

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | SATURDAY | 15 AUGUST 2020

WEATHER

Max: 34.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 71%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 34/18 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+66,849)	(+1,011)
25,25,144	49,134
<i>covid19india.org</i>	
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+1,921)	(+9)
TS: 88,396	674
(+ 8,943)	(+97)
AP: 2,73,085	2,475

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

2,12,06,883
DEATHS
7,59,824
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
213
<i>worldometers.info/coronavirus</i>

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Dakshinayana
Tithi: Shravana Bahula Ekadasi till 2.14 pm
Star: Mrigashira till 6.34 am
Varjyam: 3.07 pm to 4.45 pm
Durmuhurtam: 6.02 am to 7.43 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Zulhijja 24,1441 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.31 am
Zohar: 12.26 pm
Asar: 4.28 pm
Maghrib: 6.05 pm
Isha: 7.21 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.52 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.00 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.32 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.52 AM

COUNTER POINT



Are you sure he is our minister?

IN BRIEF

India can give fitting reply: Prez

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday said while India believes in peace it is also capable of giving a befitting response to any attempt of aggression as shown by its troops in Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh after “some in our neighbourhood”, a veiled reference to China, tried to carry out their “misadventure of expansion”. In his address to the nation on the eve of the 74th Independence Day, he spoke about the ‘Aatmanirbhar’ initiative and allayed fears of foreign investors saying India’s self-reliance means being self-sufficient without alienating or creating distance from the world.

HC EXTENDS STAY ORDER ON THREE CAPITALS G.O.

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

The AP High Court extended the status quo order on the three capitals and APCRDA repeal bills to August 27. The court had earlier issued status quo till August 14 on the two bills and heard the petitions on Friday.

The government sought lifting of the status quo orders but the HC, rejecting the plea, extended it to August 27 and postponed the next hearing on the same day.

The 65 petitioners, in which a majority is Amaravati farmers, while welcoming the extension expressed hope about getting justice eventually.

■ **Page 2: Master plan can't be basis, says state**

Tungabhadra's gates set to open



The Tungabhadra reservoir brims after getting steady inflows from upstream parts of Western Ghats for the past few days. Water level recorded 92 TMC ft as against total capacity of 100.85 TMC ft on Friday. Officials are planning to open all crest gates on Saturday.

India, China fought for 17-20 hours in May, June, says ITBP

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

Indian and Chinese troops clashed brutally at multiple times in May and June at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh, a fact that emerged on Friday after the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) recommended 21 names of its men for gallantry medals. They faced the Chinese during face offs and skirmishes in May-June 2020, some of which lasted for 17-20 hours.

In a statement, ITBP director general S.S. Deswal said that the force

has recommended 21 Gallantry medals and 294 DG Gallantry Commendations for ITBP personnel “for displaying raw courage and bravery” during the face-off with Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh in May-June.

“The ITBP troops not only effectively used shields to protect themselves but also responded fiercely to PLA advancing troops and brought the situation under control. With the highest order of professional skills, ITBP troops fought shoulder to shoulder and also brought the injured Indian Army troops to the rear,” the

statement said.

It said that even when the ITBP troops fought the whole night, they received minimum casualties by giving befitting reply to the stone pelters of the PLA. “At places they gave determined standoff about 17 to 20 hours throughout the intervening nights,” said ITBP. “Due to the high altitude training and manoeuvre experience of the force in the Himalayas deployments, the ITBP troops kept the PLA troops at bay and due to the all out and befitting response of ITBP jawans at almost all fronts, many areas were safeguarded in the

hyper sensitive areas,” ITBP said. This shows that the situation at LAC was more serious than previously known.

Till now only clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in Pangong Tso and Galwan on May 5, and in Galwan Valley on 15 June in Ladakh have been reported. Indian and Chinese troops had also clashed in Sikkim on May 9.

Also, 294 ITBP personnel were awarded with the DG’s commendation rolls and insignias on the eve of Independence Day for their courage and bravery during clashes with Chinese troops.

India tally 25 L+, Shah -ve, Kerala ministers isolated

DC CORRESPONDENTS with agency inputs
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

India’s Covid-19 tally crossed the 25 lakh mark on Friday, taking just eight days to add five lakh cases. A total of 66,849 new cases were registered, taking the total to 25,25,114, of whom about 18 lakh have recovered.

The toll stands at 49,134 with 990 deaths added during the day.

Union home minister Amit Shah, who was undergoing treatment for Coronavirus at a private hospital in Haryana, said he has tested negative. Shah, 55, will be in home isolation for a few days. He had tested positive on August 2.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and three ministers, K.K.

Shailaja, A.C. Moideen and V.S. Sunil Kumar, on Friday tested negative for the Coronavirus, hours after quarantining themselves as they came in the primary contact list of the Mamallapuram collector who has contracted the virus.

Three other ministers, Assembly Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan, Chief Secretary Dr Vishwas Mehta and DGP Loknath Behera also went into self-quarantine.

Collector E. Gopalakrishnan had interacted with the Chief Minister at the Kozhikode airport a day after the Air India Express aircraft crash on August 7. Malappuram district SP U. Abdul Kareem, the assistant collector and 20 employees of the collectorate had tested positive for Covid-19.

SPB IMPROVES AFTER BULLETIN SCARES FANS

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, AUG. 14

After a medical bulletin on the health of singer S.P. Balasubrahmanyam issued by a hospital in Chennai where he was being treated for Covid-19 said he was in a critical condition caused concern among his fans and followers, his family on Friday evening announced that he was in much better shape than he was earlier in the day. His son S.P. Charan said the singer was seriously un-well but had recovered.

■ **Full report on Page 3**

BUSINESS | 7

RBI to transfer ₹57,128 cr to govt

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Tata Group expresses interest to sponsor IPL

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Bhushan guilty of contempt: SC

‘Unfair’ criticism of judiciary must be dealt with firmly, says court; Sentencing on Aug. 20

PARMOD KUMAR NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

The Supreme Court on Friday held activist lawyer Prashant Bhushan guilty of “criminal contempt” for lowering its dignity and authority by questioning, via his tweets, the functioning of the top court in the last six years under the present Chief Justice, Sharad A. Bobde, and his predecessors. The court fixed August 20 for his sentencing.

Holding that the tweet in question was “malicious” and based on “distorted facts”, a bench comprising Justice Arun Mishra, Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice Krishna Murari said that the tweet had the “effect of destabilising the very foundation” of the judiciary. The country’s top court has taken exception of that part of Mr Bhushan’s June 27 tweet in which he said that the SC has played a substantial role in allowing the destruction of democracy in the past six years, since 2014, and questioned the role of the



Prashant Bhushan

last four Chief Justices in particular in allowing it.

The court said that in its “considered view” the tweet “undermines the dignity and authority of the institution of the Supreme Court of India and the CJI and directly affronts the majesty of law.”

“There is no matter of doubt that the tweet tends to shake the public confidence in the institution of judiciary,” it said.

The “scurrilous/malicious attacks” by Mr Bhushan are not only “against one or two judges but the entire Supreme

Court in its functioning of the last six years.”

The court said that the “scurrilous allegations, which are malicious in nature and have the tendency to scandalise the court are not expected from a person, who is a lawyer of 30 years standing.” Saying that the tweet is not “fair criticism of the functioning of the judiciary, made bona fide in the public interest,” the court said while rejecting Mr Bhushan’s contention that his criticism was bona fide and in public interest.

Justifying its firm stand in holding Mr Bhushan guilty, the court said that an attack on the SC does not only tend to erode the confidence of an ordinary litigant in it, but similarly tends to impact the confidence of judges across the country in the SC.

The court let off Twitter, accepting its explanation that it was an intermediary and has no control over the material posted on social media platform.

■ **More reports on Pg 4**

CM reiterates resolve to help farmers with Rythu Bharosa

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has reiterated that his government is committed to helping farmers through Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs). He asserted that while

RBKs will address all issues of farmers, warehouses and cold storage units will be built keeping in view the future needs of farmers.

During a review meeting on warehouses and cold storage facilities, the Chief Minister said ware-

houses and IQFs (Individual Quick Freezers) should be developed keeping in view the future demands of farmers. Food processing should begin from village level and every mandal should have a cold storage unit, he underlined.



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IN BRIEF

AP Cabinet meeting on August 19

Vijayawada: The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet meeting will be held on August 19 at 11 am in Secretariat first block at Velagapudi. Chief Secretary to the AP government, Neelam Sawhney, issued a circular to all government departments informing them about the Cabinet meeting and directed them to prepare required reports and information. The Cabinet meeting will be headed by Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, and important issues will be discussed in the meeting. Recently, Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted a meeting of AMRDA and decided to develop Amaravati as legislative capital.

ADIVASIS CAUGHT BETWEEN CORONA AND FLOODS

VADREU SRINIVAS | DC KAKINADA, AUG. 14

Adivasis are caught between a rock and a hard place with the spreading Covid-19 on the one hand and surging flood waters on the other.

The Godavari received huge flood waters as there are heavy rains in Sabari, Indravati and Bhadrachalam. The flood level touched 36.6 feet at Bhadrachalam and 10 feet at Sir Arthur Cotton barrage at Dowleswaram. Officials released 7.86 lakh cusecs excess water into the Bay of Bengal by 7 pm on Friday.

It is expected that flood waters may surge further on Saturday. Meanwhile, transportation facilities are cut off between Chinturu and V. R. Puram and several trees have been uprooted.

Flood waters reached Chinturu and V. R. Puram main road and transport facilities have been cut off nearly 19 villages.

Wireless sets have been arranged in Aeiemfiei, Voddugudem and Chintarevupalli as it is expected that power may be cut off in the tribal areas in V. R. Puram and Chinturu mandals where flood water surged into the villages.

In Devipatnam mandal, it is said that the water entered 33 villages. The waters entered the SC Colony in Thoyeeru and residents appealed for a supply of kerosene and other essential commodities as power would be cut off if the flood waters surged further.

Rampachodavaram sub collector, Pravin Aditya, said that shelters have been opened to rehabilitate the adivasis and pregnant and lactating women have already been brought to the camps. He said that power can't be given to the villages due to the flood waters.

The media cell at Rampachodavaram said that 20 persons of SC colony in Thoyeeru have been evacuated to the shelters. However, many of the people are not willing to evacuate their villages, despite the flood waters.

"Officials say that the villagers should rent houses till the rehabilitation colonies are completed. At the present juncture, the Covid-19 virus is spreading in the agency area on the one hand and there is the flood situation on the other. Many relatives or friends or even house owners are not giving us houses on rent. We are also scared of the virus. At present we are in a safe zone. The officials should provide essential commodities to us," said K. Krishna, an adivasi from Thoyeeru village.

The Polavaram project affected families' protection Porata Samithi's honorary president in Devipatnam mandal, P. Krishna Rao, said that the officials said that the rent amount should be borne by the R&R package amounts, given by the central government.

Meanwhile, district collector, D. Muralidhar Reddy, visited the flood-prone areas in the agency areas on Friday.

At Polavaram project, flood waters reached 8 lakh cusecs and touched 27 meters at Cofferdam. The Polavaram project superintendent engineer, B. Sudhakar Babu, said that there was no problem in continuing their work so far. He said that all precautionary steps were being taken. He also said that the 19 pumps of Pattiseema have been stopped as Budameru, Maneru and other rivulets are receiving huge flood waters and there is no necessity of water to Krishna delta at present.

Meanwhile, Reddy instructed the officials to be alert on flood warnings and take steps to not inconvenience people evacuating them from the submerged villages. He visited Posamma Gandhi village in Devipatnam mandal, Cofferdam, spillway and other works at Polavaram project on Friday.

At present there is no problem.

GOVT HAS NO RIGHT TO SELL AMARAVATI LANDS, SAYS NAIDU

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

Telugu Desam chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday strongly objected to the continuing 'misinformation campaign' by the ruling Jagan government that the previous TD regime had not brought any development but only showed 'graphics' to the people on Amaravati as capital.

Expressing anguish at the reports about the plans of YSRC government to sell Amaravati buildings and lands, Naidu claimed the government had no right to sell Amaravati lands.

Asserting that over ₹41,675 crore-worth projects were grounded for developing the government and public infrastructure in Amaravati and 45 to 80 per cent work was completed on different buildings already, Naidu alleged that Jagan and his ministers were making false claims on 'graphics' only to destroy the high potential, dream capital of Andhra Pradesh out of political vendetta.

Refuting the allegation that TD made the capital selection unilaterally, Naidu claimed that the decision was taken based on many strong parameters, including the fact that more than 50 per cent people told the Sivaramakrishnan committee that they would favour the location of capital in Amaravati region between Vijayawada and Guntur. He explained that over 4,700 people expressed this opinion, while only 507 people preferred

Visakhapatnam, 360 persons Kurnool and 265 people chose Ongole. Appealing to the people to think whether Amaravati as capital was a saner decision or not going by how Amaravati was located equidistant to the farthest tips of the state, Naidu stated that about 2.3 crore out of the total 5.5 crore people are living on one side of Amaravati while another 2.15 crore were living on the other side and, similarly, 12 MPs are from one side of Amaravati and another 12 from the opposite side. He mentioned that about 84 MLAs are on one side and 74 MLAs are on the other.

Stating that a dream capital was the need of the hour, Naidu said that if he had built a small town for AP's capital nearby Vijayawada or in Guntur city, there would not have been any scope for future growth on the lines of metropolitan cities in other progressive states. Jagan was not realising the need for bringing in development in a systematic way, said an exasperated Naidu.

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HC halts dismantling houses at Gandikota

NAGESWARA RAO BALLEDA | DC KADAPA, AUG. 14

Andhra Pradesh High Court issued a status quo on the demolition of the houses inundated by the Gandikota reservoir.

Residents of Kondapuram village, Gaibu Valli, filed a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking six months' time to vacate their houses. They appealed the court to distribute the compensation to them and give time to



Secretariat premises is illuminated on the occasion of 74th Independence Day celebrations at Velagapudi on Friday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

UK, Vizag AMTZ to jointly fight Covid

Indian med-tech start-ups invited to apply by Aug. 31

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 14

UK government and Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) signed a MoU for manufacture and supply of ventilators and other essential medical equipment to fight Covid-19 under a ₹5.6 million deal. Both the parties have invited innovative Indian med-tech start-ups to apply by August 31 to be a part of the new manufacturing support programme.

Select start-ups will be hosted at AMTZ's MediValley incubation centre, receiving financial, technical and infrastructure support necessary to make their equipment market-ready. The programme is part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed recently between the UK Government and AMTZ. The MoU aims to

● Dr Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner to AP and TS said the fight against the pandemic required a global response. New partnerships born in these times of adversity have a chance to make a difference and the potential to grow into something even bigger, he said.

boost med-tech collaboration between the two countries by creating direct research and development linkages between UK companies and AMTZ's manufacturing and testing facilities, and to the wider Indian healthcare market. Dr Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner to AP and TS said the fight against the pandemic required a global response. New partnerships born in these times of

adversity have a chance to make a difference and the potential to grow into something even bigger, he said.

Dr Jitendar Sharma, Managing Director and CEO, AMTZ said the Zone was happy to sign a memorandum of understanding with the British High Commission for encouraging innovations in medical devices, particularly on those products that are necessary for fight against Covid.

Through this partnership, British High Commission and AMTZ aim to encourage a number of innovators and provide them with technical, technological, financial, entrepreneurial and strategic hand-holding enabling them to leapfrog from idea to innovation and from a start-up to an established enterprise.

Master plan can't be basis, says state

From Page 1

The full bench, comprising Chief Justice J.K. Maheswari, Justice A.V. Seshasai and Justice M. Satyanarayana Murthy, directed the state government to maintain the status quo till August 27 on the decentralisation and CRDA Repeal Bill. The three judges bench heard about 65 petitions filed challenging the government's gazette notification repealing the decentralisation Act and CRDA Act.

Earlier, filing the affidavit on behalf of the State government, senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi appealed to the bench to lift the status quo and give relaxation to the government to continue its administrative works.

The state government contended that there cannot be any legitimate expectations on the basis

● The state government contended that there cannot be any legitimate expectations on the basis of a master plan, which could be modified at any time.

● In any event, even if there was any legitimate expectation, it has to make way for protection of public interest. It also stated that the state's economic capacity is a relevant criterion for continuance of an earlier decision in public interest and bona fide rational grounds, prevalent in the present instance.

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Referring to the contention of the promissory estoppel, as the decision was not taken arbitrarily

Covid-19 care permit to Ramesh Hosp cancelled

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

The five-member probe panel led by joint collector (Development) L. Siva Sankar has found fault with management of Ramesh Hospitals, which had hired Swarna Palace as a Covid Care Centre. A major fire mishap at the hotel-turned-hospital last Sunday had caused the death of 10 Coronavirus patients, who were among those undergoing treatment at Swarna Palace.

The inquiry team found that Ramesh Hospitals had flouted government norms in admitting patients for providing treatment at the hospital and its hired premises.

A fallout of the report is Vijayawada district collector A. Md. Imtiaz cancelling the permission granted to Ramesh Hospitals for treating Covid-19 patients under Category-A. The hospital authorities have been directed not to admit any Covid-19 patients hereafter until further orders.

The probe panel submitted its preliminary report to the collector here on Friday. It made several key observations, including the hospital charging patients in excess of government-recommended rates in providing treatment to Covid-19 patients.

Based on the report, the district medical and health officer has served a notice to Dr. Ramesh Cardiac and Super Speciality Private Limited, Vijayawada, pointing out that it violated Rule (9) of AP

Ramesh hospitals staffers move city court for bail

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

The bail petition of the three accused Ramesh hospitals staffers in the Swarna Palace hotel fire mishap case was heard in a local court in the city and the next hearing is scheduled to be held on Monday.

Earlier, police arrested them from the Ramesh hospitals after registering a case following death of 10 patients in a fire at the Covid-19 care centre at the Swarna Palace hotel being managed by Ramesh Hospitals after finding lapses in patient safety.

Sent to judicial remand for 14 days at the sub jail in Machilipatnam, they moved the local court in the city for bail. Meanwhile, police filed a petition in the court seeking police

custody of them.

Ramesh Hospitals' managing director also moved an anticipatory bail petition in the city court and the next hearing is scheduled to be held on Monday.

In a related development, police interrogated former MP, Rayapati Sambasiva Rao's, daughter-in-law, Dr. Mamatha, who works in Ramesh Hospitals in Guntur, for six hours.

Asserting that she was working in Ramesh hospitals in Guntur and looks after operations there, Dr. Mamatha that she did not have any role in Ramesh hospitals, Vijayawada. Her advocate, Gangiseti Uma Shankar, was critical of the police for subjecting her to six hours of interrogation when she herself was convalescing from a Covid-19 infection.

Allopathic Private Medical Care Establishment and Regulation Rules by collecting exorbitant rates and non-display of rates charged for each type of service provided by the hospital.

The notice underlined that G. O. MS No. 77 dated 08/07/2020 had been violated by collecting exorbitant fees for every admission. It pointed to also admitting Covid-19 patients in Metropolitan Hotel and M5 Hotel without obtaining permission from district authorities.

It directed the hospital management to be present before the DMHO Camp Office at Old GGH Campus on August 30 to answer in writing to the charges.

The probe panel ordered the Swarna Palace hotel management to transmit its answer to the charges before the appointed day of hearing of the case. It allowed the hotel management to be represented by an authorised person or legal practitioner.

Further, the notice directed the hospital authorities to surrender their certificate of regis-

POLICE ARE NOW PEOPLE-FRIENDLY, SAYS DGP SAWANG

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

DGP Gowtham Sawang said that the police department is turning people-friendly with innovative measures implemented under a new policing concept.

He was speaking after inaugurating a two-day training programme on 'Transformational policing: Putting people first' at Guntur on Friday.

He said that transformational policing is intended to bring about comprehensive changes in the vision.

The DGP said that he made many changes in the department and they were in tune with the wishes of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Covid breaks Hanuman devotees' tradition

NAGABHUSHANAM HOSKOTE | DC ANANTAPUR, AUG. 14

Five centuries old tradition scrupulously followed by Hanuman devotees in auspicious Shrivana Masam has been broken by the Covid-19 pandemic in the district. They visit all the three temples on the same day as part of fulfilling their vow every year in August.

The three, which form a circuit, are: Kasapuram Nettikanti Hanuman temple in Guntakal mandal and Murudi and Nemakal temples in Rayadurgam area. The three temples are said to have been consecrated by the rajguru of the Vijayanagar empire five centuries ago. They were among 732 Hanuman temples consecrated across South India by saint Vyasaraja Swamy.

Devotees make it a point

to visit the three temples on any one of the days in Shrivana Masam and RTC operates special buses.

Nettikanti Kasapuram Hanuman temple is one of the biggest temples in the state. The temple is maintained by the endowments department.

More than 50 members of the staff and security personnel reside within the temple premises. Several of the staffers and priests have fallen victim to the virus for the past one month.

The pandemic even claimed the life of a senior priest a few days ago and the temple had to be closed several times.

Devotees from Karnataka and Telangana also visit the temples every year. However, this time in view of the Covid threat, the endowments department restricted darshan to a limited number of pilgrims.

DEVINENI DEMANDS RESIGNATION OF FM

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

Former minister and TD senior leader Devineni Umamaheswara Rao on Friday alleged that the YSRC government was systematically destroying the comprehensive financial management system brought in by the previ-

ous TD regime for transparency and accountability in state financial management. He demanded the resignation of finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy, asking him to take the responsibility for the ₹649 crore double payments made to contractors and several others.

IN BRIEF

MLA attends patient's funeral

Tirupati: Allaying fears among people that one may contract Covid-19 by attending the last rites of an infected person, Tirupati MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy and Municipal Commissioner P.S. Girisha set an example by taking part in the funeral of an infected man. The MLA and Commissioner attended the funeral of the Covid-19 victim at the Govinda Dhamam eco-crematorium complex in Tirupati on Friday. The two were seen standing at a distance as the body was brought inside the complex. Both later lifted the body into the cremator and were seen wearing masks and a face shield with no other protection.

Narayana hosp told to hike beds

Nellore: Water resources minister Dr Anilkumar Yadav and Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu have instructed the management of Narayana General Hospital, which is designated as the District Covid Hospital, not to deny treatment to anyone including emergency cases of non-Covid patients. They suggested that the doctors give first aid to emergency patients before shifting them to non-Covid hospitals if they are tested negative to Covid-19. During a review with the management and the doctors of the hospital on Friday, the minister thanked the Narayana management for their cooperation to the government while requesting them to ready 1,000 beds with all facilities citing possible multi-fold increase in the cases in the coming days.

Patient who ran away killed

Nellore: One of the three Covid-19 infected patients, who ran away from Government General Hospital (GGH) in Ongole, succumbed to the injuries he sustained in a road accident on Friday evening. It may be recalled that two people from Racharla mandal and one person from Chimakurthy escaped from the GGH on Thursday. The deceased's wife is also infected and was undergoing treatment at GGH. While the police traced the two people belonging to Racharla mandal by evening, they could not find the third person from Chimakurthy. According to Traffic DSP K. Venugopal, the Chimakurthy man had suffered critical injuries when a speeding container lorry hit him on the national highway near Ongole late on Thursday night.

Gutka worth ₹54 lakh seized

Nellore: Chirala police have seized 153 bags containing banned Gutka worth ₹54 lakhs during vehicular checks on the national highway near China Ganjam in Prakasam district on Friday. DSP of Chirala, Y. Jayaram Subba Reddy said that they had found the bags in a lorry while checking the vehicles. He added that they have seized the lorry and arrested the driver Madhubabu and two others accompanying him after registering a case.

Task force seizes sanders

Tirupati: The Red sanders anti-smuggling task force sleuths, on Friday, arrested three red sanders smugglers. They seized 38 red sanders logs during the combing operations held inside the Seshachalam forests near Tirupati and at two other locations in Kadapa district. According to Taskforce DSP Venkataiah, task force sleuths, who started combing operations inside the forests on Thursday evening, intercepted a group of smugglers carrying logs, near Eethakunta forest area in the early hours on Friday. On sighting the task force team, smugglers fled from the spot, leaving behind 11 red sanders logs at the spot. In a similar operation carried out at Vannemanda forest area near Rayachoti and Railway Kodur areas, the task force sleuths seized 27 red sanders logs and arrested three smugglers.

Spirit of freedom

National Flag being erected around the stadium on the eve of 74th Independence Day celebrations in Vijayawada on Friday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

State registers 8,943 Covid cases, 97 deaths, toll 2,475

East Godavari continues to lead with 1,146, followed by 987 in Chittoor

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, AUG. 14

Offering some relief to the state health authorities, AP has registered a slight dip in coronavirus infections with 8,943 new cases taking the total number to 2,73,085 and 97 deaths taking the death toll to 2,475 in the last 24 hours, after days of almost 10k cases. The state health authorities issued the Covid-19 bulletin here on Friday stating that out of 53,026 samples tested, 8,943 individuals have tested positive. Out of a total of 27,58,485 samples tested so far in the state, 1,80,703 infected patients have been dis-

charged after recovery, while 89,907 infected patients are still undergoing treatment at various hospitals in the state.

Among the new confirmed infections, East Godavari continues to lead with 1,146, followed by 987 in Chittoor, 956 in Kurnool, 885 in Visakhapatnam, 762 in Anantapur, 748 in West Godavari, 669 in Nellore, 548 in Vizianagaram, 547 in Srikakulam, 530 in Kadapa, 527 in Guntur, 338 in Krishna and 300 in Prakasam.

With regard to cumulative Covid-19 positive cases, East Godavari is the highest with 38,292, followed by 32,012 in Kurnool, 28,096 in

● Out of a total of 27,58,485 samples tested so far in the state, 1,80,703 infected patients have been discharged after recovery, while 89,907 infected patients are still undergoing treatment at various hospitals in the state.

Anantapur, 24,940 in Guntur, 23,402 in Visakhapatnam, 22,077 in West Godavari, 21,519 in Chittoor, 16,169 in Nellore, 16,133 in Kadapa, 13,320 in Srikakulam, 11,783 in Krishna, 11,684 in Vizianagaram, 10,763 in Prakasam, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries. However, East Godavari

tops also in the rate of recovery of Covid-19 infected patients as 22,260 have recovered so far, followed by 22,556 in Kurnool, 21,517 in Anantapur, 16,882 in Guntur, 16,761 in Visakhapatnam, 16,623 in West Godavari, 12,779 in Chittoor, 10,721 in Nellore, 9,941 in Kadapa, 8,409 in Srikakulam, 7,554 in Krishna, 6,685 in Prakasam, 5,120 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

The state continues to witness deaths of Covid-19 infected patients in the last few days. 12 patients died in Kurnool, 10 each in Chittoor, East Godavari, Guntur, West

Godavari and Nellore, six each in Kadapa, Prakasam, Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam, three in Vizianagaram and two in Krishna.

Among the deceased, Kurnool is highest with 276, followed by 275 in Guntur, 258 in East Godavari, 220 in Krishna, 215 in Chittoor, 209 in Anantapur, 193 in Visakhapatnam, 180 in West Godavari, 156 in Srikakulam, 152 in Prakasam, 131 in Nellore, 106 in Vizianagaram and 104 in Kadapa.

The state health authorities have discharged 9,779 infected patients after recovery from various hospitals in the last 24 hours in the state.

Parents, unions unhappy over reopening of schools

V.K.L. GAYATRI | DC VISAKHAPATNAM, AUG. 14

Majority of parents are reluctant about sending their children to schools that are scheduled to reopen on September 5, as the number of Covid-19 positive cases are rapidly increasing as of now.

Even teachers are unsure if they will be able to cope up with the situation.

Majority of schools in the state have a large number of students. Ensuring that the students are wearing masks and maintaining social distancing between themselves appears an impossible task for them.

In fact, the state government has not yet released any guidelines on functioning of schools in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic.

All educational institutions in the state have remained shut since March 23 after lockdown was imposed. Since then,

however, the lockdown has been lifted in phases and right now it is Unlock 3.0. The central government has not allowed places of mass gathering to open, such as cinema halls or temples. Comparatively, educational institutions face an equal risk, if not more.

A. Madhusudan and Giriya, parents of 5th and 6th class students, say, “We welcome the state government’s initiative of re-opening schools. But in the present scenario, when the number of Covid-19 cases is rising, who will ensure that students are in a safe environment? How can we send our children to schools without knowing about these aspects? Education is very important, but not at the cost compromising the safety of children,” they said.

Meanwhile, majority of the teachers, including those affiliated to Andhra Pradesh Teachers Federation (APTF) and

United Teachers Federation (UTF), are worried about reopening of schools from September 5, as the deadly virus is still not in control. “We are not against the government’s decision. We are ready to attend duties at any time. However, it is a difficult task to ensure that students are continuing to wear masks and maintaining social distance. Instead of teaching, the prime responsibility of teachers will be to ensure that students do not mingle with each other. If something goes wrong, parents will hold us responsible,” one of the leaders of APTF told *Deccan Chronicle*.

It is learnt that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will be reviewing the state government’s decision of reopening schools from September 5 at the next cabinet meeting, which is expected to be held on August 19.

CASE FILED ON YAMINI FOR TTD REMARKS

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, AUG. 14

The vigilance wing of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has lodged a complaint with the II Town police in Tirumala against BJP functionary Sadineni Yamini for making controversial remarks against the temple management.

According to Tirumala ASP Muni Ramaiah, the II Town police registered a case against Yamini under Sections 505 (2) and 500 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), based on a complaint filed by the TTD’s vigilance wing, which objected to her remarks against TTD.

Yamini had expressed displeasure over the temple management for not telecasting the Ram Mandir’s bhoomi puja event live from Ayodhya in the TTD’s official broadcaster SVBC Bhakti channel.

With help of relatives woman murders son

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC NELLORE, AUG. 14

A mother, with the assistance of her relatives, murdered her son with the help of hired killers at Ponnalur village in Kandukur mandal of Prakasam district.

The deceased was an alcoholic and the mother decided to murder him allegedly after he demanded that she bring his wife, living in Hyderabad, to the village or satisfy his desire herself.

The wife left him four years ago unable to bear his harassment and alcoholism.

The murder which took place on April 13 near Kandukur came to light after someone tipped off the police on August 8.

The deceased has been identified as Kunchala Narasimha Rao. 35.

According to Prakasam district SP, Siddharth Kaushal, the mother of the deceased, Lakshamma, had plotted the murder along with her close relatives, unable to bear his overtures.

Moreover, he was also beating his father, a retired employee, who is paralysed.

At the instance of Lakshamma, her brother, Malyadri, summoned his

friends, Upputuri Ramanaiah, Chundi Paraiah and Valleti Chinna Malakondaiah, offering them money to eliminate Rao.

The trio contacted a rowdy sheeter, Paladugu Raghava Rao, to carry out the murder and agreed to pay ₹1,70,000 for the execution.

Raghava Rao took the help of four more friends to kill Rao after collecting ₹50,000 as advance from Lakshamma.

The gang axed Rao to death and buried the body close to Venkatadri nagar, near Kandukur.

Police, led by Kandukur DSP, Kande Srinivasa Rao, jumped into action after an anonymous caller told them about the murder.

The team examined the call data of Lakshamma suspecting foul play after she said that her son is in Hyderabad but does not have a mobile phone.

Police held all the accused after Lakshamma and the others admitted their guilt when police grilled them armed with the call data which indicated communication between them. Police have exhumed the body for autopsy and also recovered the weapons used for the murder on Thursday.

Son-in-law kills father-in-law

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, AUG. 14

An altercation between a father-in-law and son-in-law over matters of the property has resulted in an attack leading to one’s death. The incident took place at Deva Nagar in Nandyal on the early hours of Friday. The deceased has been identified as Naga Seshu, 35.

According to the Three Town police station, the deceased Naga Seshu was the father-in-law of accused M. Vali. The duo had consumed liquor on Thursday night and picked up an argument

over the family property issue.

Arguing over injustice in the property sharing, Vali allegedly attacked Naga Seshu with a knife. After the attack, Vali fled the scene. The family members tried to shift the injured Naga Seshu to hospital in an auto. Before he could be taken to the hospital for treatment, he has succumbed to the injuries.

The family members of the deceased have approached the police and lodged a complaint. A case has been filed, said the circle inspector Mohan Reddy.

Tungabhadra may reach full capacity

NAGABHUSHANAM HOSKOTE | DC ANANTAPUR, AUG. 14

Tungabhadra reservoir is about to reach full capacity even after inflows from upstream parts of Western Ghats for the past few days.

The water level recorded on Friday was at 92 TMC ft as against a total capacity of 100.85 TMC ft. As the Tungabhadra dam gets ready for traditional Independence Day celebrations and authorities plan to open all crest gates on Saturday.

Tungabhadra reservoir has 92 TMC ft on Friday as against 98 TMC ft last year on same day.

About 51 thousand cusecs of inflows were received with 9187 cusecs outflow towards river and power generation.

The water level reached 1633 ft. Tungabhadra board authorities think the dam may get full if the incessant rains con-

● Tungbahadra reservoir has 92 TMC ft on Friday as against 98 TMC ft last year on same day.

● The water level reached 1633 ft.

tinued in upstream by August 20 because of poor inflows from upstream areas.

The high level main canal and low level canal both covers AP and areas of Karnataka will get their quota due to hsavt storage. 1578 cusecs towards HLMC and 807 cusecs towards LLC were released from the reservoir.

Further, irrigation authorities of the HNSS (Handri Neeva Sujala Shraavanthi) project were releasing water towards reservoirs and tanks under both phase-I and phase-II and GNSS (Gleru Nagari Sujala Shraavanthi) in the Rayalaseema region.

CURRENCY | COUNTING The present parakamani location is not adequate for the counting

Parakamani to be moved to new building

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC TIRUPATI, AUG. 14

To overcome hurdles plaguing the parakamani, where the process of counting and sorting of the currency offered by devotees in Srivari hundi is carried out, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), scouting for alternatives for decades now, has finally initiated steps to move the entire set up outside the main shrine at Tirumala.

The temple management

is going to construct a new parakamani bhavan in a sprawling area of 14,962 sq. ft. in front of the anna prasadam complex at Tirumala. TTD trust chief, Y.V. Subba Reddy, along with a Bengaluru-based devotee, K. Murali Krishna, who donated ₹8.90 crore towards the construction, has performed the foundation puja for the construction of the new parakamani bhavan here on Friday.

TTD has been facing difficulties in handling the process of sorting coins

● TTD has been facing difficulties in handling the process of sorting coins and other valuable articles, other than cash, with the existing setup inside the temple.

and other valuable articles, other than cash, with the existing setup inside the temple. With the consistent surge in pilgrim footfall and hundi collections, the hundi counting area has become more congested making it difficult

to carry out round the clock counting activities smoothly.

Pilgrims are also extending a wide variety of offerings in the hundi including jaggery, human hair, artefacts and many wet materials, which has been leading to an insect and rat menace in the parakamani.

Most importantly, the present parakamani location is not adequate for the counting of 13-14 hundials, which accumulates every day with the offerings made by devotees.

As a result of the delay in counting, nearly ₹50 crore worth coins are kept pending to be transferred to banks for safekeeping for years now. The present parakamani location does not have exhaust fans to remove dust and odour from the hundi cloth and vessels causing respiratory ailments among employees.

“On many occasions, it was difficult to observe social distancing in the parakamani as 200 persons per shift, nearly 600 per day, were discharging

the duties. Besides security issues, it was difficult for parakamani staff to come out of the temple during the queue’s movement. Considering all such factors, TTD has decided to construct a new building for parakamani,” Subba Reddy said.

Underlining that parakamani is not a religious activity, Subba Reddy clarified that the TTD trust board has decided to move the parakamani outside the Srivari temple following written advice by both the Tirumala pontiffs.

SHORT TAKES

MUKHERJEE REMAINS CRITICAL, SAYS DAUGHTER

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The condition of former president Pranab Mukherjee remains critical but has not worsened, his daughter Sharmistha Mukherjee said on Friday.

Doctors attending on the 84-year-old former president at the hospital said his condition remained unchanged on Friday morning. Mukherjee was admitted to the Army's Research and Referral Hospital in Delhi cantonment on Monday and was operated for the removal of a clot in the brain.

He had also tested positive for Covid-19. "The condition of Pranab Mukherjee remains unchanged this morning (August 14, 2020). He is under intensive care and continues to be on ventilatory support. His vital parameters are presently stable," the hospital said in a statement.

The former President's daughter took to Twitter after the medical bulletin, saying his condition has not worsened. "Without getting into medical jargons, whatever I could understand from the last two days is that though my dad's condition continues to remain very critical, it hasn't worsened. There's little improvement in his eyes' reaction to light," she said.

Pranab Mukherjee served as the 13th President of India from 2012 to 2017.

U.P. LEGISLATOR ARRESTED IN MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 14

MLA from Gyanpur in Uttar Pradesh Vijay Mishra who had earlier feared his encounter death at the hands of UP police, was on Friday arrested in Agar district of Madhya Pradesh. The lawmaker who was reportedly on his way to Rajasthan after paying a visit to Mahakal temple in Ujjain was arrested at Tanodia in Agar district, police said.

"Tip off by UP police led to the MLA's arrest", Indore range inspector general of police Rakesh Gupta said. A team of UP police reportedly reached Agar late in the night to take custody of the MLA, police sources said.

The lawmaker was scheduled to be produced in a local court in Bhadohi district in UP on Saturday, sources said. The MLA who was wanted by UP police in several cases including the one related to a property dispute in UP, had earlier circulated a video in social media accusing UP police of conspiring to kill him in encounter.

ELEPHANT KILLS FOREST RANGER IN MP

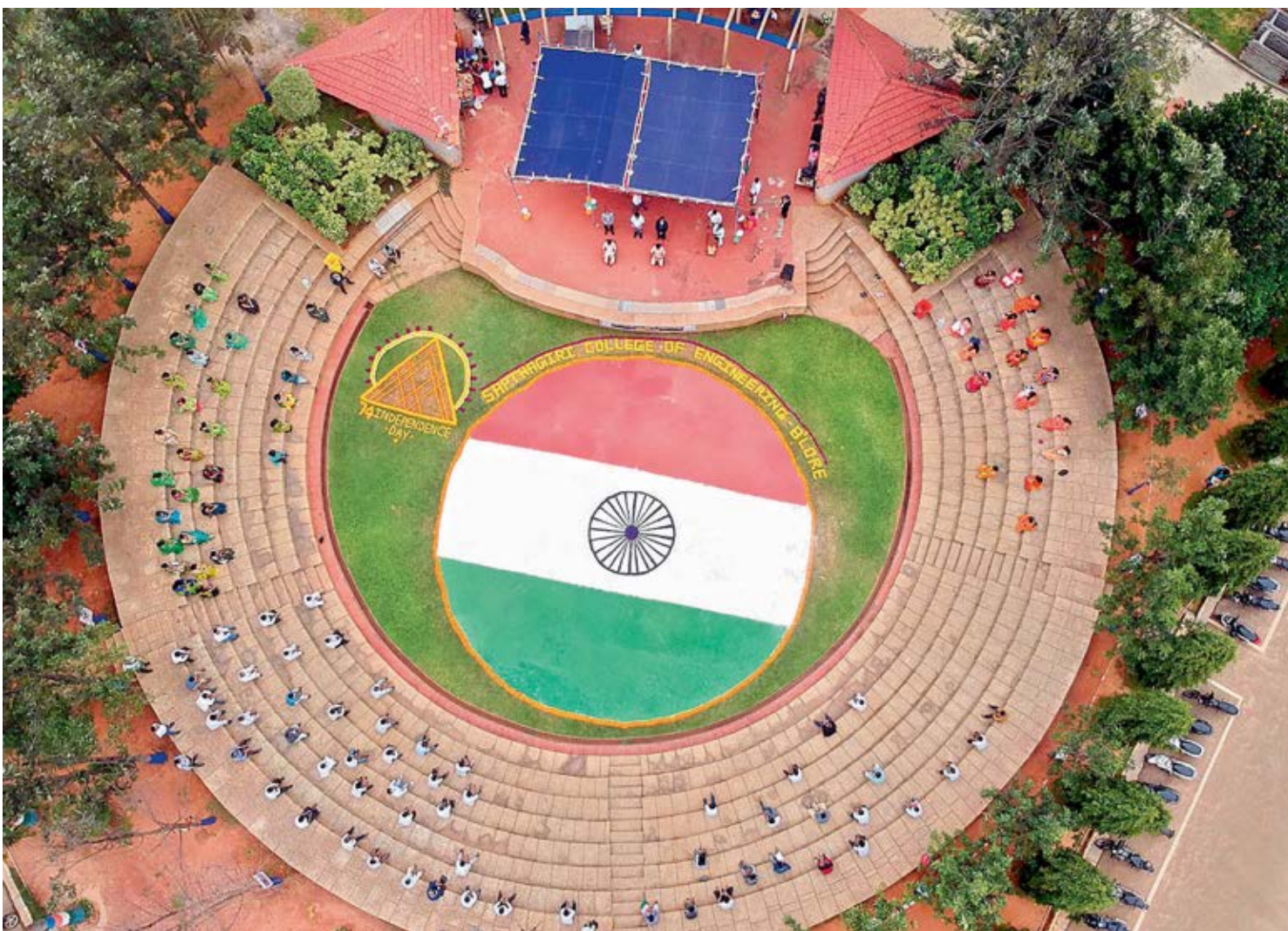
DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, AUG 14

An elephant deployed in tiger tracking in Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh on Friday attacked the local forest ranger B.R. Bhagat, leading to his death.

The pachyderm which had been deployed in tiger tracking in Hinouti range of Panna tiger reserve for the past one week suddenly became aggressive and killed the forest officer with his tusks, official reports reaching here said.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan expressed shock and grief over the death of the forest officer. Territorial fight between the two tigers in the area last week had led to death of one and injury to the other.

The Panna tiger reserve authorities had launched an exercise to track the wounded tiger for its treatment.



A 4,000 sqft Tricolor rangoli made by students and teachers of a private engineering college in Bengaluru on Friday as part of the 74th Independence Day celebrations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver his seventh straight Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Saturday - an address that comes amid the Coronavirus pandemic, a border standoff with China and a slew of reforms by the government under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

— PTI

Shaurya Chakra for 3 Army officers for J&K operations

Officers who fought Chinese troops may get gallantry awards on R-Day

PAWAN BALI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

Three Indian Army personnel — Lt Colonel Krishan Singh Rawat, Major Anil Urs and Havildar Alok Kumar Dubey — have been conferred with the prestigious Shaurya Chakra for counter terrorist operations in Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian Army personnel who have courageously fought Chinese troops in Eastern Ladakh, particularly in Galwan Valley are likely to be given gallantry awards during Republic Day in January.

They don't figure in the gallantry awards list for

Independence Day.

Wing Commander Vishak Nair, from the Indian Air Force, has also been conferred with the Shaurya Chakra on the eve of Independence Day. President Ram Nath Kovind has approved 84 awards and decorations to the Armed Forces personnel and members of the Paramilitary Forces.

The awards include one Kirti Chakra, nine Shaurya Chakras, five Bar to Sena Medals (Gallantry), 60 Sena Medals (Gallantry), four Nao Sena Medals (Gallantry) and five Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry). Major Anil, from

Maratha Light Infantry laid an ambush on receiving intelligence that terrorists in the ambush.

Lt Colonel Rawat, Sena Medal, from the elite Special Forces was team leader of a mission oriented team, deployed along the LoC in J&K for conduct of counter infiltration and counter terrorist operations.

On receiving inputs about infiltration attempts by terrorists, he led his team to a 36 hours search and kill ambush, in a tough terrain and under difficult weather conditions near LoC.

He and his team killed four terrorists during the operation.

Havildar Alok, from Rajput Regiment 44 battalion of the Rashtriya Rifles, was deployed as a stop in the inner cordon during an operation last year in June in a village in J&K.

He challenged a group of terrorists who were trying to break the cordon and killed one category A++ terrorist despite coming under indiscriminate fire from them.

He further prevented other terrorists from escaping and facilitated his team to tighten the cordon.

His courageous action led to elimination of all four terrorists.

India on Friday termed the process of disengagement between Indian and Chinese troops at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as a "complex" one that requires "re-deployment of troops by each side towards their regular posts on their respective sides of the LAC" but added significantly that this can be "one only through mutually agreed reciprocal actions".

While reiterating its expectation that China would "sincerely work" with India towards the objective of complete disengagement and de-escalation, New Delhi — in a clear message to Beijing — also reaffirmed that "the state of the border and the future of our ties cannot be separated".

The Army, Police and the paramilitary forces are intensifying their operations and carrying out frisking and checking at various parts of the state.

Earlier, police had also recovered a huge cache of

Huge cache of arms, ammo found in Assam

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, AUG. 14

In what Assam police claimed its pursuit to make Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area free from illegal arms, security forces on Friday, a day before the Independence day, recovered huge cache of arms and ammunitions from Udalguri district of Bodoland Territorial Council.

Informing that the operation was conducted jointly by Udalguri and Guwahati police, security sources said that the cache of sophisticated weapons belonged to NDFB.

Guwahati Police Commissioner Munna Prashad Gupta, who is also the ADGP of the Special Branch of Assam Police, told reporters that based on source information, Guwahati police conducted a search operation

along with Udalguri police at several places in Udalguri district and recovered the arms, ammunition and explosives on Thursday night.

The arms were recovered from multiple locations of Udalguri district where the police found them kept hidden underground.

However, no arrests have been made so far in this connection and investigation is on.

Earlier, police had also recovered a huge cache of

arms and ammunition in Kokrajhar, Baksa and Chirang district.

All these weapons belong to various faction of NDFB which recently surrendered in mass, security sources said, adding that NDFB factions were suspected to have not surrendered their entire inventory.

Meanwhile Assam is already on alert ahead of Independence Day. Several militant outfits of the region have given a call to boycott the Independence Day celebrations.

The Intelligence agencies have warned that these outfits may try to carry out subversive activities to make their presence felt.

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INDIA: PULLBACK PROCESS IS COMPLEX

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, AUG. 14

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Bhushan verdict unfortunate, say legal experts

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The Supreme Court's Friday verdict holding Prashant Bhushan guilty of contempt for his two derogatory tweets against the judiciary was termed as "unfortunate" by legal experts who said the activist-lawyer was only exercising his freedom of expression.

Senior advocates Vikas Singh and Arvind Datar said those tweets could have been inappropriate but does not attract the charge of contempt of court.

However, taking a different stand, senior advocate Ajit Sinha, said it was for the court to decide and there's no point making any comment on the verdict.

It was Supreme Court's domain, he said.

Singh, former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), said what the apex court ruled was not right.

"I do not approve what he said. It may be inappropriate, but it was a part of his free speech. It was not right what the court held today," he said.

Singh's view was shared by Datar, who termed the verdict as unfortunate, and did not agree with the finding that what Bhushan had said amounted to contempt of court.

It is unfortunate what the apex court decided today. Whatever he said was his freedom of expression and I do not think it amounts to contempt to court, Datar said.

— PTI

Yechury says verdict weakens democracy

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The Supreme Court judgement on Friday holding activist-lawyer Prashant Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his tweets has weakened India's Constitutional democracy, alleged CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury.

The SC held Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt for his two derogatory tweets against the judiciary saying they cannot be said to be a fair criticism of the functioning of the judiciary made in the public interest.

Holding that Bhushan attempted to scandalise the entire institution of the SC, the top court said, "If such an attack is not dealt with, with requisite degree of firmness, it may affect the national honour and prestige in the comity of nations."

"Whether one agrees with the precise formulation of Prashant Bhushan's tweets or not, the SC judgement convicting him of contempt is alarming."

He further prevented other terrorists from escaping and facilitated his team to tighten the cordon.

His courageous action led to elimination of all four terrorists.

ing. It brings into the ambit of contempt, bona-fide criticism of the role played by SC as a Constitutional authority," Yechury said.

"The judgement will prevent open and free discussion on the role of the Supreme Court in India's democracy. This weakens India's Constitutional democracy," he said in a series of tweets.

He also said that the judgement also brings within its scope, genuine criticism of its present day functioning and approach.

"Hitherto, such statements were protected speech under Article 19 (1)(a) under the Constitution and were not considered contemptuous," he said.

A bench of Justices Arun Mishra, B.R. Gavai and Krishna Murari said: "The tweets which are based on the distorted facts, in our considered view, amount to committing criminal contempt."

— PTI

Gehlot govt wins confidence vote

Jaipur, Aug. 14: The Ashok Gehlot government won a confidence vote in the Rajasthan Assembly on Friday, ending for now the threat triggered by a rebellion within the Congress ranks in the state.

The motion of confidence moved by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shanti Dhariwal was passed by voice vote, an expected win after the return of the 19 dissident Congress MLAs led by Sachin Pilot to the party-fold. During the discussion, Pilot said he will fight for the Congress as its "strongest warrior".

Replying to the debate on the motion, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot criticised the BJP, accusing it again of trying to bring down his government. "I will not let the government topple at any cost even if you make all attempts," he said.

Gehlot said the crisis had come to an end in a beautiful manner and this had hurt the Bharatiya Janata Party.

What was done in Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Goa, Madhya Pradesh? Elected governments are being toppled and democracy is under danger," he said.

Without taking names, he alleged that a Union minister was involved in the conspiracy to topple his government, saying this had become clear after some audio clips surfaced. The indirect reference was to Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, who has earlier rejected the Congress allegation.

The BJP had earlier said it will move a no trust motion against the government, but called off the move after the Congress itself announced that it will seek a floor test.

Referring to his seat being changed - earlier he sat next to Gehlot as the deputy CM - Pilot said he is now placed at the 'border' between his party and the opposition in the House. "Who is sent to the border? The strongest warrior is sent," he said.

Congress, BJP spar over Kamal Nath's I-Day speech

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, AUG. 14

The ruling BJP here on Friday took a jibe at former chief minister and Congress veteran Kamal Nath for addressing people on the eve of Independence Day, reminding him that August 14 is Pakistan's Independence Day.

The remark by BJP spokesman Hitesh Vajpayee has invited sharp reactions from the Congress which described

the observation as 'mischievous and unfortunate'.

Congress spokesman Narendra Singh Saluja cited the customary address to the nation on the eve of Independence Day by President of India and said he was surprised that the BJP leaders have no knowledge about Independence Day eve addresses by public figures. In his twitter post, Vajpayee wondered if Nath was going to wish Pakistan on its Independence Day by addressing people of MP on

the day.

Nath, in his address, recounted the achievements of his government during its short tenure of 15 months, saying he endeavoured to change the profile of Madhya Pradesh to turn the state into an investment destination.

Nath said his government that fell in March had initiated steps to establish 'gaushalas' or cowsheds in every panchayat, besides undertaking various social welfare measures.

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SOUR | TIES

Accused browsed internet to find out methods to execute plan

Kerala youth poisons family for property

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 14

A 22-year-old youth was arrested in Kasargod district of Kerala on the charges of poisoning his 16-year-old sister to death by feeding her ice cream laced with poison and also attempting to kill his parents using the same method.

The police said that the accused Albin Benny had allegedly planned to wipe

out the entire family for inheritance and lead a lavish life with his girlfriend.

While his sister Anne Mary Maria died on August 5, their parents Olikkal Benny and Bessy were also admitted to a hospital after they consumed the ice cream.

However, both recovered. The accused had earlier planned to mix rat poison with chicken curry to kill his sister. However, with the plan not working, the accused browsed the inter-

net to find out other methods for executing his plan and subsequently got the idea of mixing poison with ice cream.

Albin prepared the ice cream at home for carrying out his plan. After having ice cream, Anne Mary started vomiting and also had diarrhoea. She died in a local hospital and everyone suspected it to be death due to food poisoning.

According to locals, the accused had a strange personality. He used to spend time alone and seldom

traces of rat poison were found in the post-mortem report which led to suspicion.

Though the accused tried to mislead the family and doctors that he had also consumed the ice cream, on diagnostic tests carried out by health officials no traces of poison were found in his body.

According to locals, the accused had a strange personality. He used to spend time alone and seldom

interacted with the neighbours.

After completing plus two, Albin had secured a job in a hotel in Kottayam district. However, due to Covid-19 lockdown he returned home. He was glued to his mobile phone most of the time, chatting with his girlfriend for long hours. Albin was brought to his house on Friday for evidence collection during which he narrated the entire sequence of the crime.

IN BRIEF

Powerful landslide kills 11 in Nepal

Kathmandu: Eleven bodies were recovered Friday after a landslide tore down a village in north-central Nepal, police said, as rescuers dug through mud to find another 27 missing. Mud and stone came hurtling down on the remote hillside village in Sindhupalchowk district in early Friday morning. At least 37 houses have been damaged by the disaster, local police official Madhav Kafle said. "Search and rescue is under way in coordination between the army, police and armed police force," Kafle said. Helicopters are being used to reach the remote site after the landslide blocked roads.

Ex-spy endangers Saudi royal secrets

Riyadh: A former Saudi intelligence czar's lawsuit in the US courts makes a host of incendiary claims, including that the powerful crown prince tried to have him killed, and threatens to spill more royal secrets. A source close to the Saudi royal court has shrugged off Saad Aljabri's 107-page lawsuit filed last week, insisting that the former spy chief himself faced serious allegations of corruption. But the case, lodged after Riyadh detained two of Aljabri's adult children without charge, threatens to become a public slanging match that could pull aside the curtain on the kingdom's Shakespearean power plays. The lawsuit marks the first time a former top official has legally challenged Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and, if true, exposes what observers call a violent government campaign to snare overseas rivals and critics.

Virus delays SA circumcision rites

Port Elizabeth: South African 17-year-old Sinoyolo was looking forward to becoming a "man" this year. His uncle had made arrangements for him to travel to the mountains overlooking the South African city of Port Elizabeth in December for his initiation. Known in the local Xhosa language as "Ukwuluko", the secretive rite of passage marks a boy's transition into adulthood. Every June and December thousands of initiates between 15 and 17 years old spend at least three weeks secluded in the bush, where they are circumcised and taught to be responsible men. But this year, for the first time in living memory, the ritual has been called off because of the Coronavirus. "If we send them there and find that one boy is positive (for the virus), it means all 20 of them will be infected," said Afra Msutu, a Xhosa chief. "When you go to the mountains and get circumcised, for the first seven days you are very vulnerable," he added, noting that initiates stay in close quarters with access only to a traditional doctor.

US SEIZES BITCOINS USED TO FUND MILITANT GROUPS

Washington, Aug. 14: The Justice Department has said that it has seized millions of dollars from cryptocurrency accounts that militant groups, including al-Qaida and the Islamic State, relied on to finance their organisations and violent plots. Law enforcement officials on Thursday said the groups used the accounts to solicit donations, including by trying to raise money from the sale of fraudulent personal protective equipment for the Coronavirus pandemic. Officials described it as the largest-ever seizure of virtual currency funds related to terrorism.

It's also part of a broader Justice Department goal of disrupting the financing of extremist organisations, including those designated as foreign terror groups. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin are favoured for illicit transactions because they are perceived as hard to trace, and one of the groups singled out on Thursday explicitly encouraged donations by telling potential contributors that the money trail would be difficult for law enforcement to untangle, the department said.

The legal action, which included undercover law enforcement work and a forfeiture complaint filed in Washington's federal court, is meant to deprive the organisations of funds needed to buy weapons and develop fighters, Assistant Attorney General John Demers said in a conference call with reporters announcing the case.

Don stokes false birther theory about Harris

Washington, Aug. 14: US President Donald Trump said on Thursday he had heard Democratic vice-presidential running mate Kamala Harris was not eligible to serve, stoking a false claim echoing the baseless "birther" theory he promoted about Barack Obama.

At a White House news conference, Trump was asked about "claims circulating on social media" that Harris was not eligible and whether he could say she met the legal requirements for vice-president.

"I heard it today that she doesn't meet the requirements. And, by the way, the lawyer that wrote that piece is a very highly qualified, very talented lawyer. I have no idea if that's right," Trump said. "I would have assumed the Democrats would have checked that out before she gets chosen to run for vice-president," he said.

"But that's a very serious — you're saying that — they're saying that she doesn't qualify because she wasn't born in this country," but in Kenya. Even after Obama submitted a copy of his birth certificate that showed his birthplace as Hawaii, Trump alleged it was a fake. During his 2016 election campaign, Trump finally dropped his claims.

The reporter replied that Harris was born in the United States but her parents might not have been permanent residents at the time.

Trump appeared to be referring to a Newsweek op-ed by a conservative law professor wrongly claiming the California senator was not eligible to serve as vice-president or president because of the immigration status of her parents when she was born.

Harris was born in Oakland, California in 1964 to a father from Jamaica and a mother from India.

Trump earned national political prominence by promoting the "birther" lie that Obama, America's



Donald Trump

TRUMP SAYS U.S. WILL COLLAPSE IF BIDEN IS ELECTED

Washington, Aug. 14: President Donald Trump has said that the US would collapse and become the world's laughing stock if the Democratic Party's presumptive nominee Joe Biden wins the November 3 presidential elections.

Trump said Biden's proposed policies were not good for the country.

"Today, we saw Joe Biden continue to politicise a pandemic and to show his appalling lack of respect for the American people. That's what it is. At every turn, Biden has been wrong about the virus, ignoring the scientific evidence and putting left-wing politics before facts and evidence," Trump told reporters on Thursday at the White House.

"The world will be laughing and taking full advantage of the United States if Joe Biden ever became President. Our Country would Collapse!" Trump said in a tweet.

"Sleepy Joe opposed both the China and the Europe travel bans. You know that. He opposed the China travel ban that I instituted very early and the Europe travel ban that I instituted quite early. If I listened to his advice, hundreds of thousands more people would have died. This is according to many people," the president said. —PTI

first black president, was not born in the United States. —AFP

US to host Kosovo talks next month

Pristina, Aug. 14: Kosovo and Serbia leaders will meet at the White House next month as Washington renews its effort to tackle their troubled relationship after an earlier summit fell through, officials said on Friday.

The former Balkan war foes were supposed to meet in the US in June but the talks were aborted after Kosovo President Hashim Thaci cancelled his trip to face an indictment from special prosecutors in The Hague for war crimes linked to the late 1990s conflict.

More than 20 years after that war, the neighbours still have a tense relationship, with Serbia refusing to recognise the independence that Kosovo, a former province home to an ethnic Albanian majority, declared in 2008.

While Brussels has been leading negotiations between the two sides for nearly a decade, the US has recently sought a

more publicly active role under Richard Grenell, a special envoy appointed by President Donald Trump. "We are happy to announce that the leaders of Kosovo and Serbia will meet at the White House for a negotiation on September 2," Grenell wrote on Twitter.

Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti confirmed his attendance and said the summit would focus on "major projects that will change the economic perspective of Kosovo and the region".

Speaking on television, Serbian President Vucic also said his side would "take part in the talks and the topics will be related to the economy." Grenell, a former ambassador to Berlin who has ruffled feathers in Europe with his brash and blunt style, has previously faced accusations of complicating the EU-led process to bring Belgrade and Pristina to an accord. —AFP

SPACE | STUDY

Mystery had enthralled skywatchers since the star began to lose luminosity last Oct.

Dust clouds dim bright star Betelgeuse

Paris, Aug. 14: The sudden dimming of one of the Milky Way's orion stars, Betelgeuse, could be due to a dust cloud spewing up from its surface, astronomers said on Thursday.

The mystery has enthralled skywatchers since the star — part of the Orion constellation — began to lose luminosity last October, with some experts suggesting it could herald its explosion into a supernova.

But researchers working with the Hubble telescope

now have a clearer picture, seeing superhot plasma being unleashed from the star's surface, cooling in the outer layers of the atmosphere and eventually turning to dust.

"The resulting cloud blocked light from about a quarter of the star's surface," the European Space Agency said in a statement, adding that the star has since returned to its normal brightness.

"With Hubble, we see the material as it left the star's visible surface and moved out through the atmos-

Belarus fights back



Members of the Belarusian diaspora and Ukrainian activists burn flares and hold a banner with the Pahonia coat of arms during a rally in support of Belarusians protesting against rigged presidential elections, outside the Belarusian embassy in Kiev on Friday. The main challenger in Belarus' disputed presidential election called for mass weekend rallies and workers were walking off the job on August 14 as defiance mounted against strongman leader Alexander Lukashenko. — AFP

World leaders hail Israel-UAE pact as Palestinians cry foul

Israel pledges to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands

Iran, Turkey lash out at UAE over deal with Israel

Jerusalem, Aug. 14: World leaders voiced hope Friday that a historic deal between the UAE and Israel could kickstart moribund Middle East peace talks, even as the Palestinians and some of their allies denounced the move to normalise ties as a betrayal of their cause.

Announced by US President Donald Trump on Thursday, it is only the third such accord Israel has struck with an Arab country, and raised the prospect of similar deals with other pro-Western Gulf states.

The deal sees Israel pledge to suspend its planned annexation of Palestinian lands, a concession welcomed by European and some pro-Western Arab governments as a boost for hopes of peace.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed Israel was not abandoning its plans to one day annex the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements across the occupied West Bank.

News of the agreement was broken by Trump, in a tweet hailing a "Huge breakthrough".

He said leaders from the two countries would sign the deal at the White House in around three weeks, evoking memories of previous US-mediated Middle East accords. It could also help boost Trump's reelection hopes

Tehran, Aug. 14: Iran and Turkey lashed out at their regional rival the United Arab Emirates on Friday over its decision to normalise diplomatic relations with Israel in a US-brokered deal, accusing it of betraying the Palestinian cause.

Iran's Foreign Ministry called the deal a "dagger that was unjustly struck by the UAE in the backs of the Palestinian people and all Muslims." Turkey said the peoples of the region "will never forget and will never forgive this hypocritical behaviour" by the UAE. The UAE, which has never fought Israel and has quietly been improving ties for years, said the

agreement put a hold on Israel's plans to unilaterally annex parts of the occupied West Bank, which the Palestinians view as the heartland of their future state. But the Turkish Foreign Ministry said the UAE had no authority to negotiate with Israel on behalf of the Palestinians or "to make concessions on matters vital to Palestine." The agreement would make the UAE the first Gulf Arab state — and the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan — to have full diplomatic ties with Israel.

The Palestinians say the deal amounts to "treason" and have called on Arab

and Muslim countries to oppose it. The historic deal delivered a key foreign policy victory for US President Donald Trump as he seeks re-election and reflected a changing Middle East in which shared concerns about archenemy Iran have largely overtaken traditional Arab support for the Palestinians.

Trump has predicted that other countries in the region will follow the UAE's lead. Israel, the UAE and other Gulf countries that view Iran as a regional menace have been cultivating closer ties in recent years. Turkey has had diplomatic relations with Israel for decades. —PTI

in the November US polls. The Palestinian leadership rejected the deal as a "betrayal" of their cause, saying they would withdraw their ambassador from the Emirates.

Following on Friday prayers in Jerusalem, worshippers outside the Al-Aqsa mosque walked on pictures of UAE strongman Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. In the West Bank city of

Nablus, people set fire to pictures of Sheikh Mohamed, Netanyahu and Trump.

In Ramallah, office worker Jihad Hussein said: "The Palestinian people have been stabbed in the back by the Emirates leadership."

Establishing diplomatic ties between Israel and Washington's Middle East allies, including the oil-rich Gulf monarchies, has

been central to Trump's regional strategy to contain Iran, also an arch-foe of Israel.

Under the deal, Israel and the UAE "agreed to the full normalisation of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates", according to a joint statement on Thursday evening by Trump, Netanyahu and Sheikh Mohamed. They added that Israel

AFGHANISTAN BEGINS TO FREE 400 PRISONERS

Kabul, Aug 14: Afghan authorities on Friday said they had started to release 400 Taliban prisoners, the final hurdle in long-delayed peace talks between the two warring sides, even as President Ashraf Ghani warned they were a "danger to the world".

The Afghan government and the Taliban are set to meet within days of the prisoner release being completed, in a move that has drawn widespread condemnation after it emerged many of the inmates were involved in attacks that killed scores of Afghans and foreigners.

A group of 80 prisoners was released on Thursday, said National Security Council spokesman Javid Faisal, tweeting that it would "speed up efforts for direct talks and a lasting, nationwide ceasefire".

The peace talks will be held in Doha, Qatar. —AFP

would "suspend declaring sovereignty" over occupied Palestinian West Bank areas — an idea proposed in Trump's controversial peace plan unveiled earlier this year.

Sheikh Mohamed stressed in a tweet that an agreement has been "reached to stop further Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories".

But Netanyahu insisted afterwards that he had only agreed to delay, not cancel, the annexations. The plans remained "on the table", he said.

On Friday the prime minister appointed his national security advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat to lead the negotiations with the Emiratis.

US Gulf allies Bahrain and Oman welcomed the annexation deal, and Egypt, the only other Arab country to have a formal peace treaty with Israel, praised a deal that would scrap annexation. Thanking them Netanyahu said the "peace treaty" with the UAE "is expanding the circle of peace".

The European Union said normalisation would benefit both Israel and the UAE, but foreign policy spokeswoman Nabila Massrali stressed the bloc's commitment to a two-state solution. "We are, of course, ready to work on the resumption of the negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians," she said. —AFP

NZ EXTENDS CITY LOCKDOWN TO STAMP OUT VIRUS

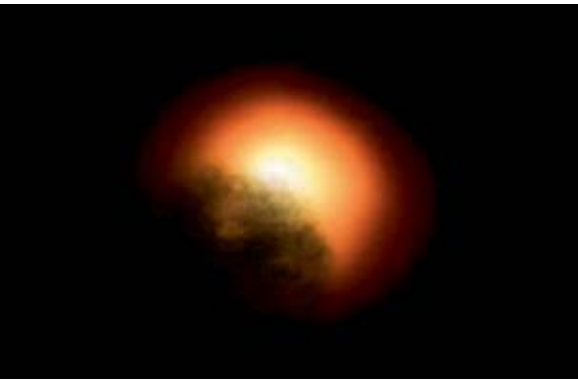
Wellington, Aug. 14: Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern extended a lockdown in New Zealand's largest city on Friday, giving health authorities more time to trace and contain a strain of Coronavirus previously unseen in the country.

Ardern said stay-at-home orders would remain in force across Auckland until Aug. 26 in a bid to prevent a mystery outbreak from becoming a fully blown second wave.

Genomic tests indicated the latest infections were not the same strain of Coronavirus recorded in New Zealand earlier this year.

"This suggests it's not a case of the virus being dormant, or of burning embers in our community, it appears to be new to New Zealand," Ardern said.

She added that tests were also unable to link the outbreak to any cases among quarantined travellers from overseas. Since four people tested positive on Tuesday - the first cases of community transmission in 102 days — New Zealand has now detected a cluster of 30 virus cases. —AFP



Picture of the Betelgeuse, one of the Milky Way's orion stars. — AFP

Resolution on Chinese aggression against India introduced in US

Washington, Aug. 14: A bipartisan group of two influential US senators has introduced a resolution in the Senate, condemning Chinese military aggression to change the status quo at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India and calling for a diplomatic solution.

Indian and Chinese troops have been locked in a bitter standoff in several

areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh since May 5. The situation deteriorated after the June 15 Galwan Valley clashes in which 20 Indian Army personnel were killed and an unconfirmed number of Chinese soldiers died.

The resolution was introduced by Senator John Cornyn, Republican Senate Majority Whip, and Senator

Mark Warner, ranking member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, on Thursday.

Cornyn and Warner are co-chairs of the Senate India Caucus. The Senate resolution follows the passage of a similar resolution by the House of Representatives as part of the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA) last month. "As a cofounder

of the Senate India Caucus, I know firsthand the importance of a strong relationship between the US and India. I commend India's commitment to standing up to China and maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific. It is more important than ever that we support our Indian partners as they defend against Chinese aggression," Cornyn said. —PTI

● BETELGEUSE, ALMOST 1,000 times the size of the Sun, is 725 light years from Earth, meaning the event witnessed by the telescope happened around the beginning of the 14th century.

phere, before the dust formed that caused the star to appear to dim," said lead researcher Andrea Dupree of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics in the

United States. "We could see the effect of a dense, hot region in the southeast part of the star moving outward."

The researchers, due to publish their findings in The Astrophysical Journal, said they were not sure of the ultimate cause of the plasma eruption.

Betelgeuse, almost 1,000 times the size of the Sun, is 725 light years from Earth, meaning the event witnessed by the telescope happened around the beginning of the 14th century. —AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

15 AUGUST 2020

Green shoots of peace in Israel-UAE accord

A landmark accord between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, brokered by Washington, comes on the back of an Israeli assurance that it would suspend annexing more areas of the occupied West Bank. Israel and UAE are to soon establish full-scale diplomatic relations but the Palestinians, who have been seeking a homeland in an elusive two-State solution to a long running feud, are miffed as there is very little in it for their greater cause. Iran, predictably enough, is upset at what clearly is the formalisation of the building of an axis of powers in the region against a Muslim country in which there is place even for the Jewish nation. The primary gainer in the deal would be Israel, which gives up only further annexation — viewed as unnecessary by a majority of its people — as it gets recognition in the contentious Middle East cauldron where religion was a clear divide in which Israel was the traditional outcast even amid Sunni-Shia tensions.

The other gainer from a historic deal that would have been unthinkable when Yasser Arafat's Palestine was facing its existential crisis is the US President Donald Trump who scores a rare foreign policy success after fruitlessly cavorting with North Korea and then grappling with China on a trade deal whose chances were totally undermined by the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. Seen as an election gift served up by his son-in-law and plenipotentiary Jared Kushner, the world will be hoping that a sincerity of purpose may have dawned at last for a region of many conflicts to experience real peace. The deal is, however, founded on assurances from a beleaguered Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who seems to be trading his territorial ambitions at least temporarily for friendship. The deal may, however, bolster his survival in a shaky coalition in the face of severe opposition in which his own people have been referring to him sardonically as "Crime Minister" in demonstrations every day outside his home.

Iran and Turkey's diatribe that all Muslims have been betrayed in the deal may be a tad exaggerated because Middle East countries have been reshaping their approach to Israel for years. Iran and many of its proxies in the region, including Hezbollah and Hamas, besides Syria and Yemen are the losers now. The Palestinian cause has lain on the backburner even as petroleum-rich countries have been dealing secretly with Israel for its cybertech, agricultural and health care expertise. It is moot whether Israel abandoning its "land for peace" policy would facilitate a grand entente in which the Palestinian Authority, led by Mahmoud Abbas, would return to the negotiating table. There has been no clear road map for this in recent times and the fear is the optics that looks so good in a US election year may fade in months. It would be in the interest of durable peace in the Middle East were UAE's recognition of Israel to lead to other Arab states following suit though a more just two-State solution seems as far away as ever. What has happened is at best the sighting of green shoots of peace.

Argue, decorously

The death of Congress spokesperson Rajiv Tyagi due to a heart attack after attending a TV discussion on Wednesday has triggered a debate on the necessity of bringing in some civility to what has been happening in TV studios of late. People who have watched Indian television debates now would hardly vouch that they became better informed after watching them. Instead, they would hear what they loved to hear, and not the other side of the argument. This cacophony with little clarity offers an antithesis to journalistic principles, and is hence unfortunate.

Democracy demands that the people, the ultimate arbiters, have access to the right information so that they can take informed decisions on issues concerning them and the nation. Mass media is one of the sources through which they get such information. Discourses, whether on television or in other platforms, help this process, and hence are extremely important.

Freedom of the media is not expressly mentioned in our Constitution, but Article 19(1)(a) which deals with the right to speech and expression of citizens stands guarantee to it. This article identifies the right of the media with that of the citizens, and hence inseparable, making it one of the strongest safeguards for media freedom. Hence it is incumbent on the media to be responsible while enjoying this freedom.

Independent media has a role only in a democracy, and it is for the survival of its own self-interest that the media must strengthen the democratic processes by being democratic in its conduct of business. The Indian media has traditionally opposed governmental intervention, and rightly so. It has opted for self-regulation instead. It is time the organisations which have a moral authority on the channels exert themselves and help discussion rooms return to their basics, instead of making them gas chambers for participants and the idea of democratic disagreement.

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Subhani

India's mood is sombre: Is Modi govt out of sync?



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

As the years pass on, Independence Day will be more of a day of gaiety than one of solemnity that it had been in earlier years. But there is no reason to complain that people have forgotten the great freedom struggle, its heroes and heroines and the enormous sacrifices they had made. Independence Day has also been a grim occasion for many of those who had to leave behind everything they had and cross over from Pakistan (or what is now Bangladesh) to India, and from India in the other direction. The wounds have healed to a great extent and those affected by Partition are now picking up the courage to look back with a certain equanimity the mad rage of riots and inter-communal strife that came with Partition and independence. This year's Independence Day will be without its customary celebratory spirit. It is going to be a rather grim Independence Day because of the Coronavirus pandemic, that has affected nearly a quarter million Indians, of whom nearly 50,000 died, and more than 20 million people across the world, of whom three-quarters of a million died.

The nationwide lockdown that had to be imposed in late March this year to contain the pandemic caused much havoc in the lives of the poor, especially the migrant workers who live in shanties in our big cities and eke out a living far from their impoverished hearths in the villages. The lockdown has brought the economic wheels to a halt and took away the livelihoods of hundreds

of thousands. The economy will take a while to pick up and it will mean hard times for the poor as well as the middle classes.

The country had at the same time to confront the Chinese military threat in eastern Ladakh, in the Galwan Valley along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and 20 of our soldiers had to lay down their lives in a violent faceoff with China's People's Liberation Army on June 15. The Indian Army has stood its ground and talks between India and China at the military and diplomatic levels are taking place, and as Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat has indicated, the dialogue would be a long drawn-out one because of the complexity of the situation at the LAC.

All that we can say of the response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to the unfolding of these stressful and sometimes traumatic turn of events is that they tried to cope with it as best as they could, though there have been acute shortcomings in policy and administrative responses. The relief packages provided by the government in terms of the supply of free foodgrains through the public distribution system and the cash, what little of it that there was of it, that was deposited in the bank accounts of many of the poor, the elderly and women, and the farmers, and the medical facilities for quarantine and treatment that the administrations tried to provide were a great help. People are indeed grateful to the government though they are acutely aware that they will have a tough time in picking up the threads of their pre-

The BJP is possibly yet to learn that a sweeping parliamentary majority may not be sufficient to do what is right for the country

Covid life and that they must do it on their own.

It is the governments that are less than clear-eyed, less than tough, and less than honest compared to ordinary people. And this Independence Day, it is the immature swagger of the governments, especially that of Prime Minister Modi and his colleagues, that will strike the wrong note in these troubling days. But neither the Prime Minister nor his colleagues are willing to respect the sombre mood of the Indian public with the constant public banter of their tenuous achievements, displaying utter insensitivity which is a sign of the arrogance of those in power. The Modi government seem to believe that the help they offered to people during the Covid-19 crisis is largesse doled out by generous rulers. And they expect the people to be grateful to the government.

Mr Modi and his colleagues are only too willing to use the Covid-19 crisis and the Chinese threat in Ladakh as a cover to divert attention from their mishandling of major issues like Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, and the economy in general. In the flush of last year's electoral victory, the Modi government had assumed that it can indulge in its favourite game of strongarm tactics, and brush aside public opinion in Jammu and Kashmir. It is now learning that the abrogation of Article 370 did not solve the Kashmir problem, and that humiliating the people of the state by bifurcating it and reducing it to a Union Territory was

not a sound idea, and that there is no alternative to the political process. The further abrogation of Article 35A with the dishonest intent of changing the demography of the Kashmir Valley has angered the people of Jammu as well because they do not want to be swamped by the intended demographic change. Similarly, the CAA was flaunted as the whim of a "Hindu state" which will protect Hindus in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, while the Assamese are totally opposed to the settling of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh in the state. And the BJP was playing to the Assamese Hindu identity to win the Assembly elections.

The Narendra Modi government has been flailing its hands for the past six years to make the economy hum, but it found itself committing all the unforced errors possible, including the November 2016 demonetisation, and alienating one Reserve Bank of India governor after another. Even the incumbent, Shaktikanta Das, who wanted to be accommodative to the government's demands, including the transfer of the RBI's huge reserves to the treasury, finds himself in a tight spot. Mr Modi does not seem to get the message that he has not set the economy free from government interference and that the ideal of "ease of business" is yet to be realised fully.

It is a hard lesson that Mr Modi is not willing to learn — that you could win a parliamentary majority but it does not ensure that the whims and fancies of a popular government do not strengthen the country in any way, including Mr Modi associating himself with the construction of the Ram Mandir at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

VIRUS IMMUNITY

It is immunity that will help us fight Coronavirus. The face mask and sanitisers may protect us to a limited extent. Some herbs, leafy vegetables and fruits containing antioxidants can go a long way. The modern foods do not contain ingredients to fight the virus. At least now, we need to adopt healthier eating habits.

D.S.P. Rao
Kakinada

STRANGE CHARGES

Atchannaidu was a remand prisoner, was in Ramesh Hospital since July 8 following HC orders. Even after spending over 30 days there, his piles operation complaint did not subside. Moreover, he now tested positive for Covid-19. On record, he was undergoing treatment in a corporate hospital all these days where the state Government has no say. It is strange to note Nara Lokesh trying to blame the State government for this infection.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

HC'S ORDERS

We welcome the Andhra Pradesh High Court's orders (HC orders probe into judge's calls, DC, Aug. 14). This is not an ordinary issue just for AP, but a serious issue for India as it is connected with the Indian Judiciary on which the people trust. The results of the probe may change the political landscape of India as most of the corrupt politicians are trying to destroy the democratic system for political benefit.

Panchakarla Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

Giri's call to banish poverty, joblessness

NEW DELHI, Aug. 14 President V. V. Giri today identified unemployment and poverty as the country's biggest problems. He warned the nation that frustration born out of poverty and social injustice was a potent cause for unleashing disruptive forces. In a broadcast to the nation on the even of the 23rd anniversary of Independence Day,

he said the vicious circle of lack of resources leading to unemployment and perpetuation of poverty "must be broken if we are to survive as a nation."

He urged a bold plan of full employment coupled with rapid growth with emphasis on using human resources fully.

Viswanath Jandhyala



Don't celebrate India's surprise trade surplus

The Covid-19 pandemic is set to leave around 170 countries with lower GDP per capita by the end of the year. The IMF forecasts a sharp contraction of almost five per cent in global economy during the year, as compared to a growth of 2.9 per cent in 2019. The downward revision of 8.2 percentage points from its January 2020 projection (of a growth of 3.3 per cent) is a major revision over a very short period by any standards. This only goes to show the enormity of the threat that the world is facing today from coronavirus, which could significantly alter the way business is conducted, trade across borders takes place and people engage with each other. In line with global trends, the IMF has slashed India's growth projection to -4.5 per cent for 2020 which is a substantial 10.3 percentage points lower than the January 2020 outlook of 5.8 per cent.

Subdued growth prospects, as a result of the global pandemic, have had adverse effects on demand, both global and domestic, thereby also leading to a slump in trade. UNCTAD, in its recent report, esti-

mated that India's trade impact due to the Covid-19 outbreak could be around US \$348 million. India is among the top 15 most affected countries on account of manufacturing slowdown in China that is disrupting world trade. As per the estimates, exports across global value chains could decrease by around US \$50 billion during the year in case there is a two per cent reduction in China's exports of intermediate inputs.

India's exports and imports saw a positive growth in February 2020, but plummeted in the last four months, recording steep contraction. With the average rate of contraction in imports of 53.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2020-21 being much larger than the average rate of contraction in exports, which was 36.3 per cent, India incidentally recorded a surprise trade surplus in June 2020.

The trade surplus of US \$800 million witnessed in June 2020, based on the provisional estimates of the ministry of commerce and industry, though subject to revision, is important on several counts. It represents a trade surplus for India after a gap of 18 long years, with the

last surplus recorded in January 2002, with a modest surplus of US \$10 million. A year prior to that, in February 2001, India had accounted for its largest trade surplus, of US \$238 million, in the last 30-year period prior to May 2020.

For a country that has been traditionally dependent on imports to meet its domestic demand, and has not witnessed an annual trade surplus for the last several decades, to have recorded a trade surplus of value close to a billion US dollars, is a matter to cheer though not an occasion to celebrate, given the circumstances under which it was achieved. One must also recognise the fact that the country has witnessed its largest trade deficit to the tune of US \$190 billion in 2012-13, and more recently in 2018-19 recorded a deficit of US \$184 billion.

The surplus in trade witnessed last month, could be attributed to several factors. While major commodity groups such as gems and jewellery, readymade garments of all textiles, petroleum products, electronic goods, engineering goods, and plastic, among others, recorded negative growth during June 2020 vis-à-vis June 2019, major

commodity groups including iron ore, rice, organic and inorganic chemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals, have in fact recorded positive growth during the same period, with partial resumption of domestic industrial activity and opening up and relaxations in many countries.

Major import commodities including gold, coal, coke and briquettes, petroleum crude and products; electrical and non-electrical machinery, and electronic goods, have shown negative growth in June 2020 over the corresponding month of last year. The global Brent price for crude (\$/bbl) has decreased by almost 37 per cent in June 2020 vis-à-vis June 2019.

Partially reflecting a slump in domestic demand, while non-oil imports witnessed a contraction of 45 per cent, non-oil and non-gold imports recorded a negative growth of 41 per cent in June 2020 as compared to June 2019, contributing to the trade surplus. Gold imports during the first quarter of FY 21, witnessed an astonishing contraction of almost 94 per cent.

The circumstances under which India recorded its trade surplus

last month leave no room for complacency. To be able to continue to witness surplus in external trade, along with a pickup in domestic demand and industrial activity, several concerted efforts and reforms would be needed. Addressing supply and demand disruptions would necessitate ensuring an enabling environment and kickstarting domestic manufacturing activity, especially through MSMEs on a large scale. The clamor call by the Prime Minister to reduce import dependency and to strive towards an *Atma Nirbhar Bharat* is an effort in this direction. A change in mindset possibly leading to large scale local production, sourcing and acceptance of non-essential discretionary items, which are otherwise imported, only due to their intrinsic brand value, could also perhaps be a game changer in the medium to long run, with countless spillover benefits for the domestic economy.

The author is an economist with India Exim Bank. The views expressed here are personal.

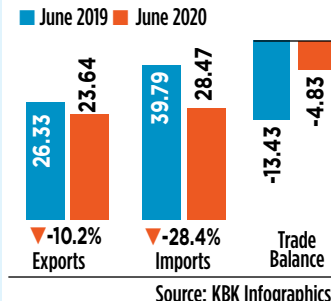
quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	37,877.34	-1.13
Nifty 50	11,178.40	-1.08
S&P 500*	3,376.01	0.08
Dollar (₹)	74.90	-0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	97.87	0.00
Euro (₹)	88.43	0.09
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	53,691,730	1.35
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.71	-0.25
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.965	0.070
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.701	-0.015

* As of 9:30 PM IST

Merchandise trade

India's exports declined by 10.2% during July 2020 while imports registered a fall of 28.40% over the same month of the previous year



WPI inflation at -0.58% in July, food prices spike



The wholesale price-based inflation stood at (-) 0.58 per cent in July, even as food items turned costlier. WPI inflation in June was at (-) 1.81 per cent, while for the month of May and April it was (-) 3.37 per cent and (-) 1.57 per cent, respectively. Inflation was at 1.17 per cent in July 2019. Inflation in food articles in July stood at 4.08 per cent, as against 2.04 per cent in June. But fuel and power basket inflation fell 9.84 per cent.

Forex reserves climb \$3.62 bn to record \$538.19 bn

The country's foreign exchange reserves swelled by \$3.623 billion to a record high of \$538.19 billion in the week ended August 7, RBI data showed. In the previous week ended July 31, the reserves had increased by \$11.938 billion to reach \$534.568 billion. Foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, rose by \$1.464 billion to \$492.293 billion. Gold reserves were up by \$2.160 billion to \$39.785 billion.

DigiValet rolls out hotel guest solution Thru

DigiValet, the makers of the guest-facing technology across luxury hotels, has launched Thru, an end-to-end cloud-based solution for hotel guests. This solution will help the hotel guests to complete their check-in process from their own device, without having to download any app or software. By facilitating check-ins remotely, Thru eliminates all touch-points that the guests would otherwise be exposed to.



Dividend in tune with Budget estimate of ₹60K cr Govt to get ₹57K cr from RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG. 14

The central board of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday approved a dividend transfer of Rs 57,128 crore to the central government for the accounting year 2019-20. The board has also decided to maintain the contingency risk buffer at 5.5 per cent as mandated by the Bimal Jalan Committee. The transfer of 2019-20 is sharply lower than last year's. Last August, the central bank had announced the highest ever dividend transfer of Rs 1.76 lakh crore to the government. The dividend then comprised Rs 1.23 lakh crore of annual dividend for the year 2018-19 and Rs 52,637 crore from its



surplus capital identified by a revised economic capital framework. The Jalan panel had also recommended that the interim dividend should be paid only under exceptional circumstances. The high-level panel, under the leadership of former RBI governor Bimal Jalan, was formed to recommend

ways to utilise RBI's excess cash reserves. The RBI usually transfers surplus to the government in August after closing its books in June. RBI and the government had budgeted a fiscal deficit at Rs 7.96 lakh crore for FY21. The fiscal deficit stood at 83.2 per cent of the FY21 budget target.

primarily from the interest it gets from the purchase and sale of government securities, the interest earned from lending to banks and interest earned on bond holdings. The dividend was lower this year as the RBI earned less from bond holdings and did not have one-time gains to transfer as it did in the previous year. The transfer while lower than last year is in line with the amount that the government had budgeted for. The Union government had pegged Rs 60,000 crore as dividend from RBI in the Union Budget 2020-21. The government had budgeted a fiscal deficit at Rs 7.96 lakh crore for FY21. The fiscal deficit stood at 83.2 per cent of the FY21 budget target.

Bond yields rise to three-month high as market rules out more rate cuts

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG. 14

Government bond yields rose on Friday after retail inflation spiked in July, ruling out expectations of more accommodation from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Traders expect the RBI to announce an open market operation (OMO) or a special OMO to address the nervousness in the bond market. The yield on the 5.79 per cent bond due in 2030 rose five basis points to 5.95 per cent on Friday. The 10-year bond yield has risen

to the highest since May this year as the July Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation climbed to 6.93 per cent against the expectations of 6.25 per cent. Economists feel that we may be nearing an end to the RBI rate cut cycle. Yields and bond prices move in opposite direction. The yields have already been on the rise since the RBI kept rates on hold at a policy review last week amidst inflationary pressures against wider expectations of a rate cut. However, the higher retail inflation print was

primarily on account of higher food prices and some believe that a normal monsoon and a good kharif harvest could help the inflation cool off in the September-March period. "Retail inflation breaching MPC's upper band of 6 per cent in seven out of last eight months makes the task of MPC difficult. We believe the MPC will watch the inflation trajectory very carefully before taking the decision of further rate cuts," said Devendra Kumar Pant, chief economist at India Ratings.

"We maintain further scope for upto 50 bps cut in the current cycle but with the MPC's desire for statistical reflection of durably low inflation, near-term cuts may be ruled out. Irrespective of the policy stance, the RBI's yield curve management in the form of outright OMOs and operation twist will continue," said Madhavi Arora, economist at Edelweiss. Retail inflation has breached the RBI's upper tolerance limit of six per cent for four consecutive months and seven out of eight months.

PE/VC FUNDS STRIKE \$1.7 BN BUYOUT DEALS IN JULY

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Private equity and venture capital funds are finding the current economic slump as an opportunity to buy controlling stakes in quality businesses at attractive valuations. July saw the highest value and number of buyout deals in 11 months. In July, six buyout deals valued \$1.7 billion were inked and across different deal types, buyouts recorded the highest value of investments. July recorded the highest value and number of buyouts in 11 months, says a monthly report by IVCA-EY. Between January and June this year, only 14 buyouts had happened and that too for a total transaction value of \$794 million. Buyout deals in the month of July were almost \$1 billion more than the entire value of H1 2020. Among the major deals, Majesco was fully bought over by Thoma Bravo for \$594 million. KKR Asian Fund III picked up 65 per cent in J B Chemicals.

Smartphone use up 50% in small cities

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Smartphone usage in cities and towns beyond tier-I increased 50 per cent during lockdown and the usage for productive work saw a growth of 100 per cent, finds a study. During the lockdown period between March 25 and May 31, users in tier-II and beyond depended on their smartphones more for professional and personal purposes, says a study conducted by CyberMedia Research (CMR) with Tecno Mobile. As many employees were working from home, there was 100 per cent more usage of smartphones for work-related purposes compared to pre-Covid times. Further, 84 per cent of consumers who responded to the survey depended on their smartphones for accessing information on government schemes, weather patterns, and market linkage information for farm produce. Among them, 83 per cent used their phones for content consumption, includ-

ing creating and consuming short-form videos, music and videos. A similar share of respondents used phones for online banking, shopping and utility bill payments. Beyond work, consumers spent increased time on their phone for consuming content, including video OTT, audio OTT and gaming. Around three in every seven users started some new activities and hobbies during the lockdown period. For instance, 21 per cent of the users learnt new skills, 19 per cent listened to music, while 18 per cent took up new hobbies on their phones. One in three parents depended on their smartphone for facilitating their kid's online education. "The smartphone is a key daily driver for consumers living in cities and towns beyond tier-I. We call this the 'Aspirational Bharat'. What the survey highlights is how smartphone usage is changing, during lockdown, said Prabhu Ram, head, Industry Intelligence Group, CMR.

When investors back media and democracy

STEPHEN ENGLE & KARI LINDBERG
AUG. 14

Jimmy Lai, the media mogul who owns the pro-democracy *Apple Daily* newspaper, warned investors not to buy his Next Digital Ltd media empire's stock because the company's fundamentals don't justify its recent rally. Moments later, the shares resumed their climb in Hong Kong. "People with very little money just want to express their anger and express their support for our company," Lai said in an interview with Bloomberg Television on Friday. "Everybody bought a little bit. That became a lot of it and jacked up the price. I was telling people 'don't do it, don't do it, because you're going to lose money.'" The warning from Lai, who was released on bail Wednesday after becoming the most prominent pro-democracy activist to be arrested under Hong Kong's new national secu-



Jimmy Lai

city law, fell on deaf ears. Next Digital shares climbed as much as 42 per cent Friday morning, resuming the roller-coaster ride the holding company's been on this week. Lai denies he broke the law. The shares are still up almost 400 per cent for the week and wavered at 44 H.K. cents, although that's far below their intraday high of HK\$1.96. Hong Kong's Securities and Futures Commission has requested brokers to submit client information and recent transaction records related to Next

Digital's shares, the Hong Kong Economic Journal reported, citing unidentified brokers. On Tuesday, the regulator warned investors to exercise "extreme caution" with the stock and that it would closely monitor trading activity in Next Digital. In response to the report, Lai said he doesn't know what the SFC might be trying to do but said the people who recently bought the shares were just expressing support for the company, which owns *Apple Daily*. The paper's offices were searched this week by the police. Separately, Lai ruled out taking advantage of Next Digital's share surge by issuing new stock at inflated prices, saying that would be a "very dishonest way" for the company to raise money. Lai also said he has no plans to divest his shares in his media empire, whose business "will go on without me" should he be convicted. —Bloomberg

Shriram City Union cuts loans to small biz by 99%



Yalamati Srinivasa Chakravarti

GANESH NAGARAJAN
AUG. 14

Shriram City Union Finance Ltd, a shadow lender backed by Apax Partners, is turning cautious on its key customers as the coronavirus pandemic rolls businesses. Loans to small businesses, including grain merchants, which make up a little over half of the company's borrowers, plunged 99 per cent to Rs 20 crore in the June quarter from a year ago. While there's demand for small-ticket loans, the financier prefers to wait for more clarity on their recovery, according to CEO Yalamati Srinivasa Chakravarti. "Most of the businesses have not come back to their normal level of sales," Chakravarti said by phone. "I have to look at their cash flows much more closely than earlier." The bulk of Shriram City's customers seek loans of less than Rs 15 lakh, and are probably among the most vulnerable in an economy forecast to shrink for the first time in decades. The government's massive stimulus package announced in May was aimed at helping small businesses, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepared to restart the economy. Earlier this month, the RBI allowed financiers to restructure certain loans by granting extensions of as long as two years with or without a freeze on repayments. Chakravarti said he is against recasting loans as the practice leads to problems down the road. He predicts people will resume borrowing as states start lifting lockdowns. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

UK opens stadia to fans gradually

London: British sports fans will be allowed in to some pilot events from this weekend to test the safe return of spectators, with the government hoping bigger crowds can start attending venues from the start of October.

Around 300 spectators will attend the final two days of the World Snooker Championship at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre this weekend, the British government said on Thursday.

It added that more pilot events will follow with a view to reopening competition venues for sports fans, with social distancing measures in place from October 1.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson called off previously planned pilot events with some fans in attendance during the first two weeks of August. However, Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said, "we can now make further careful progress on recovery with allowing audiences back for indoor performances, fans back at sports events and the reopening of more Covid-19 secure leisure businesses." — AP

Lahiri one under, Atwal yet to finish

Greensboro: Returning to action after more than five months, Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri shot a one-under 69 at the Wyndham Championship while Arjun Atwal was two-under in his unfinished first round, halted by inclement weather.

It was a fairly good round that should have fetched Lahiri a better score but he was found wanting on the greens, where he twice missed putts inside five feet and on four other occasions he was 10-11 feet or less from the pin.

Considering he was competing after a long time, he hit the ball well finding 10 of the 14 fairways and 13 of the 18 greens, but the putting prevented him from finishing with a better card.

Lahiri had just two birdies, but gave away just one bogey in his round and was Tied-67th.

Atwal, the 2010 winner of the Wyndham, playing this week with a sponsor's exemption, looked set for a great start as he was four-under through 16 holes but then double bogeyed the 17th. — PTI

Boxer Benavidez remains unbeaten

New York: Undeclared American David Benavidez defends his World Boxing Council super middleweight world title for the third time on Saturday against Colombia's Alexis Angulo. Benavidez, 22-0 with 19 knockouts, returns to action in the feature bout at Uncasville, Connecticut, some 11 months after stopping countryman Anthony Dirrell in the ninth round.

"I'm very eager to get back in the ring and give the fans a great fight. Training camp has been amazing. Fortunately, my dad opened his own gym just before the pandemic, so we've had private training and been able to safely bring in sparring partners to help me work," Benavidez said.

In 2017, Benavidez became the youngest champion in super middleweight history at age 20 by beating Ronald Gavril in a split decision for the vacant crown, then kept it by winning a unanimous decision over the Romanian in a 2018 rematch. — AFP

PORTLAND GO PAST NETS IN NBA MATCH

Miami: Damian Lillard scored 42 points and came up with a key late steal as the Portland Trail Blazers edged the Brooklyn Nets 134-133 on Thursday to keep their NBA playoff hopes alive.

The scrappy, scintillating win put the Blazers into a weekend play-in series with the Memphis Grizzlies for the final Western Conference playoff berth. Caris LeVert, who led the playoff-bound Nets with 37 points, had a chance to deny them but missed a potential game-winning jump shot as time expired. — AFP

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BIGGIES ON BOARD
Tata Group joins race to be IPL title sponsor

New Delhi, Aug. 14: Multinational conglomerate Tata Group has submitted its 'Expression of Interest' to become IPL title sponsor this year, joining education technology company Unacademy and fantasy sports platform Dream11 in a bid to replace Chinese mobile phone company Vivo for one season.

Friday was the last date of submission of 'EOI' to the BCCI. The IPL will be held from September 19 to November 10 in the UAE this year and the winning bidder will hold the rights for four months and 13 days.

Tata Group's entry into the fray makes the bidding war on August 18 very interesting as BCCI is expecting that the winning bid will not be much lower than Vivo's ₹440 crore annual contract even though the rights period is of a short duration.

"Yes, Tata Group has submitted their Expression of Interest to buy IPL title rights," a group spokesperson said.

A source in the BCCI earlier confirmed the submission of EOIs from the other two companies.

"The EOI doesn't have to mention the bid amount. It will be sent on August 18," the official said.

"Post the delivery of the EOI, BCCI shall inform the rights, product categories and entitlements to the interested third parties. The final bid should be sent to eoi@bcci.tv between 11 am to 1 pm on August 18, 2020," the BCCI has already stated.

— PTI

● **Tata Group's entry into the fray makes the bidding war on August 18 very interesting as BCCI is expecting that the winning bid will not be much lower than Vivo's ₹440 crore annual contract even though the rights period is of a short duration.**



Chennai Super Kings players Piyush Chawla (from left), Suresh Raina, Monu Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Karn Sharma and Deepak Chahar fly on a special flight to Chennai on Friday.

C. SANTOSH KUMAR | DC CHENNAI, AUG. 14

Three-time champions Chennai Super Kings have stolen a march over their IPL rivals by managing to assemble their core team in the city for a five-day training camp starting on Saturday at the M. A. Chidambaram Stadium. The team will shake off the rust before they leave for Dubai on August 21. The 13th edition of the tournament starts on September 19 in the UAE.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Deepak Chahar, Piyush Chawla, Kedar Jadhav, Karn Sharma and others arrived in Chennai by a chartered flight on

● **Chennai Super Kings flew in their top players via a chartered flight and are all set to resume training for the IPL. Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu were among the cricketers to arrive in Chennai on Friday.**

Friday afternoon. They headed straight to a star hotel where an entire block is reserved for the team. CSK officials and their social media team who will accompany the team to the UAE are also staying in the same hotel.

"The chartered flight had stopovers in Pune, Delhi, Ranchi and Hyderabad before bringing the players together to Chennai. All of them had tested negative at their respective cities. There

will be two more testings in Chennai — during camp — before they leave by another chartered flight to Dubai. All the foreign players will come directly to Dubai in batches," said a CSK team official.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who opted out of the Chennai camp due to personal reasons, will join the squad in Dubai.

Mini bubble at MAC
With the CSK players set

to begin their training on Saturday, the M. A. Chidambaram stadium has been turned into a bubble. Around 100 people, including Tamil Nadu Cricket Association staff, groundsman, security and drivers, have been tested. The camp will be held behind closed doors.

"Even the media will not be allowed in. We have already handpicked net bowlers who will travel with the team to the UAE. Those players too were tested and none of them were positive. They are also staying in the team hotel. We have sent a car to Coimbatore to pick up N. Jagadeesan, Tamil Nadu wicket-keeper batsman," the CSK official said.

No English, Aussies in early IPL stages

London, Aug. 14: England and Australia's IPL-bound players are likely to miss the first week of Indian Premier League after it was announced that the two teams will play six white-ball games from September 4-16 at Southampton and Manchester respectively.

England and Australia will be playing three T20 Internationals at the Ageas Bowl on September 4, 6 and 8 while the ODIs will be held on September 11, 13 and 16 at the Old Trafford.

The latest that the players can touch base in UAE is September 17 or 18 and

as per the IPL SOP, will be quarantined for six days with RT-PCR tests on day 1, 3 and 6. On the seventh day, they will be entering the bio-bubble provided they test negative on all three occasions.

Effectively, none of the players will be available for at least the first two to three games of their respective franchises.

A total of 29 players from England and Australia are part of the eight IPL squads including top draws like David Warner, Ben Stokes, Jofra Archer, Steve Smith and this year's record buy Pat Cummins.

— PTI

McDONALD TO MISS OZ TOUR, WILL PLAY IPL

Sydney, Aug. 14: Australia's senior assistant coach Andrew McDonald will miss next month's tour of England owing to a pre-existing commitment with his Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Rajasthan Royals (RR), the country's cricket board said on Friday. "Australian men's team Senior Assistant Coach Andrew McDonald will not travel with the squad to the UK to fulfill a pre-existing commitment as Head Coach of the Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League," Cricket Australia said in a statement. — PTI

ATM overdraft, out of order
Leipzig send Atletico out of Champions League

Lisbon, Aug. 14: Leipzig stunned Atletico Madrid 2-1 on Thursday to reach the Champions League semifinals for the first time as Tyler Adams' 88th-minute winner earned them a showdown with Paris Saint-Germain.

Atletico looked to have secured extra-time at the Estadio Jose Alvalade when Joao Felix won and then scored a penalty to cancel out Dani Olmo's headed opener early in the second half.

But Adams proved an unlikely hero for Leipzig, coming off the bench to snatch victory in Lisbon after his fired effort took a cruel deflection of Stefan Savic and flew in.

The win marks an historic night for Leipzig, who were only formed 11 years ago and played their first ever season in Germany's top flight in 2016.

Progress to the last four



Tyler Adams (right) of Leipzig celebrates his goal with teammates during their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal match against Atletico Madrid at the Jose Alvalade stadium in Lisbon on Thursday. Leipzig won 2-1.

— AFP

also puts another feather in the cap of their coach Julian Nagelsmann, whose stock will rise even further after ousting Diego Simeone, one of this competition's most gnarly tacticians.

"I'm perhaps one of the happiest coaches in the world. Tonight we're happy. Tomorrow we'll start looking at Paris. That will be another difficult game but we'll have a plan," Nagelsmann said.

Their challenge is now to defeat PSG on Tuesday, the French champions who have only played three matches in almost half a year and needed a late escape to see off Atalanta. — AFP

US | OPEN

Reigning champ Bianca pulls out

New York, Aug. 14: Novak Djokovic boosted the US Open by saying on Thursday that he will play in the Grand Slam tennis event while reigning women's champion Bianca Andreescu joined a host of notable no-shows.

"After many discussions with those closest to me, I have made the difficult decision not to return to New York this year," Andreescu said in a statement.

"I have taken this step in order to focus on my match fitness and ensure that I return ready to play at my highest level." Andreescu defeated Serena Williams 6-3, 7-5 in last year's US Open final.

"The US Open victory last year has been the high point of my career thus far and I will miss not being there," Andreescu said.

"However, I realize that the unforeseen challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, have compromised my ability to prepare and compete to the degree necessary to play at my highest level," she added.

Top-ranked Djokovic, a 17-time Slam singles champion, ended speculation by saying he would travel to New York on Saturday and play a tuneup event inside a Covid-19 quarantine bubble on the Flushing

● **With 2019 women's singles winner Bianca Andreescu withdrawing due to the Pandemic, the US Open this year will be played without defending champions.**

● **Last year's men's champion Rafael Nadal had earlier pulled out of the Grand Slam.**

Meadows grounds ahead of the US Open start on August 31.

"It was not an easy decision to make with all the obstacles and challenges on many sides," three-time US Open winner Djokovic said.

"But the prospect of competing again makes me really excited," he added.

The 33-year-old Serbian will be the only member of the "Big Three" at Arthur Ashe Stadium, with reigning champion Rafael Nadal — a four-time winner — deciding already not to defend his 2019 title and five-time champion Roger Federer out with a knee injury.

— AFP



Serena Williams (left) and Venus Williams tap racquets after their women's singles match at the Top Seed Open in Lexington, Kentucky (USA) on Thursday. Serena won in three sets at 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

— AFP

Serena rallies for win over Venus

Washington, Aug. 14: Serena Williams rallied to defeat sister Venus Williams 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Thursday in a second-round matchup of Grand Slam champions at the WTA Top Seed Open.

Top-seeded Serena, a 23-time Grand Slam winner, said the victory will boost her confidence heading into the US Open as she improved to 19-12 in the 22-year-old rivalry with Venus.

"I wanted to win this for my game and my confidence," said Serena, whose only title as a mother came in January at Auckland.

Serena smacked a cross-court forehand winner to break Venus for a 2-1 lead in the third set, then dropped the next four games, only to break again in the seventh on another forehand cross-court winner, then hold to 4-4.

Serena zipped a backhand cross-court winner past Venus to break for a 5-4 lead and served out the match, aided by an umpire over-rule ace to reach 30-30. Serena followed the call with her 14th ace and won after two hours and 19 minutes when Venus sent a forehand beyond the baseline. — AFP

HALEP FIGHTS HER WAY INTO QUARTERS

Prague, Aug. 14: Reigning Wimbledon champion Simona Halep reached the quarterfinals of the WTA Prague Open after grinding out a three-set win against Czech doubles specialist Barbora Krejickova on Thursday.

The lacklustre Romanian world number two overpowered the 118th-ranked Krejickova 3-6, 7-5 and 6-2 in two hours and five minutes in her second post-lockdown match.

On a scorching hot Thursday afternoon and behind closed doors, the 28-year-old Halep struggled with her right shoulder which affected her serve as she piled up ten double faults and gave away seven breaks.

She was 0-2 down in the third set but then won six games in a row after finally regaining composure as Krejickova lost much of the resolve she had shown earlier in the match. — AFP

HAMILTON BEATS BOTTAS TO TOP SPAIN PRACTICE

Barcelona, Aug. 14: Lewis Hamilton bounced back to top the times ahead of his teammate Valtteri Bottas as Mercedes continued to dominate Friday's second free practice at this weekend's Spanish Grand Prix.

The championship leader and six-times champion had been second behind the Finn after the morning's opening session, but re-established his supremacy on a hot afternoon at the Circuit de Catalunya.

Hamilton clocked a best lap in one minute and 16.883 seconds to outpace Bottas by 0.287 seconds with Max Verstappen, winner of last weekend's 70th Anniversary Grand Prix at Silverstone, third for Red Bull, eight-tenths adrift of the fastest lap.

Daniel Ricciardo was fourth for Renault ahead of Romain Grosjean of Haas who outpaced Charles Leclerc, who was sixth for Ferrari. — AFP