public awareness, so that the international community, governments, civil



Afghanistan accounted for 85% of the global total of opium production in 2020, says Report.

— *AFP*

society, families, and youth can make informed decisions, better target

efforts to prevent and treat drug use, and tackle world drug challenges," he

● **BETWEEN 2010-2019** the number of people using drugs increased by 22 per cent. Based on demographic changes alone, current projections suggest an 11 per cent rise in the number of people who use drugs globally by 2030 — and a marked increase of 40 per cent in Africa, due to its rapidly growing and young population.

added.

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ic changes alone, current projections suggest an 11 per cent rise in the number of people who use drugs globally by 2030 — and a marked increase of 40 per cent in Africa, due to its rapidly growing and young population.

According to the latest global estimates, about 5.5 per cent of the population aged between 15 and 64 years have used drugs at least once in the past year, while 36.3 million people, or 13 per cent of the total number of persons who use drugs, suffer from drug use disorders.

Globally, over 11 million people are estimated to inject drugs, half of whom

are living with Hepatitis C. Opioids continue to account for the largest burden of disease attributed to drug use.

The two pharmaceutical opioids most commonly used to treat people with opioid use disorders, methadone, and buprenorphine, have become increasingly accessible over the past two decades. The amount available for medical use has increased six-fold since 1999, from 557 million daily doses to 3,317 million by 2019, indicating that science-based pharmacological treatment is more available now than in the past. — *PTI*

DECCAN
Chronicle

26 JUNE 2021

J&K: Delimitation, polls on; statehood is carrot

There was no official agenda set for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with leaders of mainstream parties of Jammu and Kashmir last Thursday. That was evidently done to let the Valley politicians steam off if they so wished about the events of August 5, 2019 when the state's constitutional autonomy was taken away and its status reduced to that of a Union territory. But that does not mean Delhi did not have an agenda. And it is on this scheme of things that the PM was apparently able to secure the agreement of the Kashmiri leaders, although no papers appear to have been signed.

It's three years since the last popular government was pulled down. In this time no major objectives cited as justification for ending J&K's constitutional status-ending of terrorism, rapid development, and squelching of the separatist mindset (which does influence a segment of the population) have been achieved, although the Union home ministry has made extravagant claims. An elected government had to be installed.

To make that possible, the very politicians who were locked up in August 2019, and called the "Gupkar gang", had to be persuaded to engage in dialogue with the PM. And they did. This is perhaps the Modi government's singular achievement. But it is hard to bet on the people. It is useful to remember that alienation in the Valley has never been so complete. Still, as a rule the people of Kashmir do not refuse dialogue, and that is what we just saw. Does this mean that a chapter of hope has opened after the darkness that descended two years ago? Hardly. In no way can Mr Modi's effort be compared with the mood that captured the Valley when another PM — in a speech in Srinagar — spoke of meeting the aspirations of the people in a spirit of

The official mantra is this would happen at an 'appropriate time'. This suggests that J&K will be run from the Centre as a UT even after the Assembly poll.

"insaniyat, jamhooriyat, Kashmiriyat". Alas, the present dispensation in Delhi lacks credibility in Kashmir as well as in Hindu-majority Jammu.

However, people in J&K are fed up with bureaucratic rule in which they have no voice. They have been hungering for an early Assembly election, and their politicians could not have turned against the popular mood. But the promise of Assembly polls comes with a caveat — that there would be a fresh delimitation exercise in the UT while the national-level delimitation is slated for 2026.

A plausible reason for this is the decades-old demand of the Sangh Parivar for more Hindu-dominated constituencies in the Muslim-majority state in the belief that this might offer a chance to have a Hindu CM. Will this hope of the BJP materialise after delimitation? That is an open question.

In light of the Thursday meeting, delimitation and state polls are now officially on the cards, and the Valley's main politicians appear to have lent the process their sanction. Without their endorsement these processes would lack credibility.

In spite of impassioned appeals by senior elements among those gathered for the discussion with the PM, the Centre has not budged on restoring J&K's statehood. The official mantra is this would happen at an "appropriate time". This suggests that J&K will be run from the Centre as a UT even after the Assembly poll. This leaves questions: Is the election idea deceptive? Is it what the people want? In the final analysis, will Kashmir politicians agree to such an election? The fundamental subject of restoring J&K's autonomy is before the Supreme Court, and that was cited as a reason to stymie discussion on it on Thursday.

McAfee: Fame and misfortune

The rich and famous may be destined to living their lives in a goldfish bowl unless they get obsessively reclusive. The rich also tend to come in all shapes, sizes and lifestyles with the only constant in their lives being that they are invariably led under public scrutiny. The cybersecurity pioneer John McAfee did not, however, fall into any well-known stereotypes of the rich with their lavish lifestyles whose privacy is invariably invaded by the tabloids, especially when their marriages run into the rocks as they often tend to in that charmed circle.

McAfee was an unusual man who made his fame and a bit of fortune when the first major computer virus named "Brain" hit the web in 1986 and he devised ways to combat it. To his misfortune he left the company in 1994 long after which Intel took it over, in 2011, for \$7.68 billion and built up a customer base of 500 million.

McAfee's expertise in computer security meant he made a small pile himself but he said he lost most of it in the 2008 crash. In a replay of the sour grapes fable, he knocked McAfee for what it had become without him but all that brought him was 10 million viewers and more notoriety than fame.

His troubles as a disillusioned millionaire may serve as a general warning to all of his ilk. He seemed to lose his self control when suspected of shooting a neighbour in a tiny island off Belize because that man may have poisoned four of his dogs. He somehow emerged from it unscathed until he ran afoul of the US tax authorities. Avoiding income tax may be a plaything of the rich but McAfee, once a wannabe US presidential candidate, simply refused to pay taxes on principle and ended up in a Spanish jail where he said he didn't like the food. The fear of extradition to 30 years in a US prison pushed him into taking his own life, a final warning then that fame and fortune can lead to Shakespearean tragedy too.

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Subhani



Do Indians and our govt really care about sports?



Shobhaa's Take

India rediscovered legendary athlete Milkha Singh after he died of Covid-19 complications at a Chandigarh hospital just five days after he lost Nirmal, his wife of 58 years, to the same disease. An avalanche of tributes poured in, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi calling him a "colossal sportsman who captured the nation's imagination". Several flowery tributes followed, but one thing that struck me amid all this gush was the sad fact that this outstanding sportsman, who brought so much fame and glory to India when he "flew" on the track, had only got the Padma Shri back in 1959, and nothing since. He declined the Arjuna Award and sulked publicly, hinting he expected a Padma Bhushan. We all know how Padma awards work; but surely years later Milkha should have been "upgraded".

We can still do it! So many other sports stars have been richly rewarded for their achievements. Bharat Ratna Sachin Tendulkar, for example. No disrespect, but if a world-class cricketer can get the country's highest civilian award, why not an internationally recognised track star? There is talk of a posthumous award for Milkha, but frankly posthumous awards have little meaning. The only people who benefit are family members. The recipient passes away without the thrill and joy of being publicly feted. Posthumous awards are a waste of time; those deserving should be celebrated when they are hale and hearty and can cherish the honour with their loved ones.

Milkha Singh must have been a fairly modest man: a huge attribute in today's times when every

second person is a brazen hustler. Had Milkha been shrewder or more calculating, he would have milked his awe-inspiring status and demanded all sorts of privileges, like many others. I watched *Bhaag Milkha, Bhaag* thrice in 2013. For one, I was a track athlete myself, and know what it takes to breast that tape and create new records. Farhan Akhtar played Milkha in the biopic, which grossed over ₹100 crores. Apparently, Milkha asked for ₹1 as his fee, but insisted that a share of the profits go to his foundation. Akhtar did a convincing job of not just acquiring a runner's taut frame, but sensitively portraying a runner's anxieties and vulnerabilities. The man behind the movie, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, said of Milkha: "He believed there are no short cuts if you want to be the best in the world."

It's not too late to course correct. Governments and sports bodies the world over are commissioning statues of living sports heroes — Rafael Nadal recently posed in front of his magnificent statue that was unveiled at Roland Garros as Rafa fans worldwide cheered and applauded the legend, winner of 20 Grand slams. In India, the politics of erecting statues of public figures is mired in controversy. It's bad enough that we have to endure the mediocrity of *netas* while they are alive. It's much worse to have precious urban spaces blocked by ugly statues of awful people whose "contribution" is dodgy at best. I'm sure nobody would question an appropriate statue of "The Flying Sikh" (a title given to him by Pakistan's Ayub Khan) outside Chandigarh airport. There is a wax statue of his at Delhi's Madame Tussaud's

museum. But is that really enough? Milkha Singh was orphaned during Partition and saw five members of his family being butchered. He arrived as a refugee in Delhi and joined the Indian Army after abandoning plans to become a dacoit out of sheer frustration! He went on to bring glory to the nation as a four-time Asian Games gold medallist. His 400 metres timing of 45.6 seconds was unbroken for 38 years. What a story for youngsters to derive inspiration from!

India really needs to value its sporting greats and reward them suitably. Since I am one of the growing voices saying "No" to the Tokyo Olympics (23 July-8 August 2021), I read sports minister Kiren Rijiju's comments on India's participation with interest. "This time we are aiming high, with full confidence and I believe we should do better than any of our previous performances." Wait a minute, Sirji. Our "best" show was way back in 2012, when we came back with six measly medals. Minister *saab* is expecting a record haul and says he has interacted with most of our elite players and Olympians. For the record, Mr Rijiju's ministry spent ₹1,000 crores in the past four years preparing for the Olympics.

While I admire his faith and am also hoping for a decent showing this year, despite the pandemic with all its challenges, it must be said that our contingent came back with two medals from the 2016 Rio Games (where China won 70). At that time, I was slaughtered across the social media for "criticising" our athletes for their dismal performance.

This outstanding sportsman had only got the Padma Shri back in 1959, and nothing since. He declined the Arjuna Award. We all know how Padma awards work; but surely Milkha should have been 'upgraded'!

Our athletes are only as good as their support system. Mr Rijiju is a smart, young, dynamic politician (future Prime Minister material). He has as much riding on our medal haul as the athletes themselves, who have trained hard for this momentous event.

The problem is our casual attitude towards sports. Apart from cricket, almost no other sporting activity is "recognised" or encouraged as enthusiastically. Milkha Singh's son Jeev Milkha Singh (also an Arjuna Award winner) is arguably one of India's best golfers. We have our star tennis players and more recently, badminton is also receiving its due, along with table tennis. Our staple — hockey — where we used to be world leaders — has been relegated to a less hallowed position, after we failed to win any significant title after dominating the game for decades. The mindset of most Indian parents has not shifted sufficiently to support the sporting dreams of their children. Golf and tennis are seen as elitist sports that require generous financial support. Sports scholarships are hard to come by. Talented athletes have it tough. It's only now that we see women boxers and wrestlers coming into their own and shining at global events. As are female shooters. Archery is finding takers across the country, but in terms of commercial success, the megabucks are made by cricketers, and cricketers alone. With our Olympics contingent all set to compete in the most prestigious sporting event on earth, here's wishing them love and luck. Milkha Singh titled his autobiography *The Race of My Life*, and the nation ran it with him. His race ended on June 15, 2021. It's time to chorus "Bhaag India, Bhaag", and hope Mr Rijiju's prediction of a rich Olympics' haul goes beyond wishful thinking.

Instagram handle: @ShobhaaDe; Twitter: @DeShobhaa

LETTERS

GAP BETWEEN JAB

As is his wont, Karan Thapar has candidly spelt out in detail the contentious issue of the gap between the jabs of Covishield (*Mind the gap: Covishield's 2nd jab sets off controversy, DC, June 25*). The takeaway from his write-up is any change in the gap needs to be scientifically supported and on the basis of merit.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

UNJUST VERDICT

A one man army of black caps under Kane Williamson lifted the first test World Cup in 144 years. Yes, they won the only one off final in a rain affected Test decided on unusual sixth day. It is quite natural for disappointed Indian public to demand Virat Kohli's head.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

J&K SOLUTION

The J&K 'tangle' cannot be resolved as long as the so-called stake holders remain at the talks as they always try to convert it into a one-sided dialogue. India cannot continue to spend huge money for securing J&K just because some political leaders want autonomy.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

It's on a positive note and in cordial atmosphere that the PM's maiden dialogue with all the leaders of J&K ended. The moot point was raised by the Congress's Azad about the resumption of hearing called by 5-member SC bench headed by the CJI N.V. Ramana to delve into writ petitions challenging the Constitutional validity of the Centre's decision to abrogate Article 370 & 35A.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN
Chronicle

Experts' panel on irrigation projects

NEW DELHI, JUNE 25.

An experts committee of engineers and economists is being appointed by the Government to examine how the cost of irrigation projects could be brought down.

This was announced in the Lok Sabha today by Irrigation and Power Minister K.L. Rao, while replying to the debate on demands for grants for his ministry. The House later voted for the demands, after rejecting all the cut motions.

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



*"The poets have all claimed the wine
From Rumi to Hafiz
I asked if they meant the draught
divine
And they said "mind your own biz!"
Now Bachcho cries out in vain to Saki
Who replies with a fiendish grin
"Abh sab khuttam, Koochh nahi baki
The wages of your sin!"*

— From **The Regrets of Messrs Rowe, Rowe and K Gumby-Harer**, by Bachchoo

Of 'flat earth' & science denial: New orthodoxy of intolerance

Think, gentle reader, as you skim this column, of Galileo, one of the fathers of science and hence of freedom from assertive superstition. He looked through telescopes and observed the movement of the planets and the sun. He proceeded to assert, from his observations, that the sun didn't circle the earth but, contrary to the firmly held doctrines and teachings of the Church, that our planet revolved and rotated, circling the sun, giving rise to day and night and to the seasons.

All hell broke loose on Twitter and Instagram. The bigots of Catholicism

accused him of blasphemy! The earth doesn't move, they insisted. The outcry led the leaders of the Church to arrest poor Galileo and subject him to a trial. If this pioneer of truth had any supporters at the time, they might have pointed out to the court, and indeed to the world, that Galileo had not called for the castration or execution of those who believed that the sun went round the earth. He hadn't even called for the banning of all documents or teaching materials which asserted that the earth was flat or that it didn't move.

Nevertheless, he was tried for merely saying what he had scientifically deduced. He was aware that if they found him guilty of blasphemy, he could be put to death. Such was the power of the prevalent orthodoxy. Realising this, Galileo confessed to the bigots of the Inquisition that he recanted his blasphemous outburst. Of course, the earth was the centre of the universe and, as God's central creation, didn't move a millimetre. He may not have been applauded by the court, but he was certainly spared twenty lashes of the whip or being burned at the stake.

The story goes that, true to his beliefs, as he left the court, he muttered to himself, or perhaps to his God if he still believed in Him, "*eppur si muove*" — and yet it moves!

I don't suppose one can quite call her the Galileo of our times but, gentle reader, here follows the story of an artist called Jess de Wahl who this week hit the headlines through a controversy which she had sparked.

Ms de Wahl is an embroidery artist, and her work is famous enough and deemed good enough to be adopted by and sold in the gallery shop of the Royal Academy of Arts. The RA is probably the premier institution run by artists of all sorts. Their permanent exhibition and other occasional displays are among the most respectable, reviewed and revered in Britain.

Apart from excellence in her floral patterns, Ms de Wahl declares a devoted, thematic commitment to feminist principles and to feminist radical activism through art. But! But she doesn't believe that men and women can through assertion, surgery, hormone treatment or all of these, change their gender. She expressed her scepticism in a blog. She was very careful to assert that she absolutely supported the right of people to think as they like and for the political and social rights of everyone, including men who assert that they are women or women who assert that they are really men. Her reservations were about the scientific fact that you are born and grow with one gender determined by the chromosomes in your thirty trillion cells. I suppose the harshest way of putting it is that "trans-women are not really women and trans-men are not really men!"

The trans community's representatives, if there are such people, took exception to her expressing this view. Eight people wrote to the Royal Academy to point out that the RA's professed ethical stance was to respect and include, etc etc. The RA responded hastily and removed and banned all Ms Wahl's exhibits and work from their shop, labelling her "transphobic".

Ms Wahl objected, saying she had not been in any sense the perpetrator of a "hate crime" and that her freedom to express a scientifically valid view should be respected. There was, from

her supporters, some mention of suing the RA for transgressing equality laws. No such action has yet been taken.

Following this row, Ms Wahl has received literally thousands of texts, tweets or whatever in support of her stance and also some nasty ones wishing that she was dead.

Her stance follows that of Harry Potter writer J.K. Rowling and feminist philosopher Germaine Greer, among others. It is also supported by feminists who object to trans-women entering women's athletic competitions and even challenge the idea that trans-women should use women's changing rooms and toilets and be confined in women's prisons when they offend.

The strictures against Ms de Wahl are part of a new orthodoxy of intolerance. Of course, individuals can assert what they please about their own gender or sexuality — though white people asserting that they are black would meet with the same intensity of strictures the orthodoxy favours. That "of course" should include the right to publicly assert scientific facts. The earth is not flat simply because I say so!

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	52,925.04	0.43
Nifty 50	15,860.40	0.44
S&P 500*	4,278.70	0.29
Dollar (₹)	74.20	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.17	0.39
Euro (₹)	88.59	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,309▼66	0.14
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	76.07	0.67
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.028	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.502	0.015

* As of 8:30 PM IST

PNB HF voting okays red-flagged re-appointments

PNB Housing Finance shareholders have passed the resolutions regarding appointment of Hardayal Prasad as managing director and CEO and re-appointments of others on the company's board. Among various passed resolutions were re-appointments of independent directors (IDs) Chandrasekaran Ramakrishnan and Nilesh S. Vikramsey—whose re-induction was red flagged by a proxy advisory firm this month.

LIC, SBI Life pick up stake in Indian Bank under QIP



Life Insurance Corporation, SBI Life and Canara Bank were among the top investors picking up stakes in Indian Bank under a qualified institutional placement (QIP) that closed on Thursday, a regulatory filing said. LIC picked up 17.80 per cent, SBI Life Insurance 11.87 per cent, SBI Mutual Fund and its various schemes 11.87 per cent, SocGen and its various schemes 9.74 per cent and Canara Bank 5.93 per cent of the shares offered.

FAME Phase-II scheme extended by two years

The government said it has extended the second phase of FAME India scheme by two years till March 31, 2024, for faster adoption of electric mobility and development of its manufacturing ecosystem. The second phase of FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) India scheme focuses on supporting electrification of public and shared transportation.

India Pesticides IPO subscribed 29 times

The IPO of India Pesticides Limited was subscribed 29 times on the closing day of the subscription. The Rs 800-crore IPO received bids for 56,07,11,650 shares against 1,93,10,345 shares on offer. The qualified institutional buyers category was subscribed 42.95 times, non-institutional investors 51.88 times, and those for retail individual investors 11.30 times. The offer was in a price range of Rs 290-296.



■ Open offer makes it over ₹6,300-cr deal Pharmeasy to take reins of Thyrocare

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 25

In yet another transaction in the online pharma space, digital healthcare company Pharmeasy on Friday announced it will acquire a controlling stake in diagnostic chain Thyrocare for Rs 4,546 crore in an all-cash deal. With this, the online space is witnessing acquisition of a listed entity by a start-up.

API Holdings, the parent of the Pharmeasy, will buy a 66.11 per cent stake in Thyrocare from A. Velumani, chairman and managing director of the company and his affiliates at Rs 1,300 per share, according to a statement.

The affiliates include A. Sundararaju, Amruta Velumani, Anand Velumani, Thyrocare Properties & Infrastructure, Pavilion Commercial, Thyrocare Publications, Sumathi Infra Project and Mahima Advertisings.

The acquisition of a majority stake in the listed entity will also see a subsidiary of API Holdings, Docon Technologies, making an open offer to acquire an additional 26 per cent stake of Thyrocare.

Docon Technologies along with API Holdings has announced an open offer for acquisition of up to 1,37,55,077 fully paid-up equity shares of face value of Rs 10 each from the public shareholders of Thyrocare Technologies, representing 26 per cent of the expanded voting share



capital, at a price of Rs 1,300 per equity share aggregating to total consideration of Rs 1,788 crore in cash, Thyrocare informed the exchanges. This takes the total value of the deal to about Rs 6,334 crore.

Velumani will be separately acquiring a minority non-controlling stake of less than 5 per cent in API as part of a series of equity investments by existing and new investors of API. According to reports, Velumani will be investing Rs 1,500 crore and hold a 4.9 per cent stake in API.

Shares of Thyrocare closed 6.23 per cent up at Rs 1,448.05 apiece on the BSE on Friday.

Pharmeasy has a user base of 12 million consumers, and a network of 6,000 digital consultation clinics and 90,000 partner retailers across the country. Thyrocare performs over 110 million diagnostic tests annually. It is the largest B2B player in the diagnostics space and has a network of 3,330 collec-

tion centres across 2,000 towns in India. "The unique reach and strength of Thyrocare in diagnostics blended with the young and dynamic team of PharmEasy will bring in better healthcare solutions for common man nationwide" said Velumani, CMD of Thyrocare.

Earlier in May, Pharmeasy had fully acquired Medlife after entering the unicorn club. API Holdings is reported to be strengthening its portfolio ahead of an initial public offering, probably in 12-18 months.

In other major deals in the online healthcare space in recent times, Tata Digital bought a majority stake in IMG Technologies. Reliance too had acquired a majority stake in Netmeds to enter the online pharmacy space.

According to consultants RedSeer, the e-health space touched a gross merchandise value of \$1.2 billion in FY20 and is estimated to have clocked a value of \$2 billion in FY21.

Bids invited for leasing out 16 railway land parcels

New Delhi, June 25: The Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) has called for bids for leasing out 16 land parcels across the country with the aim of generating revenue of over Rs 1,900 crore.

Prominent among these 16 sites are Boulevard Road Colony in Delhi, land near Moula Ali Flyover in Secunderabad, Ramgarh Tal Colony in Gorakhpur, Lucknow Railway Station Redevelopment, plots at Gomti Nagar in Lucknow and at Salt Golah in Howrah.

These sites have been chosen due to their marketability and exclusive locations, which make them eminently suitable for commercial and residential development, the authority said.

RLDA will lease out these land parcels to prospective developers who will be mandated to develop these sites in line with local by-laws," RLDA vice-chairman Ved Parkash Dudeja said.

The authority is targeting revenue generation of Rs 2,000 crore for the Indian Railways in 2021-22, up from Rs 352 crore the previous year.

RLDA is a statutory authority under the Ministry of Railways for the development of railway land.

Indian Railways has about 43,000 hectares of vacant land across India. —PTI

No tax liability on Covid-related receipts

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, JUNE 25

Providing a much-needed tax concession to the people who may have received financial help from their employers and well-wishers for meeting expenses incurred for Covid-19 treatment, the government on Friday announced that there will be no tax liability on such amounts received.

"In order to ensure that no income-tax liability arises on this account, it has been decided to provide income-tax exemption to the amount received by a taxpayer for medical treatment from an employer or from any person for treatment of Covid-19 during FY2019-20 and subsequent years," the finance ministry said in a notification.

"Ex-gratia payments received by family members of a person who has died due to Covid 19 from an employer will also be tax exempt without any limit. Such a payment from other persons aggregating to Rs 10 lakh will be tax exempt," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said.

Besides, the government also announced various the tax exemptions and extended some key tax compliance deadlines.

Of the deadline relaxation, the most important deadline extension involves the linking of PAN and the Aadhaar card. It has been extended by three months. "Other than that, the time to invest in residential house for tax deduction has been extended by more than three months

DEADLINES RELAXED	
▶ Linking of PAN and the Aadhaar card extended to Sept. 30	▶ Date for furnishing TDS certificate in Form 16 extended till July 31
▶ On sale of residential property the re-investment deadline extended to Sept. 30	▶ Quarterly statement in Form 15CC can be furnished by July 31
▶ Due date for furnishing TDS statement for Q4 is now July 15	▶ Equalisation Levy Statement in Form No. 1 can be submitted by July 31

and the 'Vivad se Viswas' payment without interest has been extended by two months from June 30 to August 31," the notification said.

In case of taxing capital gains arising out of transfer of residential house property, the CBDT further said that for relief in taxation, the re-investment deadline would be September 3, 2021 for such capital gains.

Generally, Section 54 of the Income Tax Act provides that in case there is capital gain on account of transfer of a residential house property, such capital gain can be exempt from tax if the taxpayer invests the capital gain amount into another house property within two years (in case of purchase of new house) or within three years (in case of construction of a house) from date of transfer of original house property.

However, the CBDT circular now provides that in case any such time period of two/three years is expiring between April 1, 2021 and September 29, 2021, will

be extended to September 30, 2021. "Besides, the deadline for making payments under the Vivad Se Vishwas direct tax dispute resolution scheme has been extended by two months till August 31," it said.

"The last date for PAN-Aadhaar linking too has been extended by three months to September 30, 2021, while the same for furnishing Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) certificate in Form 16 to the employees by employers has been extended till July 31, from July 15, 2021," it added.

The due date for furnishing TDS statement for the last (January-March) quarter has also been extended to July 15, from June 30. "The quarterly statement in Form 15CC to be furnished by an authorised dealer for remittances made for the June quarter would have to be furnished by July 31."

"Also, the deadline for furnishing Equalisation Levy Statement in Form No. 1 for the financial year 2020-21, has been extended by a month till July 31, 2021, the CBDT said.

RBI bars MPs, MLAs from urban co-op bank helm

FC BANKING BUREAU MUMBAI, JUNE 25

To curtail the nexus between urban co-operative banks and political leaders that have resulted in frauds and led to bank failures, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday prescribed educational qualifications and 'fit and proper' criteria for managing directors (MDs) and whole-time directors (WTDs) of primary urban cooperative banks and barred MPs and MLAs from these posts.

Issuing the guidelines for appointment of MDs and WTDs, the RBI said MPs, MLAs and representatives of municipal corporations will not be eligible to hold such positions in the primary urban cooperative banks (UCBs).

It further said the MD/WTD should be a post graduate or have qualifications in finance discipline. He or she could be either chartered/cost accountant, MBA (finance) or have a diploma in banking or cooperative business management. The person

should not be below 35 years of age or more than 70 years, it added.

"The person shall have a combined experience of at least eight years at the middle/senior management level in the banking sector (including the experience gained in the concerned UCB) or non-banking finance companies engaged in lending (loan companies) and asset financing," the notification said.

Besides MPs, MLAs and representatives of municipal corporations and local bodies, persons engaged in

business, trade or having substantial interest in any company too will not be eligible for appointment to such positions.

Regarding the tenure, the RBI said the person can be appointed for a maximum of five years and will be eligible for re-appointment, but not beyond 15 years. After that, the person, if necessary, may be re-appointed after a three-year cooling period.

It said the "UCBs whose existing MD/CEO has completed a tenure of five years may approach RBI."

PLI DOESN'T COMPENSATE FOR UNCOMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT: MARUTI CHIEF

Kolkata, June 25: The production linked incentive (PLI) scheme announced by the government for ramping up large-scale manufacturing capacity does not compensate for obstacles in an uncompetitive business environment, Maruti Suzuki chairman R. C. Bhargava said on Friday.

He advocated policies directed at making manufacturing globally competitive by bringing down costs.

"The PLI scheme will help certain sectors and products. It cannot compensate for the obstacles of being uncompetitive," Bhargava said at an interactive session with The Bengal Chamber.

The government had announced an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore for the PLI scheme for 13 sectors, including automobile, in the 2021-22 Union budget.

To a question, Bhargava said the Maruti Suzuki was not looking for new manufacturing plants as the industry CAGR for the last few years was less than 2 per cent.

To attract investment, there has to be political and administrative will, besides measures that ensure that costs are competitive, he said in the context of revitalisation of industry in West Bengal. —PTI

‘Easing lockdown by vaccine coverage cuts risk to economy’

JAIVEER SHEKHAWAT JUNE 25

The rush by India's states to end lockdowns as new coronavirus infections drop, rather than waiting for vaccination rates to rise, risks triggering fresh restrictions and holding back the nation's recovery, according to Oxford Economics.

"States are easing lockdowns based on lower test positivity rates rather than vaccination progress," Priyanka Kishore, head of India and South East Asia Economics at Oxford Economics, wrote in a report to clients. "This risky strategy increases the chances of renewed outbreaks that would further delay the recovery."

Provinces including national capital New Delhi have begun reopening amid signs of infections plateauing, causing mobility rates to

improve as of mid-June. While that's likely to foster return of some demand in the near-term, there's the risk of consumption and business activity suffering going ahead should newer restrictions be placed to control a resurgent virus wave.

With only 3.9 per cent of India's population fully vaccinated, Kishore sees economically important states, including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, not yet reaching the "safe" levels of vaccination.

"The vaccine situation keeps our outlook cautious," said Kishore, who maintained India's growth forecast for this year at 9.1 per cent -- a pace slower than the 9.5 per cent predicted by the nation's central bank.

"Economic data also doesn't support an upward revision to our growth expectations at this point," she said. —Bloomberg

BEING | 'COOL' Prez offers \$30 worth of Bitcoin to citizens to boost its use Bitcoin to be legal tender in El Salvador

MICHAEL MCDONALD JUNE 25

El Salvador President Nayib Bukele doubled down on the country's new law making Bitcoin legal tender and offered \$30 worth of the cryptocurrency to any citizen who signs up for a digital wallet.

The government will create its own Bitcoin wallet called Chivo, which is slang for "cool" in El Salvador, Bukele said during a national address on Thursday night. The funds will be deposited into the account of any citizen who downloads it and registers as a user with their phone number and ID number, he said.

The law making Bitcoin

legal tender will enter into force on September 7, he said.

Bukele, 39, reiterated his arguments that using the cryptocurrency will help attract investment, boost consumption and cut the cost of sending remittances for millions of Salvadorans working abroad. But bank accounts in dollars will remain in dollars, and salaries and pensions will continue to be paid in dollars, he said.

"Why create this law? Because Bitcoin has a \$600 billion market capitalisation globally and if we do this, investors and tourists who own Bitcoin will come to the country and benefit Salvadorans and the economy," Bukele said.



Nayib Bukele

Consumers can pay businesses with Bitcoins from their wallets for items listed in dollars. But if business owners want to receive payment in dollars, they can press a button in the Chivo application to convert the Bitcoins immediately to dollars, according to Bukele. "It will be totally optional. The dollar will continue to be legal tender," he said.

The Chivo wallet will be available to download in September and it will be compatible with other Bitcoin wallets, Bukele said.

The government will provide training for businesses on Bitcoin transactions and seek to improve Internet and mobile phone penetration to encourage the cryptocurrency's use, he said. Businesses that are technologically unable to receive e-payments will be excluded from the law, he added.

Not everyone shares Bukele's enthusiasm for the plan. Fitch Ratings said in a report on Thursday that the legislation establishing Bitcoin as legal tender would

increase regulatory risks for financial institutions, including the potential of violating international anti-money laundering and terrorist financing standards.

"A rushed implementation of the new alternative payment system platform will affect financial institutions' management framework for operational, cyber/ransomware, currency and liquidity risks," Fitch analysts including Rolando Martinez wrote.

The International Monetary Fund has also criticised the move, while the World Bank rejected a request from the government to assist with Bitcoin implementation. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Sam & Liam seal series for England

Cardiff: Sam Billings and Liam Livingstone burnished their Twenty20 credentials as England withstood a top-order wobble to seal a series win over Sri Lanka following a rain-affected second contest. The duo are on the fringes of the limited-overs setup but after England stuttered to 36-4 in pursuit of 112 — a target reduced to 103 from 18 overs following a sharp shower — they put on a crucial 54 from 48 balls. Billings departed with 13 still needed but Livingstone and Sam Curran got England over the line with five wickets and 11 balls to spare as they moved into an 2-0 lead. — *PTI*

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 111/7 (Kusal Mendis 39; Mark Wood 2/18, Adil Rashid 2/24) lost to England 108/5 (Livingstone 29 (not out), Sam Billings 24; W. Hasaranga 2/20). (*Won by five wickets, D/L method*)

Bronze for Indian women shooters

Osijek, Croatia: The Indian trika of Manu Bhaker, Yashaswini Singh Deswal and Rahi Sarnobat claimed the bronze medal in the 10m air pistol women's team event of the ISSF Shooting World Cup here on Friday. They defeated the Hungarian team of Veronika Major, Miriam Jako and Sara Rahel Fabian 16-12 in the bronze medal match. The three Indians had qualified third with a score of 573. Earlier, in the 10m air rifle events, the men's trio of Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar, Deepak Kumar and Divyansh Singh Panwar lost the bronze medal match, while the women shooters failed to get past the qualifying round. Tomar, Kumar and Panwar lost 14-16 to the Serbian team of Milenko Sebic, Milutin Stefanovic and Lazar Kovacevic in the third-place match. — *PTI*

Women archers enter Cup final

Paris: The Indian women's recurve archery team, who failed to book an Olympic quota in the Qualifier, bounced back strongly to storm into the final of the World Cup Stage 3 here on Friday. The fancied trio of Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat and Komalika Bari had lost to lower-ranked Colombia on Sunday to miss the Olympic team qualification, but on Friday they just dropped a set before defeating sixth-ranked France 6-2 in the semi-finals. World Cup Stage 3 is not an Olympic qualifying tournament. The trio, who had won the first stage of the World Cup in Guatemala City in April, will face Mexico on Sunday in a repeat of the first stage final. Deepika will be in the hunt for a hat-trick of gold medals. Deepika is also in the semi-final of the recurve section. — *PTI*

Judoka Sushila gets Olympic spot

New Delhi: Ace Indian judoka Sushila Devi has qualified for the Tokyo Olympics through the continental quota, the sport's international federation confirmed on Friday. Sushila, who competes in the 48kg category, has 989 points which puts her at seventh spot in the Asian list, the International Judo Federation said. The continental quotas are allotted based on a judoka's ranking in the region. Asia has 10 quota slots. This will be the 26-year-old's first participation at the Olympics. Only one athlete per NOC (National Olympic Committee) per division can qualify. Each NOC is entitled to only one spot through the continental quota. Avtar Singh (90kg) was the lone Indian judoka to compete at the 2016 Rio Olympics. — *PTI*

Aditi is off to a creditable start

Johns Creek, USA: Indian golfer Aditi Ashok carded a one-over 73 in the opening round to be placed tied 39th at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship, which is her 17th Major start. Still searching for first Top-10 in a Major, Aditi was one-under through 12 holes. Till then she had given a bogey soon after birdies on second, fifth and ninth. Then a birdie on 12th put her once again at one-under. But a double bogey on the 13th was a spoiler and she played out safely with each of the last five holes yielding pars. Aditi's 17 Major appearances are the most by any Indian and she now overtakes Anirban Lahiri with whom she was tied at 16. It must be noted that women have five Majors and men have four each year. — *PTI*

ASSURED AZZURRI

Italy look to continue unbeaten streak, face Austria

London, June 25: Italy's unbeaten streak won't last forever, and Austria coach Franco Foda is plotting to be the one to stop it. The Italians have become one of the favourites at the European Championship after winning all three of their games in the group stage, scoring seven goals and conceding none. Those three victories at Euro 2020 extended the team's unbeaten streak under coach Roberto Mancini to 30 games — matching the previous record set in the 1930s. "Initially it seemed to be an insurmountable and impossible challenge for us, because they haven't lost for an eternity," Foda said. "But sooner or later even Mancini's team will lose."

Austria have reached the round of 16 at the tournament for the first time, will get their chance on Saturday at Wembley Stadium.

Besides the unbeaten streak, Italy will also be trying to set another record. They have not conceded a goal in 11 matches, a total of 1,055 minutes. If Austria fail to score, Italy will surpass the record of 1,143 minutes set between 1972 and 1974.

For a team who failed to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, Italy's recent results are quite remarkable.

"It's something that makes us proud, especially considering what they thought of us before the tournament started," Italy forward Lorenzo Insigne said.

"But we have to stay focused, calm and think about ourselves. Our



Italian players Giorgio Chiellini and Ciro Immobile during a training session ahead of their Euro Last 16 clash against Austria. — *Twitter*

objective is to go all the way, it wasn't just to get through the group stage."

DENMARK ON EURO ROAD FOR FIRST TIME

After three emotional European Championship matches in Copenhagen, Denmark will next play in a city that Christian Eriksen once called home.

The Danes will take on Wales in the round of 16 at the Johan Cruyff Arena on Saturday, a stadium where Eriksen is fondly remembered by Ajax fans as a stylish midfield playmaker from 2010-13 before his transfer to Tottenham.

Denmark lost their first match to Finland 0-1 after Eriksen suffered cardiac

arrest on the field and had to be resuscitated with a defibrillator. The Danes also lost to Belgium before beating Russia 4-1 to finish second in Group B and advance to knockout rounds.

While Denmark are hitting the road for the first time at a tournament that is being played in 11 cities

Live on TV

Wales vs Denmark from 9.30 pm; Italy vs Austria from 12.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

HEAD TO HEAD

WALES-DENMARK

● **Matches:** 10. Denmark: 6. Wales: 4
● **EURO MEETINGS**
1987: Wales beat Denmark 1-0 in Cardiff.
1987: Denmark beat Wales 1-0 in Copenhagen.
1998: Wales beat Denmark 2-1 in Copenhagen.
1999: Denmark beat Wales 2-0 in Anfield.

ITALY-AUSTRIA

● **Matches:** 35. Italy: 16. Austria: 11. Drawn: 8.
● **EURO MEETINGS**
1970: Italy beat Austria 2-1 in Vienna.
1971: 2-2 in Rome.

— **S. PERVEZ KAISER**

across Europe, Wales have had a tougher travel schedule.

Wales' victory over Turkey and a draw with Switzerland were enough for second place behind Italy in Group A. The Welsh lost 1-0 in their final match against the Italian, one of the tournament's top teams. — *AP*

COPA | AMERICA

Cool Cavani fires Uruguay into QF

Sao Paulo, June 25: Uruguay and Paraguay secured their spots in the Copa America knockout stage by winning their Group A matches by 2-0 scores.

Uruguay had their first win in the tournament against Bolivia, who could have jumped ahead on the table, but are out of the tournament due to Paraguay's convincing victory against Chile on Thursday.

Argentina lead Group A with seven points, followed by Paraguay with six. Chile have five, one more than Uruguay. Bolivia have none.

Uruguay's victory started after Bolivian goalkeeper Carlos Lampe, one of the best players of the match, had an own goal in the 40th minute.

Edinson Cavani doubled the Uruguayan lead from short range in the 79th minute at the Arena Pantanal in Cuiaba. It was the veteran striker's first goal for Uruguay since November.

Paraguay beat Chile with a header by Braian Samudio in the 33rd minute and a goal from the spot by Miguel Almiron in the 58th at the Man Garrincha stadium in Brasilia.

Uruguay and Paraguay will clash on Monday in a match that will decide who face defending champions and favourites Brazil in the quarterfinals.

If they draw or Uruguay win, Chile will face the hosts. A Paraguayan victory means Uruguay will take that spot.

"We have to think about winning, not about choos-

COPA RESULTS	
Uruguay (Jairo Quinteros 40-og, Edinson Cavani 79)	2
Bolivia	0
Paraguay (Braian Samudio 33, Miguel Almiron 58-p)	2
Chile	0



Uruguay's Edinson Cavani celebrates after scoring a goal against Bolivia in Copa America. — *Twitter*

ing rivals," Uruguay midfielder Giorgian de Arrascaeta said.

"We created a lot of opportunities, we missed some that were very clear, but this gives us confidence. We never stopped believing in this squad."

Paraguay's Almiron is also optimistic about the future of his team in the tournament.

"We have done great work here," he said.

"Winning was the most important thing, but the most important thing is how we are playing," he said. — *AP*

Amaceing journey



New Zealand's World Test Championship Mace is heading home in style. — *Twitter*

IT IS YET TO SINK IN, SAYS SOUTHEE ON WTC VICTORY

Southampton, June 25: New Zealand pacer Tim Southee says the World Test Championship triumph over the mighty Indian team will take at least a couple of weeks to sink in.

For Southee, it wasn't just about 15 players in the current squad.

"It is amazing to be part of this team. We have been working for this (WTC final win) for the last two years. Not only the 15 players but others probably in the last 5-6 years (have contributed) to get us to where we are now.

"It is very special. We had come very close to a few tournaments. It is yet to sink in and may take a couple of weeks."

Southee believes that the crucial wickets of India captain Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara on the

● **Kiwi quick Tim Southee believes that the crucial wickets of India captain Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara on the final day had set up his side's triumph.**

final day had set up his side's triumph.

India lost Kohli and Pujara to Kyle Jamieson inside the first eight overs of the day.

"We knew it was going to be tough on the final day, three results were possible then and the first hour to be crucial. But picking up the two wickets in that period was crucial in the end," Southee said in a video interview released by NZ Cricket. — *PTI*

Team India unlikely to get warm-up matches

New Delhi, June 25: The Indian cricket team will play two intra-squad games in Durham before the five-match Test series against England as Virat Kohli's men are unlikely to get any warm-up first-class games against county sides.

Virat Kohli had expressed his displeasure at not being given any first-class games before the England series, starting in Nottingham on August 4.

"Due to Covid-19 protocols, they will play two intra-squad four-day matches before the first Test in August," an ECB spokesperson said on Friday. While it is understood

that BCCI had requested ECB for a few practice games, the Covid-19 situation won't allow any such plan to go ahead.

Asked if there is any chance of a game against county sides, the spokesperson said, "No". The Indian team, once they assemble in London on July 14 and move to Durham, will be once again be in a bubble.

"The domestic cricketers of England not being in a bubble is an issue for sure. That's why the games in Durham will be intra-squad ones," a BCCI official said on conditions of anonymity.

India are currently travelling with 24 players — 20 in the official squad

and four reserves — which will allow them to play intra-squad games.

Chairman of national selectors Chetan Sharma and another senior selector Sunil Joshi are not going to England for the five-Test series as strict quarantine rules have become an impediment. It is understood that India being among the Red List countries, there are no direct flights to the United Kingdom.

Anyone travelling from India either needs to travel by a charter flight like the team or first fly to a country which is not in UK's Red List, quarantine there and then take a connecting flight to England. — *PTI*

1983 once more



Indian cricketers of 1983 World Cup winning team — Mohinder Amarnath, captain Kapil Dev, Syed Kirmani and Roger Binny — pose with the team signatures during the launch of the newest edition of "The 1983 World Cup Opus" in Gurgaon on Friday, June 25, the day India won the 1983 World Cup in London. — *AFP*

Sakariya raring to go in SL series

Mumbai, June 25: Rookie left-arm pacer Chetan Sakariya says he has done his work-outs properly during the hard quarantine period here and is raring to go for the limited-overs series against Sri Lanka starting July 13.

The Indian players, led by Shikhar Dhawan, started their quarantine on June 14 and will continue till June 28. However, their hard quarantine period is over.

"Everybody is now used

to quarantine ... it is good to come out of the quarantine and meet other players and everybody has done work out as per the needs. I am feeling very good," the 23-year-old Sakariya, who has earned his maiden India call-up, told *bcci.tv*.

"When I got out of the room, I was constantly looking at myself, I was feeling good wearing the jersey, but once I came to the gym, I started doing my normal workout," said the Saurashtra pacer, who



Chetan Sakariya

recently lost his father due to Covid-19.

Attacking Delhi top-order batsman Nitish

Rana, who also got his first call-up in the national team, echoed similar sentiments.

"The first seven days were difficult for me, as I was waiting to meet my teammates and I was waiting to wear the jersey. That time was a bit tough for me as each hour was feeling like a year," said 27-year-old.

Rana is looking forward to more intense work-out sessions with a new trainer.

"The atmosphere here is

good and I am excited for the series to start. With a new trainer, I learned and did a new thing.

"After seven days I did intense training and I am looking forward to more intense workout sessions," said the left-handed batsman.

Karnataka players Devdutt Padikkal and Krishnappa Gowtham who too earned their maiden call ups in the national team, also sounded pleased. — *PTI*

SINDHU SET TO CARRY TRI-COLOUR AT GAMES

New Delhi, June 25: India's star badminton player and Rio Games silver medallist PV Sindhu is a front-runner to become one of the two flag-bearers for the Indian contingent at the Tokyo Olympics. This time, India will have one male and female athlete as the flag bearer at the opening ceremony. The Olympics begin July 23.

The official announcement will happen at the end of this month but it is all but certain that Sindhu will be one of the flag-bearers.

"Sindhu is likely to be one of the flag-bearers," an IOA source said.

Although there is no rule but the convention

has been that last edition's medal winner always has been the flag-bearer for the next edition.

From last edition, there were two medallists and one of them wrestler Sakshi Malik has not qualified during this edition.

It is still not clear who among the male athletes will be the joint flag-bearer. Some of the big names include athlete Neeraj Chopra, TT player Sharath Kamal, wrestler Bajrang Punia, boxer Amit Panghal to name a few.

No male athletes got any medal at the last edition in Rio de Janeiro. — *PTI*

WIMBLEDON | DRAW

It could be Novak vs Federer in final

Wimbledon, June 25: Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer were placed on opposite sides of the Wimbledon bracket in Friday's draw, meaning they only could meet in the final — which would be a rematch of their epic 2019 title showdown.

The top-seeded Djokovic will have a lot at stake when play begins at the All England Club on Monday, a year after the grass-court tournament was canceled because of the pandemic.

He seeks a 20th major title, which would tie the men's record shared by Federer and Rafael Nadal; he can move closer to a calendar-year Grand Slam after winning the Australian Open in February and the French Open this month; he will be trying to win his third consecutive trophy, and sixth overall, at Wimbledon.

Two years ago, Djokovic edged Federer in a fifth-set tiebreaker after saving two championship points in the final. Two of the top five men

are out: No. 3 Nadal and No. 5 Dominic Thiem.

Among the noteworthy first-round men's matchups are Djokovic against wild-card entry Jack Draper, a 19-year-old from England who was the Wimbledon boys' runner-up in 2018; two-time champion Andy Murray against No. 24 seed Nikoloz Basilashvili; and No. 21 Ugo Humbert against Nick Kyrgios.

DEFENDING CHAMPION HALEP WITHDRAWS

Simona Halep said she was "really down and upset" at not being able to defend her ladies singles title at Wimbledon due to a calf injury.

The 29-year-old Romanian had been battling to be fit since withdrawing from her second round match at the Italian Open in mid-May.

"It is with great sadness that I'm announcing my withdrawal from The Championships as my calf injury has not fully recovered," she said. — *AFP*

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