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VIJAYAWADA, MONDAY AUGUST 10, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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TO UMUR
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10 patients die in fire at hotel-turned-Covid facility

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

In a ghastly accident, as many as 10 patients died on Sunday after fire ravaged through the Hotel Swarna Palace in Vijayawada, converted to a coronavirus treatment centre. According to sources, 31 persons were undergoing treatment in the hotel for Coronavirus and 10 of them died due to suffocation as they were trapped in thick smoke.

Ramesh Hospitals had taken the Hotel Swarna Palace located in Vijayawada on lease and transformed it into temporary Covid Care Centre. The hotel was housing Covid-19 patients who were mildly symptomatic and those who did not require hospitalisation.

The sources said that flames erupted in the hotel at about 4.45 am and fire tenders started rescue operations at 5 am. The smoke swiftly spread through the three floors of the hotel, leaving patients gasping for air.

According to sources in the AP Disaster Response and Fire Services Department, the fire apparently broke out due to an electrical short circuit in the hotel's front lobby and spread to the first and second floors. As there was only one main stairway, the panicked patients tried to escape to safety using the stairway after they noticed the smoke.

"They should have actually used a different stairway on the rear side and that would have saved their lives. Unfortunately, they used the main one in a moment of panic and were trapped in the fire," a fire official said.

The fire department entered the room by breaking open the window panes and rescued 21 persons by bringing them down using ladders. They were shifted to Ramesh Hospitals for treatment.

Since there was no other option, fire and NDRF personnel used ladders to bring down other people, stranded inside the hotel, to safety.

Meanwhile two persons jumped from the second floor to save their life. Their condition was said to be stable as they sustained minor injuries.



Disinfectants meant to stop virus spread fanned the flames

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Use of disinfectants with high alcohol content is being encouraged to kill the virus and stop its spread, but it may have contributed to the flames that ravaged the Hotel Swarna Palace in Vijayawada on Sunday.

Disinfectants stored for use at the hotel-turned Covid Care Centre apparently acted as a catalyst for the fire to spread rapidly.

It is learnt that disinfectants which contain alcohol were kept near the electrical appliances by the cleaning staff.

According to the Ministry of Health and FW guidelines, disinfectant with 1 per cent



sodium hypochlorite or phenolic disinfectants should be used against the Coronavirus.

It also suggests that 70 per cent alcohol content can be used to wipe down surfaces where the use of bleach is not suitable, e.g. metal.

(Chloroxyleneol (4.5%-5.5%)/Benzalkonium Chloride or any other disinfectant found to be effective against coronavirus may be used as per manufacturer's instructions).

Since the sanitiser solution is basically Isopropyl alcohol/Ethanol, it is highly flammable and when sprayed upon a hot surface it may catch fire. Phenol is considered a Category 4 flammable liquid by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The ground floor where the fire erupted had also the disinfectants stored to sanitise the hospital premises. It was recently seen that a bike caught fire while being disinfected.

Could not see a thing due to smoke, says survivor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Giving a first-hand account of the horrifying events that unfolded in the wee hours of Sunday, Pavan Sai Kishan, a survivor of the fire mishap narrated his ordeal and how he was rescued by the fire and police authorities.

In a selfie video, Pavan says that he saw the thick smoke coming inside the hotel and hardly anything else was visible.

Gripped with fear he came out of the hotel room screaming for help. Later he broke the hotel room window pane and came out and shouted at the top of his voice for help.

At the same time he called the police and the fire authorities and told them about the fire.

Pavan said that within no time, police and fire authorities reached the hotel and rescue operations began. He expressed his gratitude to the authorities for saving his life.

According to the fire department DG, the accident is said to have happened due to short circuit on the ground floor and the flames reached the first floor, resulting in the loss of 10 lives.

Firefighters show their worth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Firefighters were widely acknowledged to be the real heroes on Sunday by not only responding promptly to calls for help, but also managing to rescue 21 people trapped inside the burning Hotel Swarna Palace in Vijayawada.

"We received a call at around 5.09 and reached the spot in less than five minutes and started rescue operations," said M Sreenivasa Reddy, District Fire Officer.

He said that after reaching the spot, the first thing to do was to gain control over the fire in the building and rescue those trapped inside. "We started the rescue operations by climbing till the first floor with the help of ladders and entering the rooms by breaking open the window panes," he said.



NANI PRAISES FIRE PERSONNEL FOR THEIR ALACRITY, BRAVERY

Expressing profound sympathy with the families of those who lost their life in the fire accident at Hotel Swarna Palace in Vijayawada, State Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani) on Sunday said that a committee has been set up to inquire into the mishap and direct-

ed to submit its report within 48 hours. After inspecting the hospital, the Minister conducted a review with the authorities and then spoke to the media.

He said that the fire broke out at 4:45 am and firefighters were notified at 5:09 am.

Kin of victims blame hospital, hotel

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Expressing anguish over the death of his sister G Venkata Jayalakshmi (52) and nephew Venkata Narsimha Pavan Kumar (30) from Kandakuru of Prakasam district, Narayana Swamy said that stern action should be taken on the hospital management for choosing a hotel lacking

proper safety equipment to use as a Covid Care Centre.

He found fault with the hotel management for not even bothering to instal a working fire safety alarm since it did not work even when the flames reached the three floors of the hotel.

Speaking to The Pioneer, an emotional Narayana Swamy said that his nephew's

wife was pregnant and expected to give birth within a few days.

"I lost my sister and nephew only due to the negligence of the management of Ramesh Hospitals and Hotel Swarna Palace for their poor maintenance. It's a great loss for my family," he said.

PM grieves, announces Rs 2L ex gratia

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday expressed anguish at the death of patients in a fire incident at a Covid facility in Vijayawada, even as the Prime Minister's Office announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the kin of those killed. Modi said he discussed the prevailing situation in the city with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and assured all possible help. Ten Covid-19 patients were killed in the incident at a hotel converted into a treatment facility at Vijayawada. "Anguished by the fire at a Covid centre in Vijayawada. My thoughts are with those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured recover as soon as possible," the prime minister tweeted.

Governor, Ministers express shock

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has expressed shock over the fire incident at Hotel Swarna Palace in Vijayawada, in which 10 Covid-19 patients were killed and several others injured. The Governor directed authorities to ensure best possible treatment to those injured in the fire mishap. He expressed condolences to the kin of the patients who died in the fire accident. In a message, the Governor said that he has prayed for peace to the souls of the victims and expressed his deep sympathies to their families in their hour of grief. Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas expressed grief over the loss of lives in the fire accident.

Condolences, Rs 50 lakh ex gratia: Jagan

Expressing his deepest condolences to the families of the victims of the fire accident at Swarna Palace Hotel in Vijayawada, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Sunday announced an ex gratia of Rs 50 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased. The Chief Minister also ordered an in-depth investigation into the accident and directed authorities to take steps to ensure proper medical services are extended to the victims of the accident. The Chief Minister assured to provide necessary help and support to the families affected by the incident.

Over 70% of hospitals in Vizag yet to obtain fire NOC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Hospitals in Vizag city are literally tinderboxes with management least bothered to implement fool-proof safety measures. Sources in the fire service department said over 250 of the 340 hospitals in Vizag city under the GVMC jurisdiction are yet to obtain No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from the fire department.

The fire safety certificate is renewed every year. The applicants need to seek NOC online.

In view of the Covid situation, the fire department had taken up a survey to inspect fire safety compliance and served notices to the erring hospitals.

Careless smokers triggered most fire mishaps in State

● AP recorded 2,856 deaths in fire mishap in 10 yrs ● Property damage around Rs 200 cr every year

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Careless smokers are literally playing with fire with most of the fire mishaps in Andhra Pradesh is caused by cigarette butt. The last annual report (2019) of the state fire department reflect it clearly as 1,896 fire incidents in Andhra in 2019, 1034 are due to the careless smoking.

The reason is no different in other years too. The previous year, in 2018, 14,485 fire mishaps were reported and careless smoking was attributed to 6,920 cases. Election ori-

gin was next with 4,693 cases.

The other contributing factors being electrical short-circuit, gas coal furnace, electric origin, hot ashes, fire crackers and chemical reaction, among others. The department officials say cigarette butts that were not properly put off before being chucked, sparked fire in several incidents.

Despite the suggestions of making separate smoking zone considering the increasing mishaps due to casual smokers, the owners of the commercial buildings are ignoring it.

Occupants should not dump cartons, waste papers and other flammable substances either in balconies or cellars. The fire personnel usually ascertain the reasons for the mishap only after examining the premises and assessing the intensity of the blaze.

2,856 died in fire mishap in 10 years

In 10 years from 2006, 2856 people have died in fire mishaps in Andhra Pradesh, according to the fire department.



97 deaths in AP take toll past 2,000 mark

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Yet another record high per day cases of 10,820 saw Andhra Pradesh's Covid-19 tally rocket further up to 2.27 lakh on Sunday.

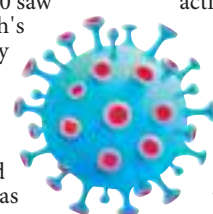
The coronavirus toll crossed the 2,000-mark as 97 fresh fatalities were reported in the last 24 hours, the latest bulletin said.

The total number of recov-

ered patients touched 1.38 lakh as 9,097 got cured in the last 24 hours, leaving 87,112 active cases in the state.

The recovery rate improved to 60.88 per cent.

After 24.87 lakh sample tests, the cumulative positivity rate climbed up to 9.16 per cent against the national average of 8.93 per cent.



TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Shravana & Krishna Paksha
Panchangam

Tithi : Shashthi: 06:42 am

Nakshatram: Ashwini: 10:05 pm

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start
any important work)

Rahukalam: 07:36 am - 09:11 am

Yamagandam: 10:46 am - 12:21 pm

Varjyam: 05:36 pm - 07:24 pm

Gulika: 01:56 pm - 03:31 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 02:00 pm - 03:48 pm

Ahijit Muhurtham: 11:55 am - 12:46 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Drizzle

Temp: 32/25

Humidity: 85%

Sunrise: 05:57 am

Sunset: 06:45 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated august 9, 2020 5:00 PM

LESS OF SCIENCE, MORE OF EVOLVING ART



Many of my fellow journalists, friends in different spheres of life often confer with me about the political situation in the country in general and its nuances in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in particular, thinking that I get to know and have more 'inside' or insightful information. I often have to frankly admit that I know as much as they do.

Over a period of time, I have noticed the urge in people to know varied, interesting aspects of politics. Not many really know what politics is inside out. They think politics is all about change of power.

As all political parties and their members are strongly believing that coming to power and staying at the top

for as many years as possible is the sole motive, people too have started accepting that the ultimate goal of politics is power. Accordingly, political parties and leaders have evolved their strategies -- some populist, some divisional, some left, some right and so on. It is always intriguing to find out what theory (rather myth) would people accept in the election. Political leaders across the globe are struggling a lot to figure out what they can sell to people to win and keep their support.

As a journalist with over three decades of work experience, I feel I can throw some light on some of the important aspects of politics which is a science, according to Aristotle. He, who was considered as the 'Father of Political Science' considered Political Science as the master of all sciences. Here, science means a body of systematized knowledge arranged on certain principles. I would

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be sharing my experiments and experiences with readers, starting this Monday.

Unfortunately, may be after the advent of socialism in the 20th century, political leaders started to believe that it is not a science, but an art. Believing that, every political leader started 'performing' the art in their own style, forgetting the original dynamics of the politics. Of course, many of them had to conclude their careers abruptly, unlike some leaders like Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, Sheik Hasina of Bangladesh, Vladimir Putin of Russia and Angela Merkel of

Germany, who showed the world the strength of being a student of political 'science'.

I strongly feel that it is a "science" because political scientists strive to derive answers through scientific reasoning and this is especially true today, where statistics are coming to fore to help find the currents of public mood.

The western democracies are older than ours and had experimented on quite a number of issues much before India could even think of them. For example Gallup surveys. An American analytics and advisory company

Gallup, Inc. founded by George Gallup in 1935, known for its public opinion polls conducted worldwide. Starting in the 1980s, Gallup transitioned its business to focus on providing analytics and management consulting to organizations globally. Now companies like Oxford Analytics have taken that to unbelievable levels in understanding the mindsets of different groups of people in a particular society.

Are any of you aware that people exposed to entertainment television and daily serials are more likely to vote for populist politicians? According to a new study co-authored by Queen Mary University of London, people who are older (55+) and viewers of entertainment stuff in TVs are more vulnerable to 'unrealistic' populist doses! This age group voted an average by 10 percentage points more to political parties whose manifesto is full of 'unrealistic' welfare promises.

es.

Another recent study confirmed the difference in voting pattern between residents of a big city and suburbs. The study displayed the clear ideological divide between urban and suburban areas. Same thing applies to India, where rural voting is different from that of the cities. And astonishingly, the suburban and rural population is increasingly moving towards 'right-wing' thinking! There is an increasing trend across the globe that people now detest 'globalisation', which was once touted as panacea for all human difficulties.

The latest thinking of people clearly exposes most of our political leaders' inability to update themselves to ground reality. How many leaders in India are aware that people are now thinking that immigrant workers are the reason behind their unemployment! They are supporting the leaders who

are propagating the 'divisional' theories. It may not be to your liking, but that exactly is what is happening at the ground level. And the political leaders who stopped learning anything after some time find it 'unruly' and 'undemocratic'. Wonder what is 'democratic', as the very word 'democracy' during its early days refused to extend voting rights to women? It is only after the First World War, that women suffrage could see the light in USA, the so-called heaven of democracy! As we are in the middle of an evolving democracy, there would be more changes, more surprises to political parties which refuse to 'unlearn' their old theories and 'relearn' the new dynamics that are influencing the present-day democracy.

When I wrote about changing perception of people and imminent fall of Chandrababu Naidu in 2003, after the Alipiri blast, everyone laughed at me. At that

time, Chandrababu was treated as equal to Bill Clinton and Bill Gates as both had visited Hyderabad and sat beside Naidu for photo-ops. My seniors in journalism cautioned me, saying that I must see the 'sympathy wave' born out of the Alipiri incident and picture of Naidu with a hand in sling. But Naidu bite the dust at the hustings in 2004 elections and could not win even in Hyderabad city which he claims to be his brainchild. Same thing was repeated in 2019, when Telugu Desam Party lost most of the seats in Amaravati capital region, despite the fact that his govt made the area as AP capital region and started building many structures. Political tapestry is vivid, complex, ruthless and everchanging. So, to stay afloat, all political leaders should be ready to update themselves.

— B Krishna Prasad

PRECIOUS METALS ON CLOUD NINE

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Amidst the hot and cold relationship between the US along with its allies including India on the one side and China on the other, all the precious metals have been on cloud nine since apart from overt investors, covert-ones too, have taken a big jump to grab the maximum of these metals.

Consequently, the markets witnessed a mad race among precious metals. New York gold broke the psychological barrier of US \$ 2,000 and finally closed at US \$ 2,034.80 (per ounce) while, silver followed suit and closed at \$ 28.32 (per ounce). Platinum and Palladium also marched forward and closed at \$ 960 (per ounce) and \$ 2,031 (per ounce) respectively.

Other economic parameters remained strong. Brent oil closed at US\$ 44.40 (per barrel), while Crude MCX oil was quoted at Rs.3,095 (per barrel). Gold MCX stood at Rs.54,789 (per 10 gms). The MCX Silver moved up and closed at Rs.74,160 (per kg). Copper marched ahead and closed at Rs.502.05 (per kg). Sensex and Nifty 50 closed at 38,040.57 and 11,214.05 points respectively, following the retreat by Indo-China forces on the borders. Leading foreign currencies' exchange rates were, US \$: Rs.75.04, British Pound: Rs.97.88, Euro: Rs.88.46, Singapore \$: Rs.82.21, Australian \$: Rs.53.70, Saudi Riyal: Rs.20.01, New Zealand Dollar: Rs.49.56, Kuwaiti Dinar: Rs.245.49, Omani Rial: Rs.194.94 and UAE Dirham: Rs.20.43, Japanese Yen: Rs.0.71, Hong

Kong Dollar: Rs.9.68.

At home, in the absence of genuine buyers, the market remained highly speculative. Both the precious metals zoomed to achieve dizzy heights during the historic week. Standard gold (24 carats) zoomed by Rs.3,310 and closed at Rs.59,140 (per 10 gms). Ornamental gold too moved in tandem, and was quoted in the range of Rs.54,110 – 54,210 on the closing day. Silver (0.999) too appreciated by Rs.11,500 and closed at Rs.76,500 (per kg). Considering the prevailing international scenario, the forward march of precious metals is likely to create new records in the near future.

COMMODITIES

The sentiment in principal wholesale commodity markets in the twin cities continued to remain strong. Rythu Bazar and the various commodity markets located in Begum Bazar, Kishangunj, Mukthiyarjunj, Risala Abdullah, Mir AlamMandi, Dilsukhnagar, Kukatpally, Bowenpally, General Bazar are slowly but steadily returning to normal business activities.

During the week, common pulses such as tur dal, masoor dal, moong dal and urad dal and commodities like chillies and garlic remained at moderate levels, while staple food-grains and common edible oils closed at their respective closing levels in the previous week. Common vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, ribbed gourd, snake gourd, lady's finger, cucumber, potatoes, onions, tomatoes and French beans along with other leafy vegetables recorded a further appreciation in the range of 20% to 38%.

Jagan reaffirms govt's resolve for tribal welfare

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has extended his greetings to the Adivasis on account of World Adivasi Day and reaffirmed the government's resolve for tribal welfare, while retaining their ethnicity.

The Chief Minister said that the distribution of RoFR patts to the tribals would take place on October 2 commemorating with Gandhi Jayanti. He also announced that the laying of foundation stone for a Tribal university, Girijan Medical Colleges and an Engineering College besides setting up of Super Specialty hospitals in tribal areas.

Taking to Twitter, he said, "The State is home to a diverse array of indigenous communities. We are proud of our tribal heritage and doing everything in our capacity to uplift and preserve their culture and ethnicity. The distribution of



● Taking to Twitter, he said, "The State is home to a diverse array of indigenous communities. We are proud of our tribal heritage and doing everything in our capacity to uplift and preserve their culture and ethnicity. The distribution of RoFR patts to tribals has been postponed to October 2 due to Covid-19."

RoFR patts to tribals has been postponed to October 2 due to Covid-19."

"On, Gandhi Jayanthi, we will also lay the foundation for a Tribal Engineering College at

● The Chief Minister said that the distribution of RoFR patts to the tribals would take place on October 2 commemorating with Gandhi Jayanti. He also announced that the laying of foundation stone for a Tribal university, Girijan Medical Colleges and an Engineering College besides setting up of Super Specialty hospitals in tribal areas

Kurupam, a medical college in Paderu and a Tribal University. Seven Super Specialty Hospitals under ITDA will also be inaugurated on the same day," he disclosed.

Naidu, Pawan express shock over death of Covid-19 patients

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan expressed shock over the fire accident at the Covid Care Centre at Swarna Palace Hotel here on Sunday where 10 people died and several others were injured.

There were 31 Covid patients and 10 hospital staff there at the time of the accident while a short circuit is believed to be the cause of the fire. Meanwhile, Naidu demanded that the injured be



given the best possible treatment and that compensation be given to the families of the deceased.

On the other hand, Pawan Kalyan said he was shocked to learn about the fire mishap at the Covid Care Centre. Those who come here for treatment of the Coronavirus are most saddened to be at

● Naidu demanded that the injured be given the best possible treatment and that compensation be given to the families of the deceased

● Pawan Kalyan directed the government to conduct a review on security measures at Covid Centres running in various hotels and buildings in the wake of the accident

risk in this way. He said he was praying for peace for the souls of the dead. He appealed to the government to provide better medical care to the injured.

743 TTD staff tested positive for Covid till date: EO

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

In all, 743 employees of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) tested positive for Covid-19 after the temple was opened for darshan to devotees following relaxation of lockdown norms.

TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singh, who interacted with devotees from across the country as part of 'Dial Your EO' programme, said that since the Tirumala temple opened for darshan to devotees on June 11, so far, 743 TTD employees tested positive for Corona and of them 402 have recovered and joined duties. Another 338 are undergoing treatment in TTD rest houses-turned-Covid Centres at Srinivasam, Vishnunivasam and Madhavam.

"Only three employees succumbed to the virus and we are giving best possible arrangements and treatment to all our employees in the Covid Centres," he said.

About 2.38 lakh pilgrims from different places across the country had darshan of Lord Venkateswara in July, said TTD Executive Officer.

Speaking to media persons



here on Sunday, after the monthly Dial your EO programme held at the Conference Hall in TTD administrative building in Tirupati, the Executive Officer disclosing the details said though there was a dip in the number of foot-falls to Tirumala due to increased cases across the country, from the past three days but the number of pilgrims picked up again. On August 8, 8,500 odd pilgrims had darshan against the quota of 9,000 tickets, he informed.

He said hundi collections stood at Rs 16.69 crore, while the e-Hundi Rs 3.97 crore during the last month. "In Padmavathi temple also we commenced e-Hundi recently and so far Rs 8.15 lakhs were received", he added.

Victims of fire mishap identified

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The District Administration released the names of those who lost their life in the fire accident in Vijayawada on Sunday.

Officials said that among the victims was Kosaraju Suvarnalatha (42) a housewife from Nidubrolu of Guntur district.

Dokka Siva Brahmaiah (59)

from Machilipatnam was admitted to the hospital after being confirmed Covid positive three days back.

Potluri Purnachandra Rao (80) was from Kodali village, Gantasala Mandal of Krishna district, while Sunkara Babu Rao (80) was a retired sub-inspector from Indiranagar, Ajitsingh Nagar, Vijayawada.

Majji Gopi (54) from

Machilipatnam of Krishna district, G Venkata Jayalakshmi (52) and Venkata Narsimha Pavan Kumar were from Kandakuru of Prakasam district. S Ratna Abraham (48) was from Jaggaiahpet, as was S Rajakumari while Maddali Raghu from Moghalrajapuram, Vijayawada.

Among the ten victims, three were women.

HC UPADHYAY ■ HYDERABAD

Some have unfurled the battle flags while others have undertaken the fire-fighting exercise following the apex court taking suo motu cognizance of the contemptuous tweets by the celebrated public-spirited advocate of the Supreme Court Prashant Bhusan. Surprisingly, this is not the solitary instance of the apex court hauling up an advocate for his contemptuous behaviour. Even in the past, several advocates, including a sitting judge of the High Court, have had the taste of the severe provisions of the Contempt of Courts Act, 1971. Some of them were reprimanded and let off, while other less fortunate ones had to pay through their nose heavy fines and even be the guests of the prison.

Obviously, not many eyebrows were raised at all these instances, then one wonders whether heavens have fallen all of the sudden now only after the initiation of contempt proceedings against Prashant Bhusan!

COURT AND CONTEMPT: STORM IN A TEA CUP!

If the Contempt of Courts Act is the main culprit, then nothing would have stopped the protagonists of freedom of expression and beholders of the rule of law to register their concern all these years since the passing of the said Act in 1971. Even if some small fries attempted their bit to voice their concern against the statute of contempt of courts, they did not receive any support from any elite quarters for the reasons unknown to them.

Now, a hue and cry has been raised against the so-called 'dreaded' provisions of the contempt law. In fact, Courts in India are so much lenient towards the contemnors that in the name of the freedom of expression under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, even the sworn enemies

of the country like Tukde-Tukde gang and jehadis go scot-free. Had it been in some other country, the judiciary would have taken to the task such people, including those who showed disrespect to its verdicts such as on the issue of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

Unfortunately, the elite lobby with obvious hidden agenda in order to weaken judiciary through brow-beating methods has been by and large emboldened by the soft and sympathetic attitude of the judiciary towards them. Otherwise, how dare the veteran lawyer Shanti Bhusan could file the impleading petition in the Supreme Court sermonising the apex court about the virtues, honesty, integrity and what not. He must be at least aware that the contempt proceedings are concerned only with the con-

In a unique case, the Madhya Pradesh High Court, while granting bail to a student accused, laid down the condition to perform 'digital detoxification' of himself by not using WhatsApp and Facebook for 2 months

temnor and the third party cannot implead in such proceedings. This is such a simple thing which even the fresher at the court knows very well. However, nobody can stop a father to go to the rescue of the son who is in the soup. Branding some of the former judges, including the Chief Justices of India, as 'corrupt' by Shanti Bhusan cannot be taken lightly and he should be made to clarify as to why he kept mum all these years even when he was the Law Minister of the country and a responsible senior advocate of the Supreme Court. Considering the prevailing

situation, wherein some vested interests are hell bent upon deriding the judicial system and insulting the coveted positions of judges, it is high time that about 50 years old law on contempt of court is revised and made more stringent against the contemnors. In particular, the maximum punishment of 6 months of imprisonment should be enhanced to at least 3 years for the first offence and 5 years for subsequent offences besides the fine of Rs.50,000/- for the first offence and Rs.1 lakh each for the subsequent offences without any exception. Indeed, 'unbridled' legal horses need to

be controlled effectively if the real rule of law has to prevail.

Can't barter land for job: TSHC

In a remarkable judgment delivered on August 4, Justice P.Naveen Rao of the Telangana High Court held that a contract between a Village Panchayat and a citizen to provide job to the latter against the land given/gifted to the Panchayat is illegal and null and void ab initio.

In a case on hand, the Court was dealing with the grievance of an employee of the Gram Panchayat who had secured the job against the donation/gift of his land to the Panchayat.

MP-HC orders digital detoxification

In a unique case, the Madhya Pradesh High Court, while granting bail to a student accused, laid down the condition to perform 'digital detoxification'

of himself by not using WhatsApp, Facebook or other social media for 2 months.

The bench, presided over by Justice Anand Pathak, directed Harendra Tyagi, a student of Agricultural Sciences, to complete his Pre Agriculture Test (PAT). The student was arrested on June 24 in connection with crimes u/s. 323, 294, 506/34, 327 and 329 of the IPC. The court also imposed a condition to plant five trees. Hope, the reformative mood of the High Court Judge would radiate to all other courts in the country.

Let accused choose between sureties and cash: HC

In a path-breaking judgment, the High Court of Himachal Pradesh has held that an accused cannot be compelled to provide sureties at the cost of his self pride. The court held that an accused is the "queen" and has the freedom to choose between

depositing cash or furnishing sureties for getting bail.

Justice Anoop Chitkara said that the lawyers have duty to appraise the accused of the existence of the provision of a cash deposit in Sec. 445 of Cr.P.C.

In the instant case, Abhishek Kumar Singh, accused of committing a white-collar crime, had at the time of hearing of the bail petition prayed the Court that in the event his bail petition was allowed, then he should be released on cash security instead of surety bonds because the accused does not know anyone who resides nearby and willing to stand as surety.

Accepting this contention, the court noted that the sole purpose of a bond is to ensure presence of accused to attend the trial. The purpose of a cash bond is not to enrich the State's coffers, but to secure the accused's presence, and added: "The right to life guaranteed by Article 21 of India's Constitution includes the right to live with dignity. Begging or prostrating before someone to stand as a surety, comes at the cost of pride."

BJP suspends 2 party leaders for their stand on 3 capitals

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

New president of BJP State unit Somu Veerajulu has placed a party member, who was former member of the TTD, OV Ramana, for having expressed his views in an editorial supporting the capital in Amaravati and criticising the three capitals policy of the government.

Similarly, he placed Velagapuri Gopalakrishna under suspension for having aired his views in favour of the capital in Amaravati. In a letter addressed to the BJP leader, action has been taken against him for having aired his views contrary to the BJP stand on the capital issue.

Meanwhile, the BJP stated officially that the Centre has no role to play on the capital issue. The party views were diamet-



rically opposite to the views expressed by the members.

Moreover, the BJP state unit president said that the allegation of the party leaders that the party is not pro-farmer is completely baseless.

Since the views expressed by some BJP leaders are likely to

cause damage to party image, he is forced to place the BJP leaders under suspension on orders from BJP national president. Moreover, many TV channels gave wide publicity to the wrong stand taken by the BJP leaders, Somu Veerajulu mentioned in the letter.

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Fire breaks out on ship

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Just a day after a boat caught fire off the Vizag shore, a minor fire broke out on a ship berthed at the Visakhapatnam port. According to VPT officials, smoke originated from West Q5 berth where the BD51 ship reached Vizag from Chennai on Saturday. The coastal ship is used to shift crew to cargo ships. The coastal ship is used to shift crew to cargo ships.

The staff observed smoke emanating from the ship cabin room and immediately alerted the port fire extinguishers, who swung into action to put off the smoke.

VPT Chairman K Rama Mohan Rao said that there's a possibility of a short circuit in the vessel.

"The smoke was detected and controlled immediately as the fire fighters stepped in to bring the situation under control. The



smoke originated from oil-soaked waste jute and cotton and boiler suits left for the crew.

However, there is no damage to the ship and the vessel is safe," assured the Chairman of the VPT.

According to the port officials, no casualty, or injury occurred to anyone during the incident.

■ Visakhapatnam Port Trust Chairman K Rama Mohan Rao said that there's a possibility of a short circuit in the vessel. "The smoke was detected and controlled immediately as the fire fighters stepped in to bring the situation under control.

97 deaths take toll past 2,000 mark in AP

Continued from Page 1

The current positivity rate is over 16 per cent over the past few days as the state has been reporting cases in excess of 10,000 per day in the last five days. "What we are witnessing is a peak curve. Our infection positivity rate was less than one per cent till May (during lockdown), which increased to 2.16 per cent in June and 12.33 per cent in July (post-lockdown).

Now it is about 16.24 per cent," Special Chief Secretary (Health) K S Jawahar Reddy pointed out. East Godavari and Kurnool districts continued to report new cases at an alarming rate while West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Anantapur and Guntur too are witnessing a high surge. In the last 24 hours, East Godavari reported 1,543, Kurnool 1,399, West Godavari 1,132 and Visakhapatnam 961 coronavirus cases.

10 patients die in fire...

Continued from Page 1

As the hotel is situated in the centre of the city, the news about the fire mishap spread swiftly and relatives of the patients rushed to the hospitals to know about the condition of their beloved.

Krishna District Fire Officer Sreenivasa Reddy said, "Around eight to 10 people are feared dead. There were 31 patients in total (at the centre). The rest have been rescued and sent to Ramesh Hospital. They were all Covid-19 patients admitted to the CCC run by Ramesh Hospital. There may be about 10 staff members."

"The fire alarm did not go off at the time of the accident and there was a delay in opening the rear door," he added.

All the victims were patients undergoing treatment there, according to Deputy CM (Health) Alla K. Krishna Srinivas. Fire Safety Director Jairam Naik said that the hotel violated safety rules and will face action as investigation has been initiated. The AP government announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 50 lakh each to the kin of the 10 victims.

PM Narendra Modi spoke to Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy over the phone and enquired about the incident. Jagan told Modi that a private hospital had taken the star hotel on lease to treat Covid-19 patients. The PM assured all possible help and support to the families of the victims, a release from the CMO said. State Home Minister M. Sucharitha said an electrical short circuit appeared to be the possible cause of the fire mishap in the wee hours of Sunday.

Kin of victims blame hospital, hotel

Continued from Page 1

Narayana Swamy said that his brother-in-law was treated for Covid in the hotel-turned CCC and later his sister and nephew too tested positive and were admitted in this hotel. "They even charged about Rs 2.5 lakh from my brother-in-law for treatment for a week and planned to charge the same amount for both my sister and nephew," he said.

Vizag sitting on powder keg: Pawan

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan has gone on record saying that there are 19,500 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in the Steel City and maintained that the city is sitting on powder keg.

In a statement here on Sunday, he exhorted the government to save the city from the threat of explosion due to ignition of ammonium nitrate.

The chemical substance has many uses. It is widely used in making fertilisers and also in blasting underground mines.

If the chemical is handled carefully, it is progressive. Otherwise, it will be highly destructive, he said apprehending danger to Visakhapatnam from the chemical a la the blast in Beirut that had claimed 158 lives.

The extent of mayhem created by the Lebanon blast is sending shivers down the people's spines, he said.

On account of a chemical reaction in ammonium nitrate stored in a godown, a huge blast was triggered claiming lives of over 158 and several buildings collapsed like a pack of cards. He quantified the ammonium nitrate stored in Visakhapatnam is eight times



more than the chemical that was stored in Lebanon.

The chemical is being imported into the country to meet the needs of the country only through Visakhapatnam port. The chemical is being imported from Russia. Annually, 2.7 lakh tonnes is being imported into the country through Vizag port. There are seven godowns here to store the hazardous chemical.

After the Beirut mishap, officials inspected the godowns and security measures and expressed satisfaction over the security at the godowns.

Of late, the city has witnessed many big and small

industrial accidents. When the chemical exploded in Beirut, the temperature was not 270 degrees Celsius. But, how the blast could be triggered there? Officials should think twice and explore scope for not having huge quantities of ammonium nitrate at one place.

He wanted the State and Central governments to think seriously to decentralise the godowns storing the hazardous chemical. Any complacency on the part of the government, could lead to a huge disaster. Quoting reports from the media, he said that at least 100 tonnes of ammonium nitrate has been stored in Kondapalli on the

■ Jana Sena chief seeks measures to save Vizag from ammonium nitrate blast threat

■ If the chemical is handled carefully, it is progressive. Otherwise, it will be highly destructive, Pawan said apprehending danger to Visakhapatnam from the chemical a la the blast in Beirut that had claimed 158 lives

outskirts of Vijayawada. It is not advisable to store the substance in the middle of the city and habitats. Environmentalists have been expressing anguish over the huge quantities of the chemical stored in the city habitats.

A retired IAS officer EAS Sarma said that storing the chemical close to shipyard, airport, ENC and the HPCL is not advisable, he said expressing concern over lack of proper monitoring near the godowns.

He appealed to the State and Central governments to take steps on a war-footing to protect Visakhapatnam, which is sitting on ammonium nitrate.

Cordial relations with Jagan but TS interests first: KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Industries KT Rama Rao has predicted huge investments will come to the state and a formal announcement in this regard will be made soon. Taking part in Ask KTR through twitter platform here on Sunday, KT Rama Rao made it clear that the State Government will fight for its rights in Krishna waters. The Government already filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court.

He noted that the State Government has cordial relations with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and as such the state government would not compromise in protecting interests of the state.

T-Fiber works will be completed within a year, he said.

The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the need for initiating several measures to update the medical and health sector in the state. The state government has initiated disciplinary action against two private hospitals for irregularities in Covid-19 treatment. He advised the people to



He appreciated the services being rendered by Gandhi Hospital personnel in treating Covid-19 patients

go to government hospitals for treatment of Covid-19 as the state government has provided all amenities for treatment of Covid in government hospitals.

He appreciated the services being rendered by Gandhi Hospital personnel in treating Covid-19 patients.

Currently, 23,000 samples are being tested to confirm the virus, he said adding that the number will soon increase to 40,000 per day.

Compared to the Ayushman Bharat Scheme of the Centre, the Arogyasri being implemented in Telangana is a better health scheme, he said.

He predicted that the maid-

en vaccine for Corona will be from the soil of Telangana. However, he is also happy if other countries will invent the vaccine first. The Centre's green signal is being awaited to resume the public transport, he said.

He refused to draw a parallel between Telangana and other states on number of tests being done in Telangana to diagnose Covid-19.

The state government will give additional incentives to industries that provide jobs to locals. The Telangana State Building Permission Approval and Self Certification System (TS-BPASS) will stand out as a bench march in urban reforms, he said.

Governor, Ministers express shock over mishap

Continued from Page 1

He expressed profound sympathy to their family members. The minister said that the medical and health department had already alerted the authorities and directed them to take action. Medical health officials have been directed to provide best possible medical care to the injured, Nani said.

The minister said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has ordered an inquiry into the incident and sought a detailed report. The Chief Minister had earlier announced ex-gratia of Rs 50 lakh to the families of each

of the deceased.

Vijayawada district in-charge minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy condoned the loss of lives of Covid-19 victims.

He spoke to district Collector A Md Imtiaz and directed officials to provide better treatment to the injured.

Ramachandra Reddy also directed the Municipal Commissioner to inspect all the security facilities at the Covid-19 treatment centres set up in private hotels across Vijayawada city.

The district in-charge minister also ordered a comprehensive investigation into the incident.

Careless smokers playing...

Continued from Page 1

The number could have gone high, but a good number of people were also saved during fire and rescue too. Moreover, the property

damage assessed every year amount to around Rs 200 crores in the last five years. Fire outbreak is the third biggest risk to business continuity and operations, according to India Risk Survey.

LAUNCH OF AGRI-INFRA FUND

Jagan congratulates Prime Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that this initiative will boost the agricultural economy by enabling farmers to add value to their products and get sustainable higher incomes, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Sunday congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching the Agri-Infra fund of Rs 1 lakh crore.

Taking to Twitter, the Chief Minister wrote "I congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji for launching the Agri infra fund Rs1 lakh-crore. This initiative will boost our agricultural economy by enabling farmers to add value to their produce and get sustainable higher incomes". The State government has initiated various welfare schemes to boost the agriculture sector for the benefit of the farmers.

In a statement, the State government reminded that it has established 10,641 Rythu Bharosa Centres (RBKs), a one-stop destination for farmers, where they can collect seeds and fertilisers for cultivation, sell their produce and can also seek expert advice on crop



cultivation. They will also facilitate in getting crop loans through the e-Crop facility and also help in getting crop insurance.

As promised during 3648 km Praja Sankalpa Yatra, the Chief Minister started a flagship programme, 'YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan Yojana' which provides financial assistance of Rs 13,500 each in three instalments to over 51 lakh farmers' families and three

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2,000 during Sankranti festival. During 2019-20, the government had spent Rs 8,750 crore towards YSR Rythu Bharosa scheme.

For the first of its kind, the State government took up an initiative to offer Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the farmers to prevent the losses. At times when the market price falls steeply, the State shall intervene and purchase the crops by paying MSP.

Earlier, the State government also laid proposals to strengthen the agricultural marketing sector with Rs 4,000 crore, by establishing cold storages and godowns in each mandal.

The Market Stabilisation Fund with Rs 3,000 crore has come in handy to buy perishable crops like tomatoes and bananas from farmers. When prices of onions have spiraled the State purchased at higher price and sold at nominal price through Rythu Bazaars.

The Fund is aimed at stabilising smart prices during fluctuations. Those are but some of the schemes of State to benefit farmers and the Chief Minister has earned the reputation of being farmer friendly.

Firefighters show their worth

Continued from Page 1

Sreenivasa Reddy said that it was only at the time of shifting the inmates to safety did the fire personnel realise that they were Covid patients. This was after they noticed the tags and bands to their hands. "Without any second thought we continued to save the survivors," said the fire officer.

Sreenivasa Reddy told The Pioneer that he along with A Sekhar, Asst District Fire Officer, K. Naresh, SFO Auto Nagar and Srinadh Reddy SFO Guntur were on the forefront in rescuing the inmates in the fire accident.

They could rescue 21 inmates in the CCC.

He said that neither the fire alarm nor the smoke alarm worked to alert the inmates during the fire mishap. There

were no stretchers available in the CCC and they had to shift the bodies on stretchers from the ambulances that reached the scene later.

Naresh said that during the present Covid pandemic the own kith and kin disown their loved ones and are treating them as untouchables. "We firefighters, without PPE kits or any protective measures, rescued the Covid patients discharging our duty and risking our life," he said.

Ramesh said that he was worried about the infection as he was due to return home and would meet his family.

Meanwhile, district collector A Md Imtiaz said that all the fire fighting crew involved in the rescue operation would be quarantined for a week as they came in direct contact with Covid positive patients.

Nani praises fire personnel for their alacrity, BRAVErY

Continued from Page 1

Fire crews arrived at the scene at around 5:13 am, and 18 people were rescued from the hotel due to timely action, the Minister said.

Nani said that preliminary investigation found that the carelessness and recklessness by the management of Ramesh Hospital was the main reason for the fire mishap. He promised strict action against those responsible for the accident.

Nani said a case was registered against the manage-

ments of both Hotel Swarna Palace and Ramesh Hospital, under Sections 304, 308 (read with Section 34 of IPC) and other relevant sections.

The Minister confirmed that 10 patients, including three women, died in the fire accident and said that there were 31 Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment in the temporary Covid Care Centre.

Ministers M. Sucharitha, Vellampalli Srinivas, Perni Nani and MP Mopidevi Ventakaramana accompanied Alla Nani during his visit.

Disinfectants acted as catalyst to fire

Continued from Page 1

CPM leader P Madhu is also of the view that the disinfectants might have helped to spread the fire. Fire emanating from the short-circuit area could have spread due to the sanitisers kept there. Even as the State Government has ordered a probe into the matter, 'prima facie' reports say the sanitisers acted as a catalyst.

Fire broke out in the ground and first floors of the hotel around 5 am and the fire services personnel and police received information at around 5.10 am. WHO has also now suggested regulation of the dispersal of disinfectants in urban areas, which they say is being done without input from the scientific community.

Over 70% of hospitals...

Continued from Page 1

In view of the Covid situation, the fire department had taken up a survey to inspect fire safety compliance and served notices to the erring hospitals.

They found that a majority of Covid designated hospitals were not adhering to the fire safety norms. Most of the hospitals in the city without prior permission from the health department are treating Covid patients.

"During last couple of days 50 hospital, including 10 dental hospitals, have obtained NOC and yet another 200 hospitals are yet to respond. We have submitted a report to the government seeking action against these hospitals," said regional fire officer Niranjan Reddy, who oversees hospitals with buildings below 15

meters in height.

He cautioned that the vulnerable institutions like hospitals, schools and function halls are taking advantage of the inadequate staff of the fire service department and continuing to violate the fire safety rules.

In the Vizag region, there are about 340 hospitals, including private and government hospitals. Of these, only 80 have fire NOC and over 250, including 20 government hospitals, have not, said Niranjan Reddy.

District Fire Officer B Ram Prakash said all the Covid designated hospitals including GITAM, VIMS, Apollo and Seven Hills have installed fire systems at the time of construction. "But they need to conduct mock drills and overhaul the system periodically," the DFO said.



PM condoles loss of lives...

Continued from Page 1

"Discussed the prevailing situation with AP CM @ysjagan Ji and assured all possible support," he said.

The PMO later tweeted that an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund would be given to the next of kin of those killed in the incident. The injured will be given a financial assistance of Rs 50,000, it said.

Venkaiah calls for ‘Knit India’ for a stronger, united nation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday called for an intensified campaign for “Knit India” to enable a strong and emotionally integrated nation.

To mark the 78th anniversary of the Quit India movement, Naidu wrote a Facebook post recounting the series of foreign invasions and the colonial exploitation during the long period of 1000-1947.



“Lack of sense of belonging to each other and unity of purpose and action had led to long subjugation and exploitation of India. Learning from this, all Indians need to be bound by the shared sense of Indianness while pursuing their respective cultural values and ethos,” Naidu said

During the second millennium, the country paid a very heavy price in the form of cultural subjugation and economic exploitation that enfeebled the once rich India, he said.

The vice president stressed that hard fought independence in 1947 was not just about ending the colonial rule of the preceding 200 years but also bringing down curtains on the 1000 year-long “dark age” during

which the country was plundered at will by invaders, traders and colonialists, who took advantage of the lack of unity among Indians.

“Lack of sense of belonging to each other and unity of purpose and action had led to long subjugation and exploitation of India. Learning from this, all Indians need to be bound by the shared sense of Indianness while

pursuing their respective cultural values and ethos,” Naidu said. He said a perception of divided India would make India an easy target for others for fishing in troubled waters. “A strong, unified and emotionally integrated India is the best defence against those casting an evil eye on us with questionable intentions,” the vice president said.

Naidu stressed on the need to

Knit India into one single fabric by ensuring equality of all and equal opportunities for all and noted that a divided and iniquitous society does not enable the fullest development of all Indians to their capacity.

Covid situation in Delhi under control: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said the COVID-19 situation in Delhi is under control and the recovery rate is improving.

Speaking at the inauguration of a hospital in Ambedkar Nagar, he said in case the situation takes a turn for the worse, the government is fully prepared to deal with it.

Delhi’s COVID-19 case count stood at 1,44,127 on Saturday, according to government data.



“The (COVID-19) situation is under control. All parameters are good, recovery rate is improving, positivity ratio and deaths have reduced,” Kejriwal said.

He said the inauguration of the hospital is a step towards strengthening the health infrastructure in the city.

“We have gradually increased the number of

COVID-19 beds,” he added.

“The hospital was conceived in 2013. It is a 600-bed hospital. We are inaugurating the first 200 beds which will be used for the treatment of COVID-19 patients,” Kejriwal said at the launch event.

“I pray to God that these 200 beds are not needed in the future... we never get to a situation where we have to use these beds. But even if the situation

becomes bad again, we are fully prepared to deal with it,” he said.

“This hospital was scheduled to begin operations after a few months, but it has been inaugurated today. I want to thank and congratulate engineers, doctors, and all the people for their efforts in making this 200-bed hospital available for the people of Delhi,” he said.

SHORT READS



‘PM Kisan scheme benefited 52.5 lakh farmers in Karnataka’

BENGALURU: Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Sunday said the PM Kisan Scheme has benefited 52.5 lakh farmers in the state and that the first instalment of Rs 1,049 crore will be credited into their accounts. As the Prime Minister unveiled a special package of Rs one lakh crore for farmers today, Yediyurappa tweeted, “PM @narendramodi Govt believes India’s future lies in the welfare of its farmers. Thanks to @PMOIndia for #PMKISAN Scheme which has benefited over 52.50 lakh farmers in Karnataka, the first installment Rs 1,049 crore will now be credited into their accounts.” State Agriculture Minister B C Patil too thanked Modi for selecting Karnataka for launching the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund of Rs one lakh crore and releasing Rs 17,000 crore under PM Kisan scheme.

Kerala CM denies discrimination in providing compensation

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has dismissed the Opposition allegation that there was discrimination in providing compensation to victims of Rajamala landslide and the victims of aircraft crash at Karipur.



The solatium announced for landslide victims was an interim one and the state government will “hold together” those who have lost everything, Vijayan said at a press meet on Saturday.

Vijayan said since the rescue operations were still on for missing persons in the landslide in high range Idukki district and the government was yet to make a final assessment of the loss incurred.

“At Rajamala, we have declared the initial financial assistance. There the rescue operations are not over yet.

We need to hold them together as we have the responsibility of taking care of those who lost everything. We also need to ensure their livelihood and rebuild their lives,” Vijayan had said in the press meet. The opposition Congress and other parties had alleged discrimination in providing compensation to the victims of two tragedies which happened within hours of each other.

Delhi zoo undertakes enrichment campaign

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi zoo has undertaken an enrichment campaign to provide its animals conditions similar to their natural habitats and improve their physical and mental health.



The exercise aims at stimulating curiosity among animals, and encouraging natural behaviour, as in the wild, an official said.

One of the enrichment techniques is cognitive enrichment. As part of this technique, animals are required to solve a problem to obtain food.

For bears, a bamboo puzzle feeder has been prepared. The animal is encouraged to climb up and explore the sections of bamboo filled with honey and bananas, the official said.

“Another way is habitat enrichment. In this, the habitat is made more dynamic, and full of fun. For example, a tire swing has been hung from a tree for monkeys. A rope ladder

has been placed for lion-tailed macaques. Perches are created for animals to climb and sit on. They love it,” he said. Food enrichment involves new food and different ways for animals to get it. This is done so that the animal does not get bored of eating the same food and indulges in activity.

“For example, the food is put inside a cardboard box for lions. The animal has to find it and work for it. In the case

of monkeys, food items are hidden in leaves in a corner of the enclosure or in a box full of straw. This makes the animal more active and alive to the surrounding environment,” the official said.

Social animals are grouped or housed in the same enclosure for social enrichment.

“For instance, we have paired lion Sundaram and lioness Hema, and leopards Bunt and Bubby, and Tajas and Bunt,” the official said.

Cong observes 78th ‘Quit India’ anniversary, pay tributes to Gandhi

PNS ■ JAMMU

The Jammu and Kashmir unit of Congress on Sunday celebrated the 78th anniversary of historic “August Kranti Divas” with its leaders paying floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi from their residences, the party said.



J & K Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) chief spokesperson Ravinder Sharma said the party leaders decided to celebrate the anniversary of historic ‘Quit India Day’ by offering floral tributes to the Father of the nation from their respective homes after the administration denied permission to hold symbolic functions at party headquarters

in Jammu and Srinagar.

“We did not receive the requisite permission for a limited presence due to Coronavirus-driven lockdown to mark the day symbolically at party headquarters. Therefore, all the leaders decided to celebrate the day at their respective residences and the spirit of freedom struggle was remembered,” he said.

Accusing the government of not honouring the historic day and denying the party permission to hold the symbolic functions, he said it was the Congress which led the freedom movement and spearheaded the Quit India movement against all odds.

BJP ridden with factionalism: Gehlot

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday questioned the shifting of BJP MLAs to Gujarat, saying the opposition party was ridden with factionalism.



His comments came in the wake of the BJP herding its 18 MLAs in the past two days to party-ruled Gujarat ahead of the Rajasthan assembly session beginning August 14.

The BJP had claimed that their MLAs were being harassed by police and the administration at the behest of the Congress government in the state. Gehlot, on the other hand, defended the stay of Congress legislators at a Jaisalmer hotel, saying the party required to keep them

together to thwart horse-trading. “But, what is worrying the BJP? They are herding their legislators to three-four places. I see a big split in them,” Gehlot told reporters in Jaisalmer.

Lashing out at the opposition party, Gehlot said the “tradition they are setting up is

dangerous to democracy”. He said while BJP is trying to topple his government, the government is making efforts to save lives amid the coronavirus crisis. Unfortunately, such people sitting in power are weakening democracy, which we saved for the past 70 years, Gehlot said. He added that their fight to save democracy will continue even after August 14 and the truth will prevail. “I can say this that the victory will be ours, truth will win,” he said, stressing that his “government will complete its five-year term”.

Gehlot on Sunday also urged all Rajasthan MLAs, urging them to listen to the voice of people to save democracy and stand with the truth in the interest of people of the state.

Six Raj BJP MLAs holed up in Guj leave

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Six BJP MLAs from Rajasthan who had arrived in Gujarat ahead of the crucial Assembly session in that state starting on August 14 left for an undisclosed location. The Congress government in Rajasthan under CM Ashok Gehlot is in strife after Deputy CM Sachin Pilot rebelled and was sacked from the post. The six BJP MLAs had reached Somnath from Porbandar on Saturday evening, with one of them telling reporters that the Congress government in Rajasthan was “harassing” opposition MLAs, and that they had come on a pilgrimage to Somnath to seek mental peace.

Defence Minister promised a ‘bang’, ended with a ‘whimper’: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday played down Defence Minister Rajnath Singh’s announcement on the import embargo on defence equipment, saying it was only “high sounding jargon” and that ‘atmanirbhar bharat’ was merely a slogan.

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi also criticised Singh for dubbing the import restrictions as a push to achieve a self-reliant India, saying there was a “big difference between claims and reality.”



“The prime minister has given the slogan of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’, but has not said when, how and what will be the direction. Just a slo-

gan has been given because this government and the prime minister are fond of slogans,” Singhvi said at an online media briefing.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the defence minister promised a “bang” on a Sunday morning but ended with a “whimper”.

“The only importer of defence equipment is the Defence Ministry. Any import embargo is really an embargo on oneself,” the former home minister said.

What the defence minister said in his “historic Sunday announcement” deserved only an office order from the minister to his secretaries, Chidambaram said in a series of tweets.

“Import embargo is high sounding jargon. What it means is we will try to make the same equipment (that we import today) in 2 to 4 years and stop imports thereafter!” he said. Singhvi, in response to a question, said the defence minister’s statement was both “funny as well as unfortunate”.

Over 27,000 litres of chemicals containing spirit seized in Punjab

CHANDIGARH: The Punjab excise department said it has seized 27,600 litres of chemicals containing spirit during raids carried out at three factories in Mohali and arrested four people. This comes days after 121 people died in the state’s Tarn Taran district due to consumption of spurious liquor. A total of 138 drums of 200 litres each containing chemicals were seized during the raids which were carried out in Mohali’s Dera Bassi area on Saturday. Four people have been arrested in this matter. The department said it has sought help from experts from the Forensic Laboratory to identify the chemicals.

Maoist hideout busted, cartridges seized after gunfight in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Security forces busted a camp of the CPI (Maoist) and seized a large number of cartridges after an exchange of fire with cadres of the banned outfit in Odisha’s Bargarh district, police said on Sunday. The gun-battle took place in Gandhamardan reserve forest in Paikmal police station area on Saturday and it lasted for around 30 minutes, a police officer said.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of CRPF and police personnel launched a combing operation during which they noticed the movement of around 10-15 armed Maoists. The rebels started indiscriminate firing on spotting the security personnel, Bargarh Superintendent of Police Padmini Sahoo said.

The security personnel took defensive positions and appealed to the Maoists to stop firing and surrender, to which they shouted “Lal Salaam Zindabad”, she said.

Historians, architects express concern over new Bihar heritage commission

PNS ■ PATNA

Historians, preservationists and scholars have expressed “deep concern” over the newly-constituted Bihar heritage commission, alleging that the panel has “no representation” from conservation architects and other independent domain experts.

The Bihar government, however, has said that the panel has been set up as per the norms under the Bihar Urban Planning and Development Rules, 2014.

The Bihar Urban Arts and Heritage Commission has been recently set up by the state government, after a plea by heritage organisation INTACH in the Patna High Court.

The state government, in its additional response to the two PILs filed in August 2019, has said that in the light of the directions of the court, the “commission has been constituted with a notification dated March 30” this year “under the provision of the rule 85 of the Bihar Urban Planning and



Development Rules, 2014”.

The seven-member panel is headed by the principal secretary, Department of Art, Culture and Youth of the Bihar government, with other members represented from the Department of Urban Development and Housing, Building Construction Department, Tourism Department, and the state’s Directorate of Archaeology, among others, according to the additional response filed by it.

Historians, conservation architects, scholars, preservationists and other domain

experts have taken strong exception to “no external members being made part of the heritage commission” with many alleging that it reduces the panel to a mere “rubber stamp of the state government”.

They pitched for including eminent people and independent experts from various fields related to art, history, architecture and urban planning in the new commission.

Noted historian and author Surendra Gopal, who has been advocating for long for a heritage conservation policy in

The Bihar Urban Arts and Heritage Commission has been recently set up by the state government, after a plea by heritage organisation INTACH in the Patna High Court

Bihar and pitched for preservation of the centuries-old Patna Collectorate, said, “The government wants to change the face of Patna, and historical buildings are being erased year after year in the name of development.”

The 84-year-old author of ‘Patna in the 19th Century’ urged the government to include historians and architectural history scholars also in the heritage commission, saying “a few government members cannot decide the fate of built heritage” of Patna and rest of Bihar.

Delhi Police personnel taking part in I-Day guard of honour quarantined

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 350 Delhi Police personnel who will be part of the guard of honour at Red Fort on Independence Day have been quarantined as a precautionary measure, officials said on Sunday.

These personnel of the force of all ranks — from a constable to Deputy Commissioner of Police — have been quarantined at a newly built police colony in Delhi Cantonment, they said.

Special Commissioner of Police (Armed Police) Robin Hibb, who is in charge of the arrangements, said the 350 personnel are doing well and none of them has any COVID-19 symptoms.

But they have been quarantined as a precautionary measure to ensure theirs as well as everyone else’s safety, he said.

“All personnel who are currently in quarantine at the police colony here for over a week now have been provided with all facilities and are strictly following social distancing norms.



"All personnel who are currently in quarantine at the police colony here for over a week now have been provided with all facilities and are strictly following social distancing norms"

“After their parade rehearsals, they immediately sanitise themselves. All precautions are being taken,” another senior police officer said.

He said that usually least 40 police personnel are ferried in a vehicle to parade rehearsals.

But this year, owing to COVID-19, only 20 personnel are being ferried in a sanitised

vehicle with strict adherence to social distancing norms, the official said.

More than 2,500 Delhi police personnel have been infected with COVID-19 so far. A majority of them already recovered and resumed their duties, according to the police. Fourteen Delhi police personnel have died due to the viral infection.

SHORT READS



Kiran Bedi: People's representatives must follow Covid norms

PUDUCHERRY: Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Kiran Bedi on Sunday said political leaders and people's representatives should follow norms for safety from COVID-19 and set an example to the public. She said there were photographs and reports in the media that some of the people's representatives were seen violating the guidelines introduced to fight the pandemic. "There are umpteen pictures daily in the media showing social distancing being violated by people's representatives themselves and this is despite being few of them having tested positive for the virus," she said. In her whatsapp message, Bedi said unless political leadership shows respect for whatever they want the public to do, the war against COVID-19 would be a case of taking two steps forward and three steps backwards.

Actor Natasha Suri tests positive for Covid

MUMBAI: Actor and former Miss India World Natasha Suri on Sunday said she has tested positive for COVID-19 and is currently quarantining at her home. Suri, 31, said she had gone to Pune earlier this month and fell sick on her return to Mumbai. "I had gone to Pune taking all the necessary precautions. When I came back, on August 3, I fell sick. I had fever, sore throat so I got myself tested and it turned out COVID-19 positive," the actor said. Suri, who made her big screen debut with the 2016 Malayalam comedy "King Liar", said her sister and grandmother have also been tested. "My family members also started feeling sick so I am strictly quarantining at home, taking medications. They have also undergone tests, their reports are awaited," she said.

12 Naxals surrender in C'garh, 5 of them carrying cash rewards

RAIPUR: Twelve Naxals, five of them collectively carrying a reward of Rs 6 lakh on their heads, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Sunday, police said. The cadres turned themselves in before police and the CRPF officials in Dantewada town saying that they were impressed by the rehabilitation campaign being run by the local police and disappointed with the hollow Maoist ideology, Dantewada Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said. Dantewada MLA Devti Karma was also present on the occasion, he said. Of these ultras, Chanduram Sethiya, who was active as a member of platoon no. 26 of Maoists, was allegedly involved in three Naxal attacks, including in Bhusaras-Chingavarm in 2008, wherein 23 policemen and two civilians were killed, he said. Sethiya was carrying a reward of Rs 2 lakh on his head, Pallava said.

INDUS WATER TREATY MEETING

India suggests video-conf, Pakistan insists on meeting on Wagah border

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has suggested to Pakistan that the talks for discussing pending issues under the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) be held through video-conferencing in view of the coronavirus pandemic, but Islamabad has been insisting that the parleys be conducted at the Attari check post, sources said on Sunday. In a letter last week, the Indus Commissioner of India told his Pakistani counterpart that it is not conducive to hold the meeting at the Attari Joint Check Post due to the pandemic. On Pakistan's request, a meeting was scheduled in last week of March to discuss pending issues under the Indus Water Treaty. However, it was deferred due to current pan-

Record 7 lakh Covid tests conducted in a day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Scaling up testing capacity, over seven lakh samples have been examined for COVID-19 in a day taking the cumulative tests conducted so far to 2,41,06,535, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday. The number of recoveries too has surged to 14,80,884 with 53,879 coronavirus patients having recuperated and discharged in 24-hours, the highest in a day so far, pushing the recovery rate to 68.78 per cent. The fatality rate has further dropped to 2.01 per cent, it said.

The ministry said the number of single-day tests has been growing exponentially and India has been testing over six lakh samples daily for several days. "A record 7,19,364 samples have been tested on Saturday, the highest in a day so far. India is conducting around 500 tests for detection of COVID-19 per minute and



the per-day testing capacity has increased over five lakhs," Scientist and media coordinator at ICMR, Dr Lokesh Sharma said. Such elevated level of testing will also lead to high number of daily positive cases, the health ministry said, adding states have been advised to firmly focus on comprehensive tracking, prompt isolation and effective treatment, following the Centre-led strategy of 'test, track and treat'. The number

of recoveries has surged to 14,80,884 with 53,879 coronavirus patients having recuperated and discharged in 24-hours, the highest in a day so far, pushing the recovery rate to 68.78 per cent. The fatality rate has further dropped to 2.01 per cent, the ministry said. "The number of recovered cases has touched another high of 2.36 times the active cases. All patients are all under medical attention either in home

The number of recoveries too has surged to 14,80,884 with 53,879 corona virus patients having recuperated and discharged in 24-hours

isolation or in hospitals," the ministry said. From 7.69 per cent on April 5, the recovery rate improved to 26.59 per cent on May 3, 48.37 per cent on June 7 and to 68.78 per cent as on date, it said. "The widening gap between recovered and active cases, indicative of the higher number of recoveries as compared to those either in hospitals or in home isolation, is 8,52,137 at present," the ministry said.

PM releases Rs 17,000 cr to 8.5 cr farmers under PM-KISAN scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday transferred Rs 17,000 crore directly into the bank accounts of 8.5 crore farmers under the PM-KISAN scheme. He said the scheme has been successful in its objective to provide financial support to farmers without any involvement of middlemen. The Centre provides Rs 6,000 per year in three equal instalments under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme that was launched in December 2018. The prime minister "released the 6th installment under the PM-KISAN scheme of Rs 17,000 crore to nearly 8.5 crore farmers. The cash benefit was transferred directly to



their Aadhaar verified bank accounts with the press of a button", an official statement said. The amount was transferred to farmers at a function organised through video conference to launch financial facility of Rs 1 lakh crore under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund. "No middlemen, no commission. The amount was transferred directly to farmers," Modi said.

Congress must find full-term president, says Tharoor

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress must expedite the process of finding a full-term president to arrest the growing public perception that the party is "adrift and rudderless", senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said on Sunday. Tharoor also said that he certainly thinks Rahul Gandhi has the "mettle, capability and aptitude to once again lead the party", but if he does not wish to do so then the party must "take action" to elect a new chief. His comments assume significance as they come just ahead of Sonia Gandhi completing one year as interim chief on August 10, with the party yet to find her successor. "I certainly believe we should be clear about our leadership going forward. I welcomed Sonia ji's appoint-

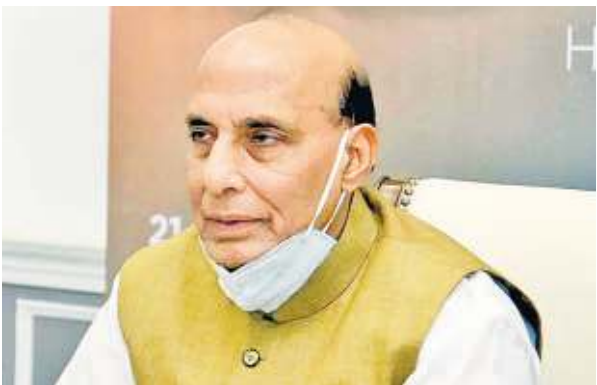


ment as interim president last year, but I do believe it's unfair to her to expect her to carry this burden indefinitely," Tharoor said. "We also need to arrest the growing public perception, fuelled by a dismissive media, that the Congress is adrift and rudderless, incapable of taking up the challenge of a credible national Opposition," the former Union minister said.

Modi to present new outline for self-reliant India on August 15

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will present a new outline for a self-reliant India in his address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday. The defence minister said various departments and ministries of the government are working seriously to implement Modi's initiative for a self-reliant India and that it is an attempt to give a fresh dimension to Mahatma Gandhi's push for 'Swadeshi'. Singh was speaking at an online event organised to pay tributes to revolutionary freedom fighter Udhham Singh. Talking about the 'Atmanirbhar' initiative, the defence minister said that the coronavirus pandemic has shown that a country may not be able to effectively protect its sovereignty if it is not self-reliant. "Our government will not allow any harm to India's self



respect and sovereignty at any cost," he said. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will present before the nation a new outline for a self-reliant India in his address from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the Independence Day," Singh said. Referring to the defence ministry's decision to ban import of 101 military weapons and platforms, Singh said major and tough decisions are being taken to promote self-reliance in defence pro-

duction. He said big weapons systems will now be produced in India and the country will look for their export to make it a hub for defence manufacturing. In a major push to promote the domestic defence industry, Singh on Sunday morning announced restrictions on import of 101 weapons and military platforms including light combat helicopters, transport aircraft, conventional submarines and cruise missiles by 2024.

Agri Infra Fund to benefit farmers, create jobs, develop rural economy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching a Rs 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund and said it will generate new employment opportunities and strengthen the rural economy. In a series of tweets in Hindi, Shah said agriculture is the foundation of the Indian economy and the Modi government has been striving to strengthen it for the last six years. Shah said many unprecedented steps have been taken to double the income of farmers and for the development of the agriculture sector. "I am confident that due to the untiring efforts of PM Narendra Modi, Indian agri-



culture will become world class in the times to come," he said. The home minister said the agriculture infrastructure fund will accelerate creation of many infrastructure projects such as cold storage, collection centres, processing units so that the hardworking farmers can get the true value for their produce.

Patna's R-Block flyover opens for traffic after inauguration by Nitish

PNS ■ PATNA

The R-Block flyover in Patna opened for traffic on Sunday after its inauguration by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. The 960-metre-long flyover in the heart of the city was built for Rs 106 crore in five years, officials said. The R-Block flyover connects Hardinge Road with Veerchand Patel Path and Mithapur flyover and it will reduce traffic near the state Legislative Assembly, they said. The R-Block-Digha Road will be connected with the new flyover near the GPO, Additional Chief Secretary of Road Construction Department, Amrit Lal Meena, was quoted as saying in a release.



Commuters will be able to access the Digha Bridge and the Ganga Path via the new flyover once it's linked with the R-Block-Digha Road, he said. Ganga Path is a 20.5-km-long driveway being built along the river to connect Digha Patna to Didarganj. The chief minister asked the officials to connect the R-Block-Digha Road with the new flyover through an elevated road, the release said.

ED grills Rhea Chakraborty's brother overnight in money laundering case; calls her again today

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) questioned Showik Chakraborty, brother of actor Rhea Chakraborty, for about 18 hours in connection with a money laundering case linked to the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput, officials said on Sunday. Showik left the central investigative agency's office here in the Ballard Estate area around 6:30 AM after an overnight questioning session that began around noon on Saturday. Officials said Showik's statement was recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and he was asked about his personal businesses, income, investments and financial dealings with his sister and Rajput. He was grilled by the agency

for a few hours on August 7 as well. On the same day, his sister and prime accused in the case Rhea (28) was questioned by the agency for the first time for about eight hours. Rhea and her father Indrajit Chakraborty have been summoned to appear before the agency again on Monday. On Friday, the ED had questioned Indrajit, Rhea's chartered accountant (CA) Ritesh Shah and business manager Shruti Modi, who also worked for Rajput. The agency is understood to have questioned Rhea, who stated in her petition to the court that she was in a live-in relationship with Rajput, about her friendship with the late actor, business dealings and the developments that took place over the last few years between them. The ED's line of questioning, officials said, is revolv-



ing around Rhea's income, investments, business and professional deals, and links. Also under the ED's scanner is a property located in the city's Khar area and another in Navi Mumbai, both linked to Rhea, for the source of purchase and ownership.

Politicisation of Sushant case a conspiracy against Maha: Raut

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed "pressure tactics" were being used in the case of actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death and the issue was being politicised as part of a conspiracy against Maharashtra. It is wrong to see the unfortunate suicide of the actor from a political angle, Raut said in his weekly column 'Rokhthok' in the party mouthpiece 'Saamana'. Rajput, 34, was found hanging at his apartment in suburban Bandra on June 14.



The CBI recently took over the probe in the case, based on a Patna police FIR related to alleged criminal conspiracy and abetment to suicide against Rajput's girlfriend and actor Rhea Chakraborty.

Shekhawat slams Gehlot over deaths of 11 migrants from Pak

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Sunday slammed the Rajasthan government over deaths of 11 members of a Hindu migrant family from Pakistan, saying the incident reflects the "working style" of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Eleven members of a Hindu migrant family from Pakistan and belonging to the Bhil community were found dead at a farm in Rajasthan's Jodhpur district on Sunday. "The deaths of nearly a dozen refugees from Pakistan put a question mark on @ashokgehlots working style. "The deceased include two men, four women and five children. One after other, very frightening incidents reflecting the deteriorating situation of the state, are coming to the fore.



The government should swing into action and clear the picture, Shekhawat tweeted. One member of the migrant family, however, was found alive outside the hut they lived at Lodta village of Dechu area, an official said in Jodhpur. "But he claimed to have no idea about the incident, which believed to have happened in the

"The deceased include two men, four women and five children. One after other, very frightening incidents reflecting the deteriorating situation of the state, are coming to the fore. The government should swing into action and clear the picture," Shekhawat tweeted

night," said Jodhpur's Superintendent of Police (Rural) Rahul Barhat. "We are yet to ascertain the cause and means of death. But apparently, all the members appeared to have committed suicide by consuming some chemical in the night," Barhat said.

PAPER WITH PASSION

Tragedy in Kozhikode

The crash of an Air India Express Boeing 737 at Kozhikode is an unfortunate disaster but could it have been avoided?



Indian air crash investigators examining the wreckage of Air India Express flight 1344, a Vande Bharat Mission flight from Dubai to Kozhikode, are likely to have witnessed similar scenes just a few short years ago. Another Air India Express Boeing 737-800 overran a runway at Mangalore airport, just a few hundred kilometres north of the current site. Thankfully, while that crash saw few survivors, it appears that, at the time of writing, a large majority of the passengers on board this plane survived the slide down the end of the runway.

This is probably because the pilot turned off the engine to avert fire. Investigators will have several tools at their disposal from weather reports, radar displays and even the plane's own Cockpit Voice Recorder and Flight Data Recorder. However, the similarities between the two accidents bring to mind the risks of operating at such "tabletop" airports. Both Kozhikode and Mangalore airports are carved into the Western Ghats, leaving pilots little room for error. The information available at this time has revealed that the pilot had already made one missed approach to the airport. Landing in the monsoon in India, when runways are wet, is always a risk and runway "excursions" are common due to the lower braking action available on the slippery tarmac, as any motorist on the roads would be quite aware of. While Kozhikode airport's runway was clearly long enough at 9,000 feet for a Boeing 737 to land safely in most conditions, the distance needed for a landing in extremely wet conditions with a tailwind might have been an ask too far for the aircraft. And unlike Cochin airport, a hundred or so kilometres to the south, this one, by its very layout on the top of a plateau, had little runoff area and no soft concrete surface at the end of a runway for planes to sink into. Now that the crash has happened, every oversight and lapse is being called into account. As it turns out, civil aviation experts had warned of the airport's risk factors about nine years ago. In a letter sent on June 17, 2011, to the then director-general of civil aviation, Capt Mohan Ranganathan wrote, "An aircraft landing on runway 10 in tailwind will experience poor braking action due to heavy rubber deposits ... All such flights ... are endangering the lives of all on board." While no accident happened until now, the report got buried. Even now the Government has claimed that hundreds of flights have landed there in the recent past, overlooking the need to reassess the lay of the land.

There are six tabletop runways in India where landing flights is somewhat difficult as there is no additional space on the runway. Since there are many issues pertaining to safety of aircraft, crew and passengers, many international flights and Airbus A330 and Boeing 777 do not land at these airports. The Kozhikode airport's runway end safety area was expanded in 2018 to accommodate wide-body aircraft. Though it meets United Nations international civil aviation requirements, the agency recommends a buffer that is 150 metres longer than what exists at Kozhikode airport. Some reports also suggest a laxity about routine tests. Apparently no friction test was done at the airport, as is mandatory on runways and taxiways, especially those affected by rains. Flying in India has been incredibly safe over the past decade even as air traffic has exploded with hundreds of new aircraft and millions of first-time passengers. But air travel, while being inherently safe, does have an ability to shock us when something goes wrong. One expects this accident to be thoroughly investigated and faults if any to be rectified, even if that means closing down of certain airports in India or restricting large jet aircraft from flying there. Ranganathan has flagged Patna and Jammu airports as accident-prone and sitting ducks that need immediate upgrades. Aviation is a vitally important transportation option in a country as large as India where millions make their living outside Indian shores. The safety and security of this industry is not only of paramount importance but also a strategic necessity for this nation.

Breaking stereotypes

UPSC toppers come from fairly modest backgrounds and have shown how the ordinary can manage extraordinary feats



The recently published results of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) civil services examination, 2019, have thrown up some powerful stories of triumph, surpassing gender, caste, economic and religious barriers. Stories of grit and inspiration abound as most candidates who have made the cut have done so under challenging circumstances and modest means. While some never gave up despite repeated failures, there are others who had to overcome physical as well as family limitations to prove that courage is the only

mark of success. The topper, Pradeep Singh, though already an IRS officer, is the son of a farmer from Sonipat. Surprisingly, Jatin Kishore and Pratibha Verma, too, not satisfied with their earlier results, reappeared for the exams and have now become the second and third rankers and the top scorers among women. Overall there are three women candidates in the top 10 list. But setting a new record are 12 candidates from Jammu and Kashmir, including Nadia Beig, the youngest officer from Kupwara, at a time when young people in the blacked out State are suffering on account of lost opportunities. In yet another example of perseverance, a son of a petrol pump worker from Madhya Pradesh has bagged the 26th position. Neither financial struggles nor a missed opportunity last year, when he failed to make it to the list by just one slot, could deter this young officer. Aishwarya Sheoran, who bagged the 93rd position, has become a classic example of beauty with brains. A former Miss India finalist, she has broken the stereotype that models aren't smart enough by clearing the exams in her first attempt. A former child actor, too, is an inspiration for he is a COVID warrior and is ready to become an officer. And Purana Sunthari, a 25-year-old visually impaired woman from Madurai, has proved just how no vision can be out of sight.

Caste and gender barriers continue to be broken. Of the total qualified candidates, 304 belong to the general category and 78 from the reserved (SC, ST and OBC) quotas. The gap is still wide but there is some progress. Women have pushed their way creditably into the top 10 list but overall, the number of women joining the services is still less than 25 per cent, according to Government data. This year, it is 23.7 per cent women, an improvement on the 2018 figures. The biggest takeaway is that the young and hard-working achievers have broken many myths surrounding one of the toughest examinations in the country — that it is meant for the intelligent, those who have excellent academic records, that it is easier for those from engineering and medical fields to clear the exams, that one needs to devote more than 16 hours of the day to do so and that one needs to spend money and time on coaching classes. Yet everybody on the toppers' list this year is a regular youngster. Each has been high on motivation, effort and focus. The mindset has won in the end.



Unending Ladakh story

The Modi Govt is in a fix today, not because of the negligence of previous regimes but because of its own deliberate neglect of the military. We have failed to learn lessons



DEEPAK SINHA

An interesting anecdote doing the rounds among military veterans' groups on social media pertains to an incident just after the 1971 war. A young officer performing duties of the Regimental Adjutant, the principal staff officer to the Commanding Officer, was approached by an extremely engaging and popular ex-serviceman — who was employed by a well-known corporate — for an authority letter to continue drawing canteen stores from his unit. This was a common occurrence in those times when smart cards were yet to make an appearance. However, on a hunch, the officer decided to obtain verification of his antecedent prior to signing the certificate from the office that maintained departmental records.

Surprisingly, it turned out that the individual was a deserter from the Army and had absconded from his unit during the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 while his unit was deployed in the combat zone. On receipt of this information, as was expected, the ex-soldier was apprehended and questioned. He accepted his guilt and explained that after his unit was overrun by the Chinese, he successfully evaded them and escaped to Bhutan where he got himself a job. One thing led to another and he settled into civilian life and never rejoined the Army. As is customary, he was brought before a court-martial; was found guilty and sent off to serve time in jail. However, the commanding officer being a kindly soul and displaying immense empathy for the convict, convinced his company to retain him on the rolls, while also arranging to look after his family till he had served his sentence. Thus, on his return, the former soldier not only got his job back but was also able to finally shed his sense of guilt and apprehension that had haunted him all those years.

This is a simple straightforward tale of being held to account for one's misdeeds, which fortuitously ended well for the soldier and his family, despite all the trials and tribulations that he must have faced. A contrarian view would suggest that in all likelihood, he had probably been traumatised by his world collapsing around him when his unit disintegrated in battle, leaving him to fend for himself. Given his experience and mental state — where there was no sufficient ground for mitigation — should he not have been absolved of all wrongdoing? Of course, while this question may draw differing conclusions, depending on one's point of view and interpretation of the law, what cannot be disputed is that he was guilty of fraudulently attempting to obtain benefits authorised only to military veterans. He deserved to be held to account. Ironically, the account does not make clear whether the latter aspect was glossed over or even considered.

But here is the thing that the young soldier was undoubtedly an insignificant cog in that vast military machine and yet, he was held to account for the error he had committed.



One wishes that those responsible for derailing the military and forcing it and this country to live through years of ignominy of defeat had also been meted out justice in a similar manner. The sad truth is that they got away without being held accountable as neither resignations — like that of Krishna Menon or General Thapar, the Army Chief — nor deprivation of further promotion, as some others faced, can be called punishment enough. At the minimum, those responsible should have certainly faced disciplinary proceedings, maybe even have had their pensions stopped, as was the case with General AAK Niazi after he surrendered in Dhaka. After all, surrendering 37,000 square km of the territory that we claimed as ours to the Chinese was no small matter. Yet, how did we respond to this humongous disaster? Shamefully, to say the least, the Government did transfer the individual entrusted with the defence of India, the then Defence Secretary O Pulla Reddy, but subsequently nominated him as the founding Vice Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University. Talking of second chances.

Our unwillingness and inability to fix the blame for acts of commission and omission at the highest levels have ensured that no lessons are ever learnt. We have also gone on to perfect the art of deflection as the Kargil disaster clearly showed. There was no reason why Atal Bihari Vajpayee's attempts at engaging Pakistan should have led to complacency on the part of either the intelligence or the security establishment. It was all very well to have blamed it on "systemic intelligence failure" but why nobody thought it necessary to ask the question: While the intelligence agencies may have failed to discern Pakistan's intentions, how was it that the latter occupied our territory without detection by the Army? Instead of taking it to task, we made much of our top military brass, treating them as heroes for reclaiming — at great cost one might add — what we should not have lost in the first place. Of course, the Government of the day could not have acted in any other manner as that would have been seen as a blemish on its performance as well.

Naturally, we are again witness to this sordid cycle as the Chinese once again make fools out of us. The same cliched excuses are being trotted out that unfortunately, the "Wuhan-Mamallapuram spirit" made our security establishment complacent and we were, thus, caught wrong-footed as intelligence agencies were unable to detect Chinese movers or gauge their intentions. The security establishment hopes to save itself the blushes by pushing the blame on its favourite whipping boy, "sys-

tem failure." In this case, the current border management practice that ensures a rather opaque division of responsibilities between the Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. One can be certain that they will manage to avoid being held to account this time as well. Not least because of the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi has attempted to change the narrative by denying any ingress or loss of territory and instead promoting through his minions "differing perceptions of the LAC between both sides" to fudge the issue. He hopes — and not without good reason given the blind support he enjoys — this will allow him and his Government to carry on as if it is business as usual. Unfortunately for him, the unexpected appearance in the public domain of the Ministry of Defence report on the ingress by the PLA — though now withdrawn — does suggest that there are those within the Government who have serious reservations about his actions and have no compunction in showing him up for dissembling.

Normally, in a bureaucratic and hierarchical system such as ours, it is often the case that those left holding the baby, so to say, are not necessarily the ones responsible for its procreation in the first place. We would certainly not have found ourselves in the present situation if the previous Government, and this one, had

shown even a modicum of interest in national defence and kept their eye on the ball. Modi finds himself in an extremely difficult situation, not because the Manmohan Singh Government was negligent, which it certainly was, but because of his own deliberate neglect of the military since 2014. He made all the right noises but had no time for the military, except for where it helped his own political fortunes.

Similarly, General Rawat would not have found himself caught in this controversy today if he had not been appointed the Chief of Defence Staff after pandering to Modi's wishes. He cannot escape responsibility for having sabotaged the Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) midway through its raising while he was Chief of Army Staff. One may recall that it was after the ingress by the Chinese in the Depsang Sector in 2013 that the dysfunctional Manmohan Singh Government understood the seriousness of the issue and sanctioned the raising of the MSC. Its raising was given full attention by the Army Chief and was of immense concern to the Chinese because they clearly understood the shift in the intent of the Indian armed forces from a purely defensive posture to a more pro-active one. It changed the concept of Sino-Indian conventional deterrence.

Thus, one can imagine their utter joy when the Modi-Doyal-Rawat combine put the MSC into forced hibernation. This was allegedly done because of budgetary constraints, something that apparently had no impact on the unbridled expansion of the Central Armed Police Forces. It is obvious that purely defensive actions on our part will never restore the status quo ante, which we are insisting upon, in the foreseeable future. If we do nothing, the loss of territory will be a body blow to our reputation in the region and internationally.

In the long run, as happened with Nehru, it will be the ruination of Modi. His reputation will suffer, his ability to stay in power will be reduced to a caricature. Ironically, while Nehru continues to shoulder much of the blame for problems that afflict us today, Modi and his minions will not have that advantage. They will have to bear the consequences for their actions. There is something to be said for poetic justice and that old adage, "As you sow, so shall you reap."

(The author, a military veteran, is a consultant with the Observer Research Foundation and a Senior Visiting Fellow with The Peninsula Foundation)

SOUNDBITE

There have been no significant reforms in education for the last many years. As a result, our society started promoting herd mentality instead of imagination and curiosity.



Prime Minister
—Narendra Modi

If a new actor is launched today, even if in a small film, they (public) should support them, write good comments on their posts and stop crying nepotism, nepotism.



Actor
—Gurmeet Choudhary

If Democrats continue to hold this critical relief hostage, I will act under my authority as President to get the American people the relief they need.



US President
—Donald Trump

With MS Dhoni in the IPL, I don't see much difference. In fact, the conditions that we have are just perfect for Dhoni, where it's going to be about the mind and not just power hitting.



Former India batsman
—Sanjay Manjrekar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

China cannot be trusted

Sir — Despite several rounds of talks between India and China, no solution appears to be in sight with regard to the border crisis along the Line of Actual Control. Clashes at Galwan were proof enough that China cannot be relied upon. It attacked Indian soldiers without any provocation. To top it all, China's expansionist tendencies and greed for grabbing weaker landlocked territory through unfair means are a never-ending phenomenon. India's relationship with Russia, though on an even keel, cannot be ignorant of the former's support to China. It is doubtful if Russia will extend us any help in case of conflict. It is, thus, imperative that India forges a military pact with the US to keep a check on China's assertiveness, aggressiveness and other nefarious activities.

Rashmi
Via email

Debt restructuring

Sir — In view of the COVID-19 pandemic having battered the economy, it was expected that the

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) would come up with another rate cut but it left it unchanged at four per cent. Instead, the Central bank has allowed financial institutions a special one-time dispensation to restructure loans which

are stressed due to the pandemic. Indeed, a rate cut at this juncture would have meant little. Unless demand is generated, units will continue to gasp for survival despite the repayment breather.

The Monetary Policy Committee has also called for the appointment of an expert committee to frame a window under the prudential norms for speedy resolution of stressed loans. Besides, the gold loan-to-value

Raging rainforest a climate threat

The rainforest region of Brazil, Amazon, recorded 6,800 incidents of fire in July, up from 5,318 last year, the same month. Amazon has been a talking point for most experts because it comprises more than half of the world's wetlands. Continued dry spells are a threat to the forests. Raging fires in the region may not entirely be attributed to natural causes such as lightning, heatwave or the eruption of volcanoes. Cattle ranching is the largest driver of deforestation. In the months between July and September, farmers are known to clear their lands for cattle farming and soil fertilisation. Illegal mining in Amazon rainforest, too, has become an "epidemic." Artisanal mining for gold and other minerals in Amazon forests and rivers has been a problem for decades and is usually illegal.

Critics of President Jair Bolsonaro have placed the blame at his doorsteps and his "anti-environment," "pro-agriculture" and "pro-industry" policies. The pro-development image of Bolsonaro has angered conservationists, who feel he is not doing enough to save the forests from man-made disasters. Species of plants and animals in the rainforests slow down global climate warming. Rainforests contribute to a healthy maintenance of the ecosystem. In contrast, wildfires emit a high con-



Ganapathi Bhat
Akola

tent of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone precursors let alone nitrogen oxides and organic materials — all of which are detrimental to the climate. In 2019, the forest fire was termed as a "global crisis" by world leaders. President Bolsonaro's attempt to crack a whip on "offenders" was too late to bear fruit. This season in Brazil is expected to be drier than the corresponding period in 2019. The fires may only get worse in the months ahead.

ratio has been increased to 90 per cent. This will pave the way for a robust rise in the quality and quantity of loans. While extending forbearance, it is imperative for the banks to be diligent and cautious to prevent good money from turning into NPAs.

Shivansh
Via email

Deal with compassion

Sir — The Kashmir problem needs to be tackled with sensitivity. The people of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered enough. All possible aid should be provided to them. Kashmir should be transformed into a world-class tourist destination. Establishing good colleges and other technical institutes will help the Kashmiri youth compete equally with the rest of the nation as they are talented and given to innovation. By setting up good medical colleges and hospitals, public health needs can be taken care of, too.

Ashok Malik
Via web

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

October surprise awaits the US?

Maybe Trump will arrange the premature certification of a COVID-19 vaccine, so he can roll it out just before the Nov 3 election



GWYNNE DYER

An “October Surprise” in the US is now almost inevitable, because that will be US President Donald Trump’s last chance to get re-elected legitimately. Trump might try to cling to office even if he loses the vote, but it would be a lot easier and neater if he actually won a majority in the Electoral College on November 3. In US political jargon, an “October Surprise” is a news event deliberately created or timed to influence the outcome of an election, particularly one for the US presidency and usually involves foreigners or a threat to the nation. It is planned such that all other issues are forgotten, Americans rally around the flag and the incumbent wins on a surge of patriotism. Or that’s the theory, at least.

The same thing happens elsewhere, too, of course and not necessarily in October. That’s when it needs to happen in the US to win a presidential election. For instance, a “July Surprise” happened recently in Belarus because of the August 9 presidential election. Alexander Lukashenko, the strongman who rules Belarus, “discovered” Russian mercenaries in his country. It matters little that they were unarmed and on their way to Istanbul, but President Lukashenko told his people that there was a plot. “So far there is no open warfare, no shooting, the trigger has not yet been pulled, but an attempt to organise a massacre in the centre of Minsk is already obvious. Only I can save our country. Vote for me,” was Lukashenko’s impassioned plea to his citizens.

Trump will need something like that because otherwise the Coronavirus is going to kill him politically. This was not true as recently as early June, because up until then the US was not performing especially badly in dealing with the pandemic. It looked a lot worse because of Trump’s bizarre behaviour — the endless, shameless lies, the narcissism, the suggestions that people should inject bleach and so on — but in terms of COVID-19 deaths per million people, the US fatality rate was still lower than other major Western countries, except for Germany and Canada.

The US was late to go into the lockdown, but so were they all, at least compared to most Asian countries. Until recently, if you were a Trump supporter, you could still believe he was doing a good job. It was Trump’s rush to end the lockdown, not all the earlier nonsense, that did the real damage. He believed that he would lose the election if the economy didn’t revive, but by opening up too fast he managed to revive the pandemic at the same time.

The numbers tell the tale. This week the US will record its 1,65,000th death from COVID-19. That’s almost a quarter of all the Coronavirus fatalities in the world. Much worse, US deaths are still going up while casualties elsewhere in the developed world have fallen steeply. That’s almost entirely due to Trump.

Take Canada, for example. It is very similar to the US in its economy and demography but different in social and political terms. Canada has universal healthcare and a much less drastic divide between the rich and the rest, for example, which probably explains why the US’ cumulative death rate per million is 484, while Canada’s is only 237. The history is, therefore, an American death rate twice as high as Canada’s: Not great but structurally inevitable. By now, however, Canada has managed to get its casualties down to ten a day, whereas the US is back up to around a 1,000 fatalities a day.

Even allowing for Canada’s much smaller population, that is ten times worse. This is what coming out of a lockdown too early did to the US, and it is all down to President Trump. The pandemic is raging once again in the US and there may be a quarter-million deaths there by election day in November. US “deaths per million” are going up three per day, which means that the US will overtake Chile (now at 509 casualties) in less than one week, Italy (582) in a month, Spain (609) in five weeks. It might even catch up with the UK (682) by election day.


Most of those newly-dead Americans will be over 60, so probably they would have been Trump supporters. Their relatives and friends are bound to notice eventually. As it is, Joe Biden’s lead over Trump in the polls has already widened to 10 per cent. How could Trump turn that around in the remaining 82 days? His only hope is to manufacture an “October Surprise” involving China, a restaged “Tonkin Gulf Incident” i.e. the one real and one phantom firefight that embroiled the US in the Vietnam War.


Or perhaps he could manufacture a terrorist “threat” so humorous that it would give him a pretext to declare martial law nationwide. Or maybe Trump will arrange the premature certification of a COVID-19 vaccine so he can roll it out just before the November 3 vote. If it kills a lot of people later on, who cares? He won. Trump knows that if he loses the November election, he will spend the rest of his life in court, possibly even in jail. He will do whatever it takes to win. It isn’t over yet.

(Gwynne Dyer’s new book is ‘Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work.’)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

JAMMU AND KASHMIR WAS A BROKEN STATE. NOT A SINGLE SOUL CRIED OVER THE DETENTION OF POLITICAL AND SEPARATIST LEADERS IN AUGUST LAST YEAR.
—J&K CHIEF SECRETARY
BVR SUBRAHMANYAM





SUBRAHMANYAM AND HIS TEAM ARE LEAST EXPECTED TO KNOW HOW THE PEOPLE FEEL. TO QUOTE GANDHI, THEY ARE RULING J&K FROM THE 500TH FLOOR.
—PDP LEADER AND FORMER J&K MINISTER
NAEEM AKHTAR

Nip the NPA crisis, now

The Govt and the RBI must urgently reassess the moratorium policy and limit it only to the hardest-hit, address the delays in IBC resolution and not drive away depositors



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

After the release of the Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI’s) half-yearly Financial Stability Report (FSR) on July 24, shares of banks and finance companies were battered at the stock market. Though the private banks (PVBs) like ICICI, HDFC, Axis Bank, Bandhan Bank got seared, the public sector banks (PSBs), too, bore the brunt of the bloodbath on the bourses. The mayhem exposed the structural weaknesses of the Indian banking system and the severity of the Non-Performing Asset (NPA) crisis looming over them.

As the RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das emphasised (and his sentiment was echoed by the Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission) the soaring NPAs and the consequent capital erosion of the banks would need immediate recapitalisation of both PVBs and PSBs.

To alleviate the pandemic-created stress on borrowers, the RBI has already placed a moratorium on the payment of loan instalments and deferment of interest payments till August 31. However, the banks are fearing — as articulated by the HDFC Chairman — that even solvent borrowers may take advantage of this relaxation and not repay their loans. This would further worsen the financials of the banks.

The FSR has also acknowledged that there is a major risk that the moratoriums may have serious implications on the financial health of the banks. Overall, about 50 per cent of all loans — 65 per cent of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) borrowings and 56 per cent of retail loans — were under moratorium as on April 30, against only 39 per cent of corporate loans. The PSBs have a larger share — 58 per cent, 82 per cent and 80 per cent respectively for corporate, MSME and individual loans, as against 20 per cent, 43 per cent and 34 per cent respectively for the PVBs.

As far as Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) are concerned, 56 per cent, 61 per cent and 46 per cent of the loans are under moratorium respectively for these categories. The scenario is really disquieting. The RBI has assumed a contraction of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 4.4 per cent, gross fiscal deficit of 10.9 per cent and Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) of 4.1 per cent as the baseline scenario assuming steady recovery from the second-half of the current fiscal. The GDP contraction and fiscal deficit numbers may be a tad too optimistic, given the severe economic disruptions with no end in sight.

The FSR has stated that the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) stood at 14.8 per cent while their Gross Non-Performing Asset (GNPA) ratio stood at 8.5 per cent in March. But it projected that the GNPA ratio may worsen further to 12.5 per cent by March 2021 under the optimistic baseline scenario and may escalate to 14.7 per cent under a severely-stressed scenario.

The implications of these numbers are indeed very serious. As of March, the total NPAs of SCBs stood at ₹8.62 lakh crore; at the baseline scenario which seems a bit hopeful, this would rise to around ₹13 lakh crore and at the worst case scenario to ₹15 lakh crore, at which level, all undercapitalised and overleveraged banks would cease to be going concerns.

In fact, the pandemic has wiped out all the work done so far by the SCBs by using a large part of their capital to correct their balance sheets

“THE RECAPITALISATION BOND ROUTE BY WHICH THE GOVERNMENT ISSUES BONDS TO THE BANKS, WHICH PROMPTLY INVEST THEM IN GOVERNMENT SECURITIES, IS NOTHING MORE THAN AN ACCOUNTING TRICK. APART FROM INCREASING THE GOVERNMENT’S INTEREST LIABILITIES, IT RARELY ADDRESSES THE DEEPER STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS OF THE BANKS. WITH LOW CREDIT OFFTAKE AND HIGHER NPAs, BANKS WILL BE FORCED TO FURTHER LOWER THE DEPOSIT INTEREST RATES — ALREADY AT THE ROCK-BOTTOM — AND DRIVE DEPOSITORS TOWARDS THE EQUITY MARKET OR GOLD. THIS IS HARDLY A RECIPE FOR REVIVAL”



— which was so assiduously pursued by the RBI during the last few years. This has seen a steady decline in their GNPA ratio from 11.5 per cent in March 2018 to 8.5 per cent in March this year. Though this reduced their CRAR, however, it still remained above the Basel III-compliant RBI norms. Now, the loans are likely to rise to a 20-year high as a result of the crisis triggered by the pandemic.

As the RBI Governor said in the foreword to the FSR, “The financial system in India remains sound. Nonetheless, in the current environment, the need for financial intermediaries to proactively augment capital and improve their resilience has acquired top priority. In the evolving milieu, while risk management has to be prudent, extreme risk-aversion would have adverse outcomes for all.”

Under the current crisis, risk aversion, both by banks and borrowers, is only to be expected as evidenced by the banks parking their excess liquidity with the RBI instead of lending. Credit demand has not picked up despite the easing of the lockdown and financial vulnerabilities are likely to be amplified, leading to a further deterioration in the asset quality of the banks due to the piling up of mountains of bad loans.

As a 90-day window is given for paying the loan instalments to keep the loans from being classified as NPAs, the exact position would be known only in December after the expiry of the moratorium on August 31. But there is an urgent need to recapitalise the banks — both PSBs and PVBs — for building stronger buffers for them to be able to absorb the losses.

The recapitalisation bond route by which the Government issues bonds to the banks, which promptly invest them

in Government securities, is nothing more than an accounting trick. Apart from increasing the Government’s interest liabilities, it rarely addresses the deeper structural problems of the banks.

While the GNPA ratio of PSBs may increase to 15.2 per cent under the baseline scenario (16.3 per cent under the worst-case scenario), the ratios of the PVBs and even the foreign banks are likely to increase to 7.3 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively. Erosion of the capital will shrink the system-level CRAR of the banking sector as a whole from 14.6 per cent in March to 13.3 per cent by next March under the baseline scenario and to 11.8 per cent under severe stress conditions.

Five banks will fail to meet the minimum prescribed CRAR level of nine per cent by March 2021 — five more will be close (under 10 per cent) without merger or recapitalisation which might increase their systemic resilience. However, mergers of PSBs, now practically stalled because of the lockdown, have their own problems. The NPAs of the State Bank of India (SBI) worsened after its merger with associates two years ago, with write-offs and persistent slippages eating into profit and capital both, besides impeding the growth of credit.

Other mergers — Bank of Baroda (BoB) with Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank and Punjab National Bank’s (PNBs) 1993 merger with the New Bank of India also faced many problems. It is unlikely that the current mergers of healthy banks with weak banks will improve the health of the banking system as a whole; in any case, they will not cause any significant reduction of the NPA ratios of the amalgamated banks. Then there is the added danger

of spillover effects from the NPAs of NBFCs, which are still unable to recover from the IL&FS shock of 2018. Bank lending to NBFCs had increased dramatically from ₹3 lakh crore in December 2016 post-demonetisation to ₹8 lakh crore in May this year. Any increase in their NPAs will automatically trigger a contagion, leading to further deterioration of the banking system. The gravity of the situation cannot be overemphasised.

The structural problems with the recovery of bad loans have remained unresolved even after operationalisation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Of the total claims of ₹3.52 lakh crore from 190 companies (till December 2019), ₹1.52 lakh crore (43 per cent) has been recovered, which of course was a significant improvement over the earlier recovery rate of 10 per cent. But only two cases — Bhushan Steel and Essar Steel — accounted for 49.5 per cent of the overall recoveries.

Given the huge number of case-loads — 1,961 as of December 2019 — and the time taken for disposal by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), the system is already getting clogged like never before. With low credit offtake and higher NPAs, banks will be forced to further lower the deposit interest rates — already at the rock-bottom — and drive depositors towards the equity market or gold. This is hardly a recipe for revival. The Government and the RBI must urgently reassess the across-the-board moratorium policy and limit it only to the hardest-hit, address the delays in IBC resolution and not further alienate and drive away the depositors.

(The writer is a former Director General at the office of the CAG of India and an academic.)

Did an Islamic State ever exist?

The modern State is a fairly recent European construct and has been borrowed to project a retrospective interpretation about what an Islamic State meant



NADEEM PARACHA

The roots of the concept of the State lie in the political ideas formulated in ancient Greece and the Roman Republic. Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle write of the “polis” (the city State) as an ideal form of association, in which the religious, cultural, political and economic needs of the citizens can be satisfied. The ancient Roman idea of *res publica* is more similar to the modern concept of the State. The *res publica* was a legal system, the jurisdiction of which extended to all Roman citizens, securing their rights and determining their responsibilities.

However, it wasn’t until the 16th century that the modern concept of the

State fully emerged in Europe. Between the 17th and 19th centuries, the idea was expanded and developed in the works of philosophers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham and Karl Marx. By the 19th century, the concept of the State as we know it today, had been practically established in various regions of Europe.

According to the noted political anthropologist Professor Irfan Ahmad, till the 17th century, “the State governed by not governing.” Seldom did it interfere in most affairs of its subjects. Its main interest was to extract levies and taxes. Its administrative scope was limited. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, claimed that the scope of the State began to expand from the 16th century. The idea of the State in non-Western regions was no different. According to Irfan Ahmad, the nature of the State in Muslim-majority regions and in regions being ruled by Muslims was also static. It was only interested in gathering taxes and aiding the monarch and his vassals to

retain their wealth and power.

The State as we know it today, is thus a comparatively recent construct and a product of political and economic modernity. So what do concepts such as “Islamic State” or “*Riyasat-i-Madina* (State of Madina)” really mean? Such terms are often used by ideologues and politicians in Muslim-majority regions. The thinking behind them is that Islam is inherently political and its sacred texts lay out a blueprint for a State run by laws prescribed by Allah. Those who hold this view insist that such a State came into being with the arrival of Islam that actively regulated every political, economic and social aspect of the community.

Irfan Ahmad writes that till the 16th/17th century, the working of the State, even in powerful Muslim empires, was as limited as it was in non-Muslim realms. He adds that the idea of an Islamic State is actually not more than a 100 years old. According to the works of Egyptian scholars Ali Abdel Raziq and Sa’id al-Ashmawi, theologically, Islam treats faith and the

concept of State separately and, in fact, puts more emphasis on faith and how it can operate as a moral guide. Ahmad writes, “to impose the modern concept of the State on 7th century Arab society is misleading.” Because of infrastructural weaknesses, the State could not have expanded its scope beyond a handful of duties, even if it wanted to.

The Syrian academic and historian Aziz Al-Azmeh, in a widely-debated 1990 essay *Utopia and Islamic Political Thought*, demonstrates that there is no political theory (about a State) in classical Islamic political thought. Fact is, those who insist that there is, are simply projecting the modern concept of the State on ancient and medieval Islamic polities, reimaging these polities as Islamic states which influenced almost every aspect of the lives of their citizens. According to Ahmad, such projections are the result of ideas that first emerged in the early 20th century.

One of the pioneers in this respect was the prolific South Asian ideologue

and Islamic scholar Abul Ala Maududi. Ahmad writes that, as a young man, Maududi was associated with *The Muslim*, a daily that took an anti-British, pro-Congress Party position and promoted Muslim-Hindu unity and a secular set-up in India. However, after 1937, Maududi changed his stance, especially when Jinnah’s Muslim League began to press for a separate Muslim-majority State. Ahmad writes that all major political players in British India had become smitten by the concepts of the State and nationalism introduced in the region by the British colonialists. The Muslim League began to speak about a Muslim State, the Congress about a post-colonial secular Indian State and the Leftists about a socialist State.

Rejecting all these concepts as ungodly, Maududi came up with the theory of Government of Allah or Islamic State. He then set out to formulate a new political theology, by interpreting Islamic scriptures in the context of the State. In a 1941 essay, he writes, “In reality, the classical Arabic

word *deen* approximately has the same meaning which the word State has in the contemporary age.” Noting that the modern State regulates almost every facet of people’s lives, he contemplated the creation of an Islamic State that would regulate every aspect of its citizens’ lives according to laws laid down by the Islamic scriptures.

Maududi understood the Muslim League as a secular Muslim nationalist organisation. So, to neutralise Maududi’s criticism, Pakistan began to borrow his ideas. Yet, Maududi’s own party could not gain much traction among voters. This was probably due to the aforementioned ploy by the State and, more so, because from the mid-1970s, even non-religious parties began to adopt ideas from Maududi and fused them with their secular outlook. His ideas in this context reached completion as an elaborate theory in his 1979 magnum opus, *Four Fundamental Concepts of the Quran*.

The theory suggested that an Islamic State existed during the early days of the faith because the sacred

scriptures were treated as an all-encompassing political constitution and that such a State fell away because of corruption and needs to be re-enacted. Interestingly, this is the narrative popularised by the Imran Khan Government. Though Maududi’s thesis was inspired by largely European ideas of the State, this does not bother those who take the revisionist historical claims of his theories as fact.

Ever since the 1980s, whenever there are claims and promises made by a variety of ideologues and leaders in the Muslim world, about working towards an Islamic State, it is assumed that it is rooted in the workings of a 7th century Islamic realm. According to Ahmad, objective history does not support this. As Egyptian scholar Nasr Abu Zayd says, “Religious scriptures are at the mercy of the ideology of its interpreter. For a communist, they would reveal communism, for a fundamentalist they would be fundamentalist text, for a feminist it would be a feminist text, and so on...”

(Courtesy: Dawn)



CAPSULE



'Amazon Easy' stores now in all-new avatar

BENGALURU: Online retailer Amazon on Sunday launched an upgraded 'Amazon Easy' store format that integrates its multiple services through a single touchpoint. The format would offer a touch-and-feel product experience through a physical product display, the company said in a statement. Customers can also place an order on Amazon.in with guided assistance from the store staff and either pick up the order from the store or get it delivered at their doorstep, it said. The store owners can now leverage Amazons last-mile delivery program 'I Have Space' to deliver packages to customers in their area as well as facilitate pickups. The first such exclusive Amazon Easy store is now operational in Mahalakshmi layout here.



Micro enterprises confident of recovery

NEW DELHI: Despite several businesses remaining closed during the lockdown, 81 per cent of micro enterprises polled are confident of a recovery post COVID-19 whereas 57 per cent reported not having any cash reserves to survive, according to a survey. Initial results of a six-month survey that is underway by GAME (Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship) in association with LEAD at Krea University covering 1,500 micro enterprises also reveal that 40 per cent tried to borrow money to cover expenses. However, only 14 per cent of the overall borrowing was from formal borrowing sources. As per the revised criteria, any firm with investment up to Rs 1 crore and turnover under Rs 5 crore is classified as a "micro" enterprise.



Lupin, Sun Pharma recall drugs in the US market

NEW DELHI: Leading drug makers Lupin and Sun Pharma are recalling different products in the US, according to the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA). The Mumbai-based drug maker Lupin is recalling 11,688 bottles of Lisinopril tablets USP, 10 mg, which is used to treat high blood pressure, in the US market, as per the latest Enforcement Report by the US health regulator. USFDA said the company is recalling the specific number of bottles due to presence of foreign tablets. Lisinopril tablets USP, (20 mg) were found in a 1,000 count bottle of Lisinopril Tablets USP (10 mg), it noted. The tablets have been manufactured at Lupin's Nagpur facility.

Defence reforms to steer India towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India Inc on Sunday said the Centre's decision to impose restrictions on import of 101 weapons and military platforms, and creation of a separate budget for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year is a 'path-breaking' reform towards becoming self-reliant and will boost indigenous defence manufacturing.

In a major reform initiative to boost the domestic defence industry, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday announced restrictions on import of 101 weapons and military platforms, including artillery guns, assault rifles and transport aircraft. "The Ministry of Defence is



now ready for a big push to #AtmanirbharBharat initiative," Singh said on Twitter while making the announcement.

He said the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has prepared a list of 101 items for which the

embargo on imports is planned to be progressively implemented between 2020 and 2024.

"MoD has also bifurcated the capital procurement budget for 2020-21 between domestic and foreign capital procurement routes. A sepa-

rate budget head has been created with an outlay of nearly Rs 52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement in the current financial year," the Defence Minister tweeted.

Welcoming the initiative, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said the defence minister's announcement of negative import list of defence systems and platforms marks the launch of a new glide path for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

"Announcement of Rs 52,000 crore for domestic capital procurement coupled with the list of 101 items for import embargo gives a tremendous boost to Atmanirbhar Bharat and indigenous defence manufacturing," he added.

IBBI lists out potential red flags to detect avoidance transactions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Pre-dominance of cash transactions, independence of directors and frequent changes of auditors are among the potential red flags for insolvency professionals in detecting avoidance transactions during insolvency proceedings, according to an IBBI document.

Under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, resolution professionals and liquidators are required to determine whether corporate debtors concerned were subject to avoidance transactions.

The Code provides for a time-bound and market-linked resolution of stressed assets. In case, the resolution does not materialise, then the entity concerned goes for liquidation.

Resolution professionals and liquidators can also facilitate claw-back or disgorgement of value, if any, lost through



avoidance transactions.

Against this backdrop, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has come out with the detailed document titled 'Avoidance Transactions - Red Flags'.

IBBI Chairperson M S Sahoo told PTI that the insolvency law frowns on alienations of property prior to the commencement of the insolvency proceeding, if it vitiates the sanctity of equitable distribution and maximisation of the value of the assets of a corporate debtor. Such alienations, which vitiate an insolvency proceeding, are called avoidance transactions, he noted.

The 22-page document lists out various factors, including

the need to look at whether the corporate debtor is present at the address that is given in the corporate affairs ministry records. It also noted that non-existence of an office of the corporate debtor at such an address is also a red flag.

"Predominance of cash transactions generally undertaken by the entity is a potential red flag indicator. According to the document, an insolvency professional should assess the independence, capability and competence of the directors as well as under whose instructions they are usually accustomed to act, and that presence of name-sake directors might also be a red flag.

ArcelorMittal resort to cost-reduction measures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, global steel giant ArcelorMittal is focussing on cost-reduction initiatives to protect profitability in view of an uncertainty around pace of recovery. The world's largest steelmaker had logged a net loss of USD 559 million for the second quarter ended June 2020 and termed it as the most difficult period in its history.



The company continues to focus on cost reduction

The world's largest steelmaker had logged a net loss of USD 559 million for the second quarter ended June 2020

initiatives to protect profitability as it navigates the evolving demand backdrop.

DGTR recommends CVD on certain steel product imports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Commerce Ministry has recommended imposition of provisional countervailing duty (CVD) on certain steel products from Indonesia to guard domestic manufacturers from subsidised imports.

The ministry's investigation arm Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) in its preliminary findings has recommended the duty after concluding in its probe that 'Flat Products of Stainless Steel' have been exported to India from Indonesia at subsidised prices.



The domestic industry has suffered material injury due to subsidisation of the product and therefore it is necessary to recommend imposition of provisional countervailing duty on these imports, the DGTR has said in a notification.

It said that the directorate is of the view that imposition of provisional countervailing duty is required to offset subsidisation

and injury, pending completion of the investigation. "The authority recommends imposition of provisional countervailing duty on the imports...originating in or exported from the subject country (Indonesia)," it said.

The duties recommended are 22.31 per cent, 22.65 per cent and 24.83 per cent on different producers of Indonesia. The finance ministry will take the final call to impose these duties. In October last year, the directorate initiated the probe into an alleged subsidised export of certain steel products by Indonesia, following complaints by domestic industry.

Chingari attracts \$ 1.3 million

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Indigenous short video-sharing app Chingari has attracted a funding of USD 1.3 million in a seed round.

The round was led by venture capitalists, including AngelList India, Utsav Somanis iSeed, Village Global, LogX Ventures, and Jasminder Singh Gulati of NowFloats, said a statement from Chingari.

The funding, said the company officials, would be used to hire more talent to accelerate product development, ramp up the platform and make it more engaging and consumer focused, and engage a larger consumer base by offering a seamless short video entertainment experience. "Were delighted that investors saw the immense potential in our vision and chose to join the Chingari journey," he said.

Unichem: Need to boost local API production for India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Unichem Laboratories has called for measures to step up local production of raw materials to produce drugs in order to reduce the country's dependence on imports, especially from China.

Sharing information with shareholders in company's annual report for 2019-20, the drug firm said the ongoing coronavirus pandemic calls for concentrated efforts to build upon capacities for active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) in the country.

"Our country is heavily dependent on China for import of most of its APIs. India needs a healthy and financially strong ecosystem to boost manufacture of APIs to remain self-reliant in the years to come," Unichem Laboratories Chairman and Managing Director Prakash A Mody said.

The present health crisis calls for proactive measures to step up economies of scale in production of intermediates and other key materials, with focus on research and development for APIs, he added.

The procrastination syn-



drome surely calls for prompt treatment, Mody noted.

"Over-dependence of the Indian pharmaceutical industry on imported APIs exposes it to raw material supply disruptions and pricing volatility," Mody said.

While the government is working on developing bulk drug manufacturing parks to boost local production and reduce dependence on imports, the company, at its end, is focusing on efficiency and backward integration by ramping up its capacities in APIs and intermediates, he added.

The company is looking to use these APIs for captive consumption, which will give it an edge in the global gener-

ics market, Mody said.

The drug firm's strategic investments in two pharma companies engaged in research and development, marketing and distribution of APIs will help meet the demand of exports for incremental growth, he noted.

Unichem offers a broad portfolio of APIs across various therapeutic areas. It has three manufacturing facilities to cater to the segment.

The Mumbai-based firm also has a sizable presence in finished drug formulation segment.

The global API market is projected to reach USD 268 billion by 2026 from USD 182 billion in 2019, growing at a CAGR of 6 per cent.

ONGC cuts debt by 35 pc to Rs 13,949 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has cut its debt by more than one-third but faces an uphill challenge to meeting planned expenditure during current fiscal due to oil and gas prices falling below sub-optimal levels, according to company officials and regulatory filings.

ONGC's outstanding debt of Rs 21,593 crore as on March 31, 2019 has come down to Rs 13,949 crore as on March 31, 2020, as it used revenue from better operations to retire some of the borrowings, according to the company's regulatory filings.

Out of this debt, long-term borrowings account for Rs 2,245 crore which are due for maturity in December 2029.

The company had cash and cash equivalent (including



other bank balances) of Rs 968 crore as on March 31, 2020, up from a record low of Rs 504 crore a year back.

Standalone debt-equity ratio at the end of March 31, 2020 is only 0.07 which is considered comfortable.

"While we ended the 2019-20 fiscal year with a comfortable financial position, we face an uphill challenge during the current 2020-21 financial year. The pandemic has played havoc on oil prices and government mandated gas price is way below cost of production," a senior official said.

Purple aims at \$ 100 mn sales in FY'21, looks for acquisition

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Online beauty and personal care platform Purple is looking to double its sales to USD 100 million during the current fiscal, as it is bullish on growing demand in the e-commerce space in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, a company official said.

The e-commerce firm, which has raised USD 35 million of funds from global investment bank Goldman Sachs and other investors, is exploring opportunities for acquisition in brands, technology and content space to fuel growth, Purple co-founder and CEO Manish Taneja told PTI in a telephonic interview.

"The coronavirus pandemic had worked in our favour. In the short term, demand will continue to be robust as people prefer to stay indoors and online purchases. Given the economic situation, we may



Manish Taneja

see some speed breakers in the long term," he said.

Purple achieved USD 50 million in gross merchandise value in 2019-20.

"In the current fiscal, we expect USD 100 million sales, out of USD 7 billion beauty industry in the country," he said.

Taneja said the consolidation in the online beauty and personal care segment is

The e-commerce firm is exploring opportunities for acquisition in brands, technology and content space to fuel growth

expected to happen in the second half of the current fiscal. "Consolidation will happen in this industry in the second half of the year. Some small firms and start-ups will find difficulties to tide over the crisis, and raising money is getting difficult now. We are open for acquisitions," he said.

The company concluded a mega sale programme on Saturday.

Smartworks takes over 6 lakh sq ft office space on lease

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Co-working player Smartworks has taken a total of over 6 lakh sq ft of office space on lease in Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad to set up new centres as part of its plan to expand business despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Founded in April 2016, Smartworks Coworking Spaces Pvt Ltd, currently has 31 co-working centres, comprising about 60,000 seats and 40 lakh sq ft area, across nine cities.

According to sources, Smartworks has taken on lease



over 2 lakh sq ft area each in Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad since March this year to set up three new large co-working centres, targeting big corporates.

The centre at Times Square building in Mumbai is likely to start from next month with

3,000 desks. The co-working facilities at Pune and Hyderabad are slated to be launched within this fiscal year. A Smartworks spokesperson declined to comment on the leasing transactions.

In October last year, Smartworks had announced raising of USD 25 million (about Rs 175 crore) from Singapore's Keppel Land Ltd to fund its expansion plan and touch 1 lakh seating capacity.

The company's founder Neetish Sarda had said that it was the first round of external funding.

Plan to convert Reliance into new energy firm

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd has a 15-year vision to build itself as a new energy company that aims to recycle CO2, create value from plastic waste and has an optimal mix of clean and affordable energy, analysts said.

While the oil-to-chemical conglomerate has in recent times seen focus on consumer business, RIL's core oil-to-chemical (O2C) business is well placed to generate sustained free cash flow, BofA Securities said in a report.

"Until demand normalises, RIL is looking to maximise



RIL has a 15-yr vision to build itself as one of the world's leading new energy company

throughput, focus on cost by leveraging deep petrochemical integration and continue to focus on domestic fuel marketing," it said.

Future of O2C is new energy company and partnerships.

"RIL has a 15-year vision to build itself as one of the world's leading new energy and new

material companies. It also intends to be a net carbon zero company by 2035. To achieve this, the company is open to work with global financial investors, reputed technology partners and start-ups working on futuristic solutions," it said.

This new energy business based on the principle of car-

bon recycling and circular economy is a multi-trillion opportunity for India and the world.

The brokerage said a key focus for RIL is renewable energy, and for that it intends to build an optimal mix of clean and affordable energy with hydrogen, wind, solar, fuel cells and battery.

"It intends to use proprietary technology, recycle CO2, create value from plastic waste; RIL is also looking to make its operations cleaner and more customer-centric," it said.

Reliance has the largest single site refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat with crude processing capacity of 1.24 million barrels per day.

The brokerage said RIL is looking to make CO2 as a recyclable resource, rather than treating it as an emitted waste.

While the company will remain a user of crude oil and natural gas, it is looking to embrace new technologies to convert CO2 into useful products and chemicals.

"One viable application RIL has found for such 'end-of-life-cycle' plastic waste is in road construction. Road constructed with post-consumer, non-recyclable plastic waste ensures enhanced durability, higher resistance to deformation, increased resistance to water induced damages and improved stability and strength," it said.

NEP 2020 A STEP TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION OR BAD EXECUTION?

When the Union Cabinet had, on July 29, 2020, approved the National Education Policy 2020 that represents a major service of teaching processes in Indian education, from the pre-primary level to higher education, Twitterati went beserk with some heaving a sigh of relief, and others, raising several doubts and issues. *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL attempts to address a few of these by talking to eminent people from different walks of life in the city.

When the NEP 2020 was announced, the draft came under criticism for proposing a three-language formula. Some believe this new policy is an urban-centric approach and while others feel it's going to bring approximately 2 crore children back to schools! There will be more e-courses in regional languages and virtual labs will be developed, according to this new draft.

PRIOR ATTENTION TO MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY

This policy will unfold an immense opportunity for the new generation. Having a firm grasp on the current socio-economic landscape and the prospect of future uncertainty, education for a new generation of learners will be necessarily engaging with the increasing dematerialisation and digitalisation of our economies. Navin Mittal, the commissioner collegiate education and technical education for the Government of Telangana, believes the due

encouragement towards start-ups and blend of technology with education will help promote free thinking along with flexible entrepreneurship courses. "There is a lot of focus on developing soft skills among students. All of this will greatly encourage start-ups. Establishing National Education and Technological Forums will bring in technological convergence and encourage the use of technology in education. It aims at equitable and inclusive education for every child in the country with a special focus on socially and economically disadvantaged groups," adds Navin Mittal. A free education system cannot flourish without a free society!

TERMINATION OF MPHIL PROGRAMME

Among several proposed changes, one provision that stands out is the discontinuation of the MPhil programme. What does this mean? "NEP is a revolutionary movement towards streamlining the entire education pattern and practices in India that were untouched for the past 34 years despite the constantly changing scenario of global education. The decision to scrap M.Phil. which was a bridge between Masters and the Ph.D. program comes as an exorbitant measure by the

Government. For those who want to get into teaching, M.Phil. has been an important medium to shape their research mind and further an important qualifying asset to apply for teaching jobs. But I believe the 'research' part which is supposed to be the crux of the entire NEP program, will be taken care of by the four-year, research-oriented UGC program. Now, it is for the educational institutions to ensure the students complete their research projects in core areas that significantly contribute to innovations and inventions," explains Rini Anweshi, SI for Excise department and a Ph.D. aspirant. If the NEP provision applies to all MPhil programmes, regardless of a researcher or practitioner's focus, there will be important implications to it.

EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

Member of a Hyderabad's student association, Ram Kumar asserts that this new policy indeed wants to increase the GDP percentage by six units, however, the policy doesn't aim to focus on enhancing existential resources like skills of unemployed youth, better training support for athletes, increase in the number of platforms to showcase the creativity

of developing artists, etc., and that's just not enough. "Of course there's an aspect of a policy encouraging extracurricular activities but do we have the necessary resources for it? As a local citizen associated with student association for a long time now, I have witnessed that a majority of the educational institutions here run on commercial profits. Students are pushed into a singular class like a flock of sheep having bare minimum facilities. It's an over-ambitious policy — there's greater centralisation probably going against the federal policies. If we want to become a developed nation, we must increase our allocation for education substantially. The centre will have to convince states that it's going to be a beneficial one," adds the TDP student wing member.

3-LANGUAGE POLICY, CODING & BLUE-COLLAR INTERNSHIPS

What about those who graduated already? What do they have to say about these changes to the education system? Let's hear it from Avinash Denduluri, Mass Communication and Journalism graduate who considers the new education policy a blatant attack on classism and casteism despite having vision-

ary goals for students. "It's an approach towards elitist audiences. Exclusion of the English language until 5th grade can create barriers for vocational education. The affluent are anyway going to hire a tutor for their ward, but guess who's going to suffer amidst all this? The destitute, causing further imperialism. Coming to the aspects of inclusion of coding from the sixth standard, how do you expect a child striding onto regional languages to understand coding? A student with an established English background may land job prospects globally. There are blue-collar internships available too, poor students may get inclined towards those, hence it comes back to the same old circle of educational likelihood. In an ideal world, if properly implemented, the freedom to choose subjects flexibly without the restriction of streams is a healthy move. But with the present infrastructure, only ICSE schools and elite CBSE schools can do that," opines the graduate.

MULTIPLE EXIT OPTIONS

College is the stage where young people drop out or change track. The exit options sound good - a certificate after year 1, a diploma after year 2, and a multidisciplinary degree after four years. The NEP has envisioned the combination of sciences and humanities. This will undoubtedly improve the calibre of graduates if they are permitted to study subjects of their choice rather than the rigid combinations imposed by colleges. Anupama Dalmia Barnwal, an influencer parent from the city of Hyderabad feels positive about one of the newly added steps with the help of which, students can take a break from the undergraduate course and come back again within a specified period without missing the credits earned during the previous session. "Our education system was in dire need of an overhaul and I personally think that the new education policy is definitely a step in the right direction. I am extremely happy with the talk of more

libraries and the reduction of school drop-out rates by means of volunteering and peer-to-peer teaching. I believe, that in some ways, there is an addition of 'contemporary' to our traditions and the idea to use these traditions and folklore in teaching is actually progressive and a great way to keep children connected to the Indian heritage. A fine balance here would ensure a comprehensive and all-embracing learning experience for students. The only thing I'm unsure about is the suggestion of using the regional language as a mode of teaching and in text-books as this may pose challenges in many cities. The demand for education is yet to be channelised into an institutional change," adds the Karmaveer Chakra awardee!

We should be grateful for an admirable draft for focussing on the right questions. There sure is much to discuss, but the hope is that with this, our education policy can be transformed into a treat and not another trick.



Anupama Dalmia Barnwal



Avinash Denduluri



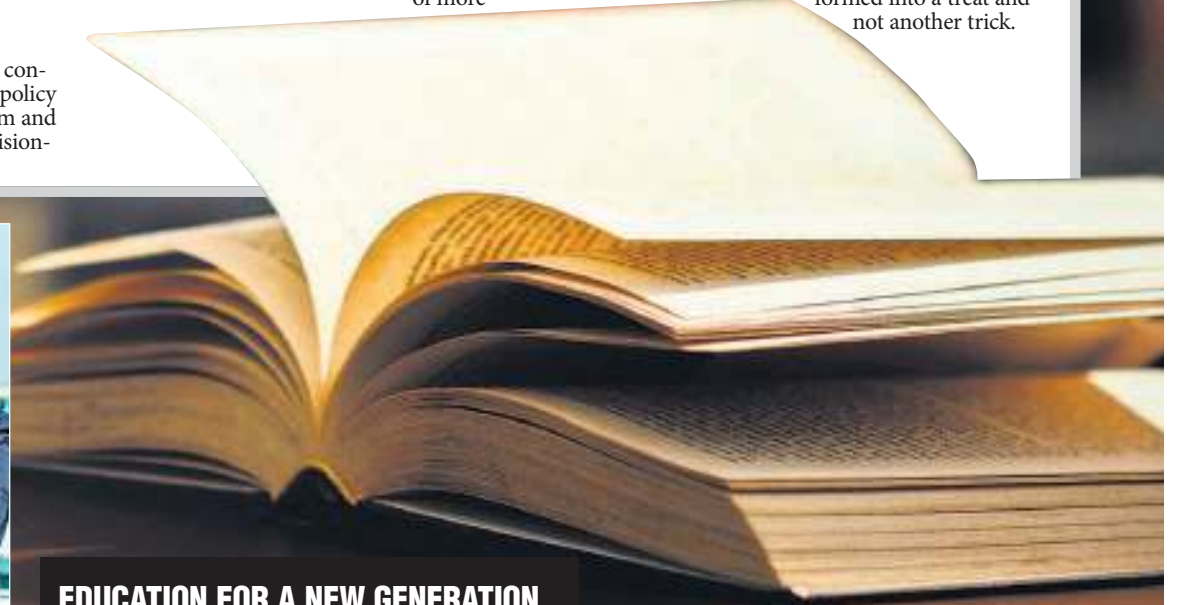
Mrs Rini Anweshi



Navin Mittal



Ram Kumar



EDUCATION FOR A NEW GENERATION OF LEARNERS WILL BE NECESSARILY ENGAGING WITH THE INCREASING DEMATERIALIZATION AND DIGITALISATION OF OUR ECONOMIES.



To fan one of the most important discussions needed today, FICCI FLO Hyderabad Chapter organised a conversation on the topic 'Women in Political Leadership - Then to Now' with noted politician and academician Prof. Rita Bahuguna Joshi, MP, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh and Swetha Kesineni, Mayoral candidate for Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh as a part of the Power Hour series.

The discussion captured the emergence of women in politics in India spanning decades to today's context where a growing number of women leaders are working towards influencing the political agenda and the laws to improve the lives of millions. The free-wheeling conversation that captured the personal and political journeys of Rita Bahuguna Joshi was laced with many personal anecdotes on the challenges faced and successes achieved.

Prof. Rita Bahuguna Joshi,

WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP



Usharani Manne



Prof. Rita Bahuguna



Swetha Kesineni



Priya Gazdar

as part of the discussion, said, "I have seen several decades right from the conservative phase then came the phase of the struggle when women were going through a kind of emancipation, then I saw the empow-

erment phase. Today's women are empowered. As far as politics stands, women still have to prove themselves a lot more than men to be considered worthy of the job. Political mentoring is essential to prepare women. We

can start with social activity and local-level positions that can equip women with the skills necessary for higher levels of public office and careers in regional and national politics. Women need support and encourage-

ment. I am happy to note that the activities of FICCI FLO are aimed at the empowerment of women at all levels."

Swetha Kesineni, TDP mayoral candidate for Vijayawada, with her work in

the political domains in both US and India, dwelt on the differential aspects of the two. She also spoke about her understanding of the current political climate for youth leaders.

Speaking on the occasion,

Usharani Manne, Chairperson, FLO Hyderabad Chapter and Founder-Director Polmon Group of Companies said, "It was enlightening to hear the views of veteran politician Rita Bahuguna on how we can carve out a positive enabling environment alive with gender equality in terms of access and opportunities, distribution of resources to ensure we create, encourage and empower women politicians. It has been 100 years since the first woman could vote. The number of women active in politics globally and in India is growing significantly. Mentoring and training programs prepare women for political work and enhance their skills. FICCI FLO is working to imbuing leadership qualities in women."

Manne outlined FLO Hyderabad's Incubation and Mentorship activities in collaboration with WE Hub & IIIT-Hyderabad's CIE. FLO Hyderabad's active participation in the Ministry of Textiles' Handloom Day promotion and Government of Telangana's 'Haritha Haram' program too, were brought to the fore by her.

SWEET NUTRITION WHICH PACKS A PUNCH

2020 is unlike any year we have seen and in parts of the country this monsoon is unlike any we have seen. Staying healthy is essential to staying happy; and while we are well versed with the power of the mind for wellness, or the ‘top-down’ approach as some call it, however, one shouldn’t underestimate the ‘bottom up approach’ either. With the rains comes the common cold and cough, flu and viral fevers, in addition we have COVID-19 to deal with as well. If you get sick, your immunity is lowered making you more susceptible to virus. Our mood, health, energy and reactions are heavily influenced by our second brain; our gut, which is a result of what we eat. Try these simple recipes to help get super charged with the nutrients you need.



OVERNIGHT CHIA PUDDING

I call this a pudding because it truly tastes like one. Chia seeds are filled with fiber, antioxidants essential fatty acids and good quality protein; add to this the humble curd and you have a good dose of probiotics, protein and fats. Fruit adds fresh sweetness and flavour along with phytonutrients and essential vitamins. Cinnamon adds flavour and you get its medicinal properties too—antioxidants and anti-inflammatory.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Chia seeds: 2 tbsp
- Curd: 6-8 tbsp
- Chopped mango: 3/4 cup
- Cinnamon powder/vanilla essence (optional): 1/2 tsp
- My seed powder (optional): 1tsp
- Coconut (optional): 6 - 7 thin slices

HOW TO MAKE:

- Mix all the ingredients together the night before and you are good to go in the morning
- The yogurt / curd mixture should be runny like a milkshake or dosa batter.
- Store it overnight in the fridge
- Before serving top with the chopped mango and the coconut slices

FLAVOUR OPTIONS

- One small banana + half an apple chopped small
- One small banana + half mango + coconut meat
- One small banana + 1 tsp instant coffee powder 1/2 cup strawberries
- One small banana + 1 tbsp cocoa powder + toasted almond slices
- Pina colada - Coconut Milk + Pineapple

HOT CHOCOLATE

- Chocolate has long been known for its antioxidant properties and magnesium. This helps fight free radicals, however one can't say the same for commercial chocolate which is mostly sugar. Using cacao gives us the myriad benefits this super food has to offer, in addition to how comforting it is to hold a hot cup of chocolate.
- This simple hot chocolate tastes like molten chocolate in a cup. Try this low calorie version every time you crave chocolate and you'll thank me. I prefer to use unsweetened cocoa powder as this helps control the amount of sugar you want to add. You can use any sweetener of your choice. If you just keep boiling this down slowly you get a chocolate sauce. If you want to make the sauce more indulgent, just add a tiny bit of butter at the end.

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Unsweetened cocoa powder: 1 heaped tbsp
- Jaggery (or sweetener of choice): 1 inch square
- Water: 1 cup

HOW TO MAKE:

- Mix the cocoa powder into room temperature water
- Mix till there are no lumps remaining
- Add the jaggery or sweetener and simmer on low heat for about 5 minutes
- Once it starts to boil down, reduce to about 3/4 cup
- Switch off when you think its thick enough
- Sprinkle with Chocolate Powder and serve hot



SUPER SEED POWDER

- Seeds are a nutritional powerhouse and a must include for everyone. Especially for vegetarians and vegans, due to their plant based protein and omega 3. They are a brilliant source of protein, healthy fats, fiber, minerals and vitamins. Each seed has its unique benefits which is why my recipe uses a mix to ensure we get a little of all the important ones. I grind the to ensure max absorption.
- How to use it?** Just add it to your overnight oats, atta dough or sprinkle on your curd. This is a versatile recipe you should make ahead and use daily for everyone in the family. Think of it as your multi-vitamin.

WHAT YOU NEED:

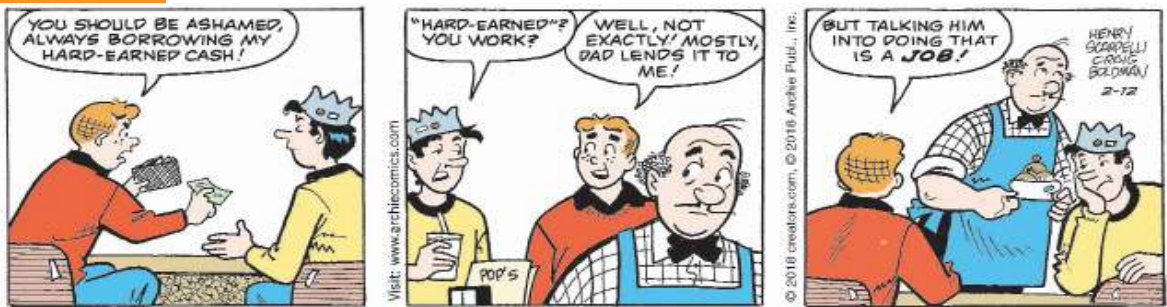
- Flax seed: 3/4 cup
- Hemp seeds: 1/2 cup
- Mixed seeds (pumpkin, sesame, sunflower, watermelon): 1/2 cup
- Cacao nibs: 1/4 cup
- Turmeric (haldi): 1 tsp
- Ground pepper: 1/2 tsp

HOW TO MAKE:

- Mix all the seeds
- Use the chutney jar of the grinder
- Ensure its completely dry
- Do a quick pulse, open and mix
- Do short pulses to reach a powder consistency. Do not over grind or it will turn into a clumpy mess
- Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



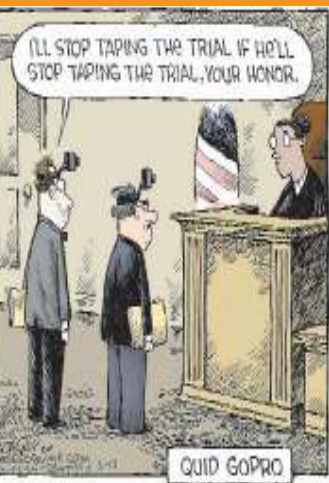
GINGER MEGGS



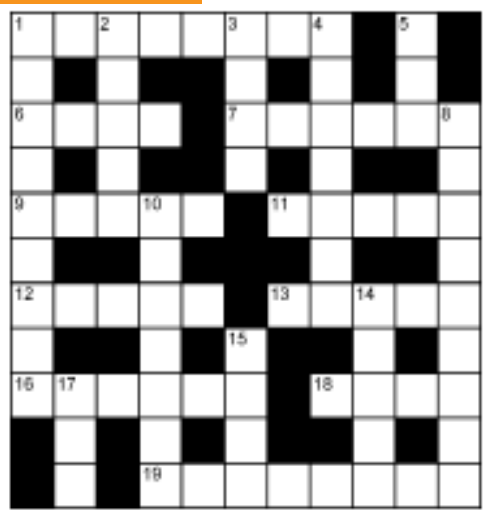
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

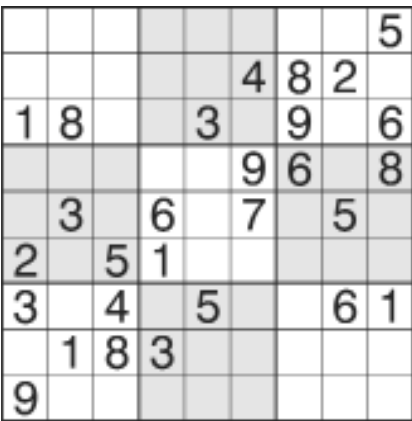
- 1 Blew up with a bang
- 6 Part of the foot
- 7 Baby cows
- 9 Beneath
- 11 Wool-covered animals
- 12 Melodies
- 13 A garden ornament like a small person
- 16 Leave
- 18 Wound someone with a pointed weapon
- 19 A person who controls the making of a film

DOWN

- 1 Completely tired out
- 2 Beg



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution								
4	3	8	2	1	6	7	5	9
9	2	5	7	4	3	8	1	6
6	1	7	8	5	9	2	3	4
3	5	4	6	7	1	9	8	2
8	6	2	3	9	5	4	7	1
1	7	9	4	8	2	3	6	5
2	9	6	1	3	8	5	4	7
7	8	1	5	2	4	6	9	3
5	4	3	9	6	7	1	2	8

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

Most Read NEWS

Museum on RK Narayan's fictional town opens

The Indian Railways has brought RK Narayan's fictional town of Malgudi to life by developing a railway station in Shivamogga in Karnataka, where the popular television serial 'Malgudi Days' was shot into the 'Malgudi Museum'. The museum developed at the Arasalu railway station was opened on Saturday and an inauguration was held with Union Minister of State for Railways, Suresh Angadi appearing via weblink. "Iconic TV series Malgudi Days shot in Agumbe, Shivamogga district comes to life with 'Malgudi Museum' at Arasalu station. Thank you Piyush Goyal ji for immortalising the legendary work of RK Narayan, Shankar Nag and for reviving memories of millions," Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa tweeted. The television series was directed by the late actor and director Shankar Nag based on the heartwarming short stories written by novelist RK Narayan. The stories were set in the fictional town of Malgudi and Shankar Nag decided to shoot the television adaptation in Shivamogga. The series was an adaptation of the heartwarming short stories set in the fictional town of Malgudi. Shankar Nag chose Agumbe and nearby areas in Shivamogga as the locations for the serial due to the rustic ambience.



Cops return wallet stolen in a train 14 years ago

A man, who lost his wallet containing ₹ 900 in a local train in Mumbai, Maharashtra, in 2006, was contacted by the police who said they have found it after 14 years. They returned part of the amount to him. Hemant Padalkar had lost his wallet while travelling in a Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus-Panvel local train in 2006, a Government Railway Police (GRP) official said. In April this year, he received a call from GRP, Vashi, informing that his wallet was found. However, he could not go to collect it because of the lockdown amid coronavirus pandemic. After the easing of restrictions, Mr Padalkar, a resident of Panvel in neighbouring Navi Mumbai township, recently went to the GRP office at Vashi where he was given part of the money. "My wallet at that time contained ₹ 900, including a ₹ 500 note which was later demonetised (in 2016). The Vashi GRP returned ₹ 300 to me. They deducted ₹ 100 for stamp paper work and said the remaining ₹ 500 would be returned after exchanging the scrapped currency note with a new one," Mr Padalkar said.



Russia unearths its largest ever color diamond

The stunning gem aged from 120 to 230 million years was mined in Arctic Yakutia. The precious discovery was made by workers of remote Ebelyakh mine on river Anabar in the extreme north of Yakutia, not far from shores of Laptev Sea and some 1,211km north-west from Yakutsk. The mine belongs to Diamonds of Anabar, part of ALROSA Group. The rough diamond is of deep amber colour, its dimensions are 47x24x22 mm. The decision hasn't yet been made as to whether it'll be sent to Alrosa's in-house cutting and polishing division, or sold rough. "Such a large natural color rough diamond is a unique discovery. 'Now, the stone is at ALROSA's United Selling Organization being studied and evaluated by our specialists. After that, we will decide whether to give it to our manufacturers for cutting or sell it as a rough. 'Of course, cutters in any country will be interested in such a diamond, as it has the potential to give several high quality polished diamonds," said Pavel Vinikhin, head of ALROSA's cutting and polishing division. The Ebelyakh mine has produced several brightly-coloured rough diamonds in the past several years. In summer 2017 alone a crimson, a pink and an intense yellow stones were found within a month.



Naked man chases laptop stealing wild boar

A naturist in Germany got much closer to nature than he bargained for after a wild boar ran off with his laptop bag. According to the BBC, there is a strong tradition of naturism in Germany, where it is common in the summers to strip in parks and other public places. The back-to-nature movement is known as Freikörperkultur - or "free body culture". One nudist, however, left fellow sunbathers in splits after he was filmed running after the laptop-stealing boar and her two piglets. The incident took place on Wednesday in Berlin, reports The Local. Photos of the naked man chasing the boar were shared on Facebook by Adele Landauer, an actor and life coach. She said they were taken at Teufelssee, which is a popular bathing spot. While sharing the hilarious pics on Facebook, where they have gone viral, Ms Landauer said that she had shown them to the nudist and had his permission to share them online. "I then showed the photos to the man, he laughed soundly and authorised me to make them public," she said. The post has gone viral with nearly 10,000 'shares' and hundreds of amused comments. In the comments, Ms Landauer revealed how the chase finally ended. The man "made some noise, then the sow dropped the bag," she wrote.



London dreams

Lewandowski scripts another dominating Bayern win over London club, this time against Chelsea to set up Barca clash

Bayern's Robert Lewandowski celebrates with teammate Leon Goretzka after scoring his team's first goal from penalty spot. AFP ■ BARCELONA

Lionel Messi scored a brilliant solo goal as Barcelona saw off Napoli on Saturday but they are likely to need something even more special from their captain to beat Bayern Munich in the Champions League quarter-finals. Messi's weaving run and finish came between an early Clement Lenglet header and a Luis Suarez penalty, also won by Messi, as Barca stormed into a 3-0 lead in the first half at Camp Nou. But Lorenzo Insigne gave Napoli hope just before the interval and an unconvincing second period from Barcelona

left them hanging on for a 3-1 win on the night, 4-2 on aggregate. "A second goal would have given them a feeling of euphoria that can hurt you," said Barca coach Quique Setien. "It's normal to get a little nervous." In winning the penalty, Messi took a heavy kick from Napoli's Kalidou Koulibaly and needed treatment. "It was a heavy knock," said Setien. "It will have to be treated but I don't think there is a problem." After finishing five points

behind Real Madrid in La Liga, Barca resumed in the Champions League with doubts hanging over the form of the team and the future of their coach. And victory against Napoli eases the pressure but the performance will not inspire confidence, even with Messi seemingly rejuvenated after three weeks rest. Napoli, whose own league season only finished last weekend, should have had the advantage of rhythm but a disastrous opening half an hour left them with too much to do.



Barcelona's Lionel Messi, right, embraces Napoli's goalkeeper David Ospina after the end of Champions League round of 16, second leg soccer match. AP

Koulibaly, linked with a move to several elite European clubs this summer, endured a particularly disappointing night. Yet Barcelona will have to improve significantly to match Bayern, who advanced after putting seven past Chelsea over two legs and are arguably favourites to win the tournament. "It's going to be very complicated," admitted Setien ahead of the quarter-final on Friday. Messi now has four goals in his last three games and in a one-off match in Lisbon, the Argentinian is capable of anything. But Bayern have their own trump card in Robert Lewandowski and a more complete team that makes them heavy favourites to reach the semis.

Leading 3-0 from the first leg at Stamford Bridge in February, before the coronavirus pandemic halted the competition, Bayern progressed 7-1 on aggregate. "We can be pleased, it was our first game for a month and it's not easy to keep the rhythm," added Alaba. "We have prepared for this for the last two weeks and you could see the result." Lewandowski netted a penalty with just 10 minutes gone at the Allianz Arena. Winger Ivan Perisic then doubled Bayern's lead before England striker Tammy Abraham tapped home a loose ball to give Chelsea brief hope. However, replacement midfielder Corentin Tolisso put the result beyond doubt when he fired home a Lewandowski pass with 14 minutes to go. "I am really happy with how we played over the 90 minutes, the first 30 minutes we shut Chelsea out," said Bayern head coach Hansi Flick. This was a world-class display from Lewandowski who added a late header to his pair of assists. He is now four goals short of



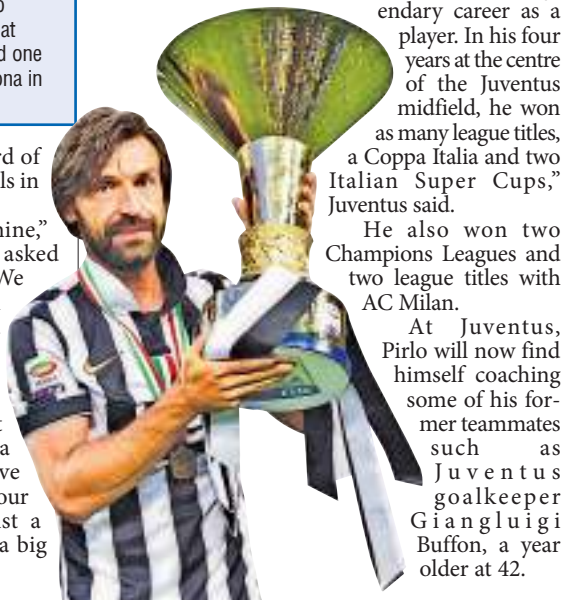
Champions League's top-scorer, bagged his 12th and 13th goals in Europe this season and played a part in all four Bayern goals in Munich on Saturday.

Robert Lewandowski was involved in all seven of Bayern's goals against Chelsea this season (3 goals, 4 assists). He was the first player to register 3+ goals & assists against an opponent in a season since Luis Figo in 2004/05 vs Roma. Lionel Messi has scored against 35 different clubs in the CL; two more than the next best Cristiano Ronaldo. Robert Lewandowski has scored 53 goals in 44 appearances in all competitions this season, finding the net in 36 of those 44 matches (82%). Lorenzo Insigne is the first Italian player ever able to score at least one goal at Bernabeu vs Real Madrid and one goal at Camp Nou vs Barcelona in the UCL history. Cristiano Ronaldo's record of 17 Champions League goals in 2013/14. "It's not a goal of mine," said Lewandowski when asked about Ronaldo's record. "We have a few more games in the knock-out round and I am just as happy creating goals as scoring them." The Poland star was also coy when asked about a rivalry with Barcelona star Lionel Messi. "We have to perform well and show our quality as a team against a good Barcelona side, it's a big game for everybody."

Pirlo is new Juve boss

AFP ■ TURIN

Former Italy and Juventus star Andrea Pirlo was appointed the Italian champions' new coach, just hours after Maurizio Sarri's sacking with the club promising a "new chapter in world football". Sarri, 61, leaves Juventus after just one season, a day after the Italian giants crashed out of the Champions League in the last 16 to French club Lyon. The 41-year-old Pirlo, with no previous top-level coaching experience, recently took over the Juventus U-23 side and arrives on a two-year contract. "The choice is based on the belief that Pirlo has what it takes to lead from his debut on the bench, an expert and talented squad to pursue new successes," Juventus said. "Today, begins a new chapter of his career in the world of football: from Maestro to Mister." Pirlo's swift appointment, a day after their Champions League exit, is again a bold choice for club president Andrea Agnelli. Other former players have turned to coaching such as Zinedine Zidane, Frank Lampard and Gennaro Gattuso, but Pirlo does so without experience. The former midfielder does, however, know Juventus and its players well after an impressive four-year spell from 2011 to 2015.



"Pirlo has had a legendary career as a player. In his four years at the centre of the Juventus midfield, he won as many league titles, a Coppa Italia and two Italian Super Cups," Juventus said. He also won two Champions Leagues and two league titles with AC Milan. At Juventus, Pirlo will now find himself coaching some of his former teammates such as Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, a year older at 42.

Verstappen wins Silverstone race

AFP ■ SILVERSTONE

Max Verstappen delivered Red Bull's first victory at Silverstone since 2012 on Sunday when he made the most of a superior strategy in sizzling conditions to beat both Mercedes and claim victory in the 70th Anniversary Grand Prix. It was the Dutchman's first victory of the season and the ninth of his career and the first time a race had been won by a driver who did not start on pole position in seven races since last year's Mexican Grand Prix. Verstappen owed his victory to a team decision to start the race on hard compound tyres while his main rivals all launched from the grid on mediums, the two Mercedes men struggling to manage tyre-wear throughout the race. During the race, Red Bull asked him to ease off, but he replied saying "I don't want to drive like a grand-ma" before the team relented.



BCCI may start domestic season from Nov 19

NEW DELHI: The BCCI is mulling November 19 as tentative date for start of domestic season with Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament but Indian players in various IPL teams won't be able to play first few rounds due to quarantine protocols in place. The delay in the beginning of the domestic season due to pandemic means that only Mushtaq Ali trophy and Ranji Trophy (Dec 13 - March 10) comprising of 245 games (across formats with 38 teams) will be played. There will be no Vijay Hazare Trophy, Duleep Trophy or Challenger Series this year and as of now there is no provision for Irani Cup also. "This is a tentative list that has been prepared and it has gone for approval of president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah," a senior BCCI official told PTI. While this is a draft schedule, it is being asked how the Indian players, who will return from IPL, will play since they will have to be in a 14-day quarantine as per Government rules.



"That's an issue primarily for the uncapped players, who would be with the squad and would like to play some cricket. Now even a player's team is knocked out before play-offs, he won't be back before November 3 and till Nov 17 will be in quarantine. "For those whose teams are in play-offs and may reach finals, they will have to miss the first few rounds in that case. But again this is a draft proposal and there could be some tweaks in it," the official said.

Root hails Poms mental strength after 'brilliant chase'

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

England looked all but beaten when they stumbled to 117-5 in their pursuit of a 277-run target set by Pakistan at Old Trafford but captain Joe Root felt confident about his team's battling qualities. "We knew it would take something special but after last summer it is very hard to stop believing. It's a real strong trait of ours," he said. Almost a year on from Ben Stokes' heroic batting display to stun Australia in the 2019 Ashes at Headingley, Jos Buttler and Chris Woakes combined to deliver a counter-attacking display in a 139-run sixth-wicket stand. Buttler (75) was trapped leg-before with 21 runs still required and the second new ball due, but Woakes (84) stuck it out, edging the winning boundary down to third



Chris Woakes returns to pavilion after he guides England to win in 1st Test. AP

man to seal a famous victory. "It was a brilliant chase. I couldn't be more proud of the

Stokes out of series for 'family reasons'

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

England's star all-rounder Ben Stokes will miss the remainder of the three-match Test series against Pakistan due to family reasons, the country's cricket board announced on Sunday. The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), however, did not specify the exact reasons for his pull-out. "Stokes will leave the UK later this week and travel to New Zealand. He will miss England's two Test matches against Pakistan at the Ageas Bowl starting on Thursday 13 August and Friday 21 August," the ECB said in a statement. He will be flying to Christchurch — where his parents Ged and Deb live. Stokes' father — a former rugby league international — was hospitalised days ahead of England's Boxing Day Test against South Africa in December last year, and has since been recuperating at home in New Zealand. of it, calculating risks, manipulating the spinner, brilliant innings, and Chris was magnificent too.



Akram criticises Ali's captaincy

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Fast bowling great Wasim Akram has come down heavily on Pakistan captain Azhar Ali for his decisions during the first Test against England, saying he "missed a trick quite a few times" in the visitors' three-wicket defeat here.

Akram was particularly critical of Ali's decision to under-bowl pacer Naseem Shah, who was used for just 13 overs out of 82 in the second innings while defending a target of 277. "It will hurt. It will hurt the Pakistan team and the cricket lovers in Pakistan," Akram was quoted as saying by Sky Sports.



"Winning and losing is part of cricket, but I think our captain missed a trick quite a few times in this game, as far

as his leadership is concerned," the former Pakistan captain said. Akram felt with England reduced to 117 for five, the need of the hour was to put pressure on Buttler, who was fighting for his Test spot, and Woakes, who averaged just 5.22 with the bat in his previous six Tests.

Serena fit & ready to play

LEXINGTON: Serena Williams on Saturday said that she is pressing ahead with plans to play in the US Open despite a wave of player withdrawals from the upcoming Grand Slam event over coronavirus fears. The 23-time Slam winner returns to tennis next week at the inaugural Top Seed Open WTA event in Lexington, Kentucky, relaunching her season after a

six-month hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Williams, who was one of the first players to commit to the US Open despite the pandemic, said her plans remain unchanged, adding that she was tentatively planning to go to Europe for the rescheduled French Open. "I see myself doing it all if it happens," Williams said when



asked about her schedule during a virtual press conference.

"But I am not planning for the future, as tournaments got cancelled I was just like, 'Let me just work on today and see what happens.'" Williams revealed that she had been practicing on her own court, built with the same hard-court surface used at the US Open. She has also stayed fit with construction of a home gym.

RANA AND MIHEEKA TIE THE KNOT IN A PRIVATE WEDDING



Actor Rana Daggubati tied the knot with fiancée Miheeka Bajaj in a close-knit ceremony held at Ramanaidu Studios, Hyderabad on Saturday night. With COVID-19 scare all around, the guest count was kept minimal with only immediate family and close friends of the actor and Miheeka gracing it.

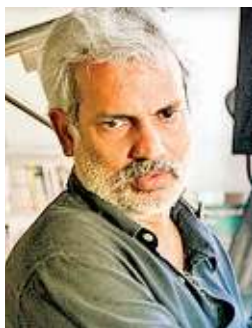
While Rana cut a dash-opting for a South Indian light gold *pancha* with a pattu border and a full-sleeved *lalchi*, Miheeka Bajaj looked glittering in a Anamika Khanna ivory lehenga, pairing it with a piece of heavy Polki jewellery, *matha Patti*, nose ring and traditional kalirey worn with the bangles.

Besides members of the Daggubati clan, including Rana's aunt Lakshmi who flew down from Chennai,

the Baahubali star's best friend Ram Charan and his wife Upasana, and actor Allu Arjun, were among the 40 guests who received invites. Sharing a picture with the bride and groom on his Twitter profile, Ram Charan wrote, "Finally my hulk is married wishing @ranadaggubati #miheeka a very happy life together!! (Sic)." Celebs like Akshay Kumar, Mahesh Babu and Nani too congratulated the newly-weds.


One notable absentee from the event was Venkatesh's eldest daughter Aashritha, who is married to Vinayak Reddy, the grandson of Hyderabad Race Club Chairman R Surender Reddy. Commenting on a wedding post of Samantha, Aashritha wrote, "Picture perfect! I'm going to Photoshop me and V (her husband Vinayak Reddy) in this at some point."

Madhie steps in for PS Vinod



on Sunday as Mahesh rung in his 45th birthday. In the poster, the actor is seen flipping a one-rupee coin and wearing a thread which has an 'Om' locket, as the title track plays in the background. The poster doesn't have the actor's face but for his fans, the 44-second long video was enough to make them happy.

On Sunday, Mahesh also participated in Green India Challenging initiative and planted a sapling

at his home in Hyderabad. Thanking TRS MP Santosh for the initiative, he posted on Twitter, "There couldn't be a better way to celebrate my birthday #GreenIndiaChallenge I pass this on to @tarak9999, @actorvijay& @shrutihaasan. Let the chain continue and transcend boundaries I request all of you to support the cause. One step towards a greener world! (Sic)." 



In a fresh development, ace cinematographer PS Vinod, who was initially signed on for superstar Mahesh Babu-starrer *Sarkaru Vaari Paata*, has made way for Madhie. The new poster of the film indicates the change. While there's no official word from the unit on what led to the change, reports suggest that Vinod's other commitments prompted him to exit the project on good terms. It is believed that with no production date

attached to the project despite it being announced more than two months ago, Vinod was left with no option but to consider other offers. Madhie, who has shot Mahesh-starrer *Srimanthudu* five and half years ago, was immediately approached and as he had not committed to other projects, he said yes.

Meanwhile, the motion poster of *Sarkaru Vaari Paata*, a joint production venture between Mythri Movie Makers, 14 Reels Plus and GMB Entertainment, was unveiled by the makers

Here's how Johaar landed at aha

Teja Marni's debut film, *Johaar*, which drops on *aha* this Independence Day, was initially acquired by prominent distributor and producer Abhishek Nama for an outright price after he saw the film. "The deal was signed before COVID-19 outbreak. But the scenario changed

post pandemic, with Nama later dissolving the agreement. Marni understood it. The director put his father's savings into the film and his father's business too was reeling under the effects of coronavirus, he started looking for OTT platforms to recover money. He initially landed a good offer from *Netflix* but as the streaming giant wanted to release it after a theatrical roll out, the deal couldn't move forward. With theatres continuing to remain shut and lack of clarity in sight, Marni later approached *aha*.

The think-tank of *aha* liked the film and decided to purchase it. Marni is happy with the way it is being promoted," said a source close to the development.

Featuring Subhalekha Sudhakar, Easwari Rao, Rohini, Naina Ganguly and Esther Anil in the lead roles, *Johaar*, inspired by real incidents, narrates how five lives are affected due to the construction of a statue. Filmed across Rajahmundry, Kakinada, Visakhapatnam and Varanasi, Priyadarshan Balasubramanian has composed the film's music.



Actor Naga Shaurya is the latest Tollywood celebrity to have participated in the Green India Challenge. He planted a sapling at the premises of his house in Hyderabad during the weekend before praising and extending his thanks to MP Santosh Kumar for thinking of such an initiative. He nominated actors Jagapathi Babu, Nara Rohith and director Nandini Reddy to take the challenge forward.

Haven't thought of working with my family in a film: Shruti

Actress Shruti Haasan says that working with her family in a film will not necessarily make it a great film.

Shruti is the daughter of veteran actors Kamal Haasan and Saarikka. Her sister Akshara is an actress, too. She says she has not thought of working with all of them together.

"I tell you why because that doesn't determine that it will make a great film. Everybody from the same family. That's absolutely not what's going to determine that at all," Shruti said.

The actress believes that a "great film is that a film chooses to be great and the people working on it".

She added, "I think films have a life of their own, which is really wonderful and then we kind of become a conduit to the energy and destiny of the film, and that can be with anybody. I don't necessarily think that it would be with my family."

The actress, who will be next seen in Ravi Teja-starrer *Krack*, recently signed Pawan Kalyan-starrer *Vakeel Saab*.



tollywood



Actor Satyadev 'humbled' with the acknowledgement to *UMUR*

As soon as it dropped on Netflix more than a week ago, Uma Maheswara Ugra Roopasya (*UMUR*) fronted by Satyadev and

directed by Venkatesh Maha, received acclaim from audiences and critics alike. With industry personalities too giving it a thumbs-up and praise especially going to the way Satyadev enacted the part, the actor, one of the brightest talents, couldn't have asked for more. Extremely glad with the reception that is coming his way, the actor, in a statement, said, "Thank you! Although I do say that phrase often I feel I have under-used it in the last few days. All the kind words and appreciation we have been receiving ever since the movie was released have not only been overwhelming but also brought us echoes of joy and delight that are truly endless."

Further stating that he is left with a feeling of gratitude, the actor, addressing the people who've embraced the film, added, "I'm humbled by this entire acknowledgement and the manner in which all of you have owned the film. All I am left with is a feeling of gratitude and a renewed sense of purpose."

UMUR — an official remake of Malayalam hit *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* — tells the story of an Araku-based studio photographer owner (played by Satya) who publicly vows that he will not wear his slippers again until he has avenged the humiliation that he has been meted out to by a neighbouring village resident who suffers from anger management issues. Maha has tailored the original to suit Telugu nativity.