

ANALYSIS 7

BAILOUT OR
BLOWOUT?

MONEY 8

RIL'S ASSET MONETISATION TO
BOOST CREDIT QUALITY: S&P

SPORTS 11

STILL HUNGRY
TO PLAY

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY AUGUST 11, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

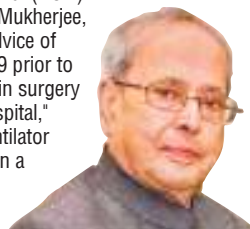
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RAJASEKHARA
IN JOSEPH
TELUGU REMAKE

Page 9

EX-PRESIDENT PRANAB MUKHERJEE
TESTS +VE, SAID TO BE 'CRITICAL'

Former President Pranab Mukherjee on Monday underwent a brain surgery at the Army's Research and Referral (R&R) hospital for removal of a clot, sources said. Mukherjee, who was unwell, was hospitalised on the advice of doctors and had tested positive for Covid-19 prior to the surgery. He underwent a successful brain surgery for removal of a clot at the Army's R&R hospital, sources told PTI. He is critical and is on ventilator support, the sources said. Mukherjee, said in a tweet earlier that he had tested positive for Covid.

SACHIN PILOT RETURNS TO CONG
FOLD, MEETS RAHUL AND PRIYANKA

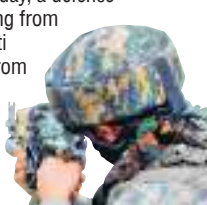
Former Rajasthan deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot will "work in the interest" of the Congress party and its government in the state, the Congress said on Monday after a meeting between the rebel leader and former party chief Rahul Gandhi. The two leaders had a "frank, open and conclusive discussion". AICC general secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal said in a statement. "Following this meeting, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has decided that the AICC will constitute a three member committee to address the issues raised by Shri Sachin Pilot and the aggrieved MLA and arrive at an appropriate resolution thereof," the statement said.

BCCI INVITES TENDER FOR IPL
SPONSORSHIP FOR 4-MONTH PERIOD

The new IPL title sponsor to replace Chinese mobile phone company Vivo will hold the rights for only a four-and-a-half-month period and the highest bid may not necessarily end up being the winning one, the BCCI stated on Monday. Vivo, which had a Rs 440 crore per year deal for five seasons, has suspended its partnership with the Board due to the Sino-India border stand-off. BCCI floated the tender invite for a new sponsor on Monday. Secretary Jay Shah announced a 13-point clause for submission of the bids from interested "third parties" and the winner will be announced on August 18. The last date for submission of bids is August 14.

PAKISTANI TROOPS TARGET FORWARD
AREAS ALONG LOC IN J&K'S POONCH

Pakistani troops resorted to intense mortar-shelling and firing from small arms on forward areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Monday, a defence spokesperson said. The heavy shelling and firing from across the border in Balakote and Krishna Ghati sectors drew a strong and befitting response from the Indian Army, the spokesperson said. In the first act of ceasefire violation of the day, the Pakistani troops opened fire on forward posts in Balakote sector around 10.15 am, the spokesperson said.

State enhances registration
value of land in urban areas

● Move may help govt rake in Rs 800 cr in additional revenue per year

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The cash-starved Andhra Pradesh government on Monday enhanced the value of land in urban areas by 10 to 30 per cent to net an additional revenue of Rs 800 crore per annum but kept the registration rate unchanged at six per cent.

Special Chief Secretary (Revenue, Stamps and Registrations) Rajat Bhargava said that revision of land values has been effected to reflect the reality as there were a lot of anomalies in the current rates. "We had to rationalise and equalise the value of land based on the nature and use in a vicinity. Only where there was a huge difference between the prevail-



ing higher market value and its substantially lower registration value, we increased the land rate by 10 per cent to 30 per cent to achieve market value correction," he said.

This would also protect the avenues for revenue generation "in a balanced manner", Bhargava said. He said the stamp duty and transfer duty structure on land and related

transactions had not been increased from the existing six per cent because of the prevailing economic environment, though many other states had enhanced the rates.

"We have focused more on rationalisation and simplification of numerous land rate slabs by rectifying various anomalies," the official said.

Non-implementation of revised rate on land converted from agriculture to other uses, plotted layout having rate per acre, different rates on either sides of national highway, state highway for lands of comparable or similar land use are some of the anomalies "that we have now sought to correct", Bhargava added.

3

New Industrial Policy for AP
unveiled with eye on investors

● State govt identifies 10 thrust areas to propel economic growth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Monday unveiled its new Industrial Policy 2020-23 identifying 10 thrust areas to propel economic growth, with manufacturing as the high priority sector that would create large scale employment.

The government has identified industrial zoning as a key focus area to ensure planned industrial development and provide a risk-free, investment-friendly environment for setting up and operating industries in the state with minimal impact on the environment.

"De-risking the investments is the cornerstone of the new industrial policy. We are introducing 'YSR AP One', a multi-faceted business enablement centre which acts as a one-stop resource and support centre for industries," state Industries and

- Petrochemicals, aerospace and defence,
- Automobiles and components,
- Machinery
- Precision equipment
- Mineral-based industries.
- Food processing



- Pharmaceuticals and biotechnology
- Textiles
- Electronics
- Footwear and leather
- Toys and furniture

Infrastructure Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy said, unveiling the new policy at the AP Industrial Infrastructure Corporation. 'YSR AP One' would provide handholding support (to investors) during pre-establishment and setup of industrial units, post-setup support, backward and forward linkages and access to market and new technologies among

other things, the Minister said. The major incentive a prospective investor gets, under the new policy, is reimbursement of State Goods and Services Tax for five years (capped to Fixed Capital Investment) for medium, large and mega industries linked to employment creation, the Minister added.

3

Apex court asked to expedite
hearing in three capitals case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a bid to step up the exercise on the formation of three capitals for Andhra Pradesh, the YSRCP government has filed a petition in the Supreme Court requesting expeditious hearing of the case. The Jagannathan Reddy government on Friday filed a Special Leave Petition in the Supreme Court challenging the AP High Court's interim orders granting stay on formation of three capital cities for the state. It argued that the High Court had issued orders without any valid reasons.

The petition was expected to come up for hearing in the Supreme Court on Monday, but because of the caveat petitions filed by the Amaravati farmers, the apex court did not take up the hearing.

As a result, the state government was forced to file the expeditious petition requesting that the



Supreme Court take up the SLP immediately and submitted the relevant papers to the court, including the gazette notifications.

It may be recalled that a three-member division bench of the AP High Court comprising Justice Rakesh Kumar, Justice Sesha Sai and Justice Satyanaryana Murthy on August 4 granted a 10-day stay on the implementation of the gazette notifications and asked the state government to file a

counter within 10 days.

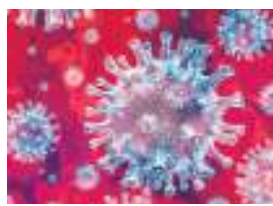
The High Court issued interim orders acting on a petition filed by Rajadhani Rythu Parirakshana Samiti (Committee of farmers to protect the capital). It ordered the state government to maintain status quo with regard to Amaravati as the capital city and not to proceed with any moves with regard to the shifting of executive capital from Amaravati to Visakhapatnam.

Less tests,
cases dip to
7,665 in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A reduction in sample testing by about 15,000 bore a reflection on Andhra Pradesh's Covid-19 daily tally as it reported only 7,665 fresh cases on Monday after reporting over 10,000 each for five consecutive days.

The latest bulletin said 46,999 tests, including 24,331 rapid antigens, were conducted in 24 hours ending 9 am on Monday as against 62,000-plus tests per day over the past few days. No reason was cited for the drop in number of tests.



3

Teams begin probing
cause of fire, lapses

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A day after the fire accident at Swarna Palace in Vijayawada that claimed the lives of 10 patients getting treatment at the hotel-turned-Covid Care Centre, investigations into the tragedy began in right earnest. The authorities have set up three teams to go through the mishap.

While the first team is investigating the arrangements made for the treatment of Covid-19 patients at Ramesh Hospital, the second team is probing the possible causes for the short circuit



that sparked the blaze. A third team is examining the fire safety norms being followed at the hotel taken on lease by Ramesh Hospital for use as a Covid Care Centre. Officers from various departments are part of the teams and began the task on hand from Monday morning.

3

3 employees
of Ramesh
Hospital
arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada police on Monday arrested three people in connection with the fire accident that claimed 10 lives undergoing treatment in Hotel Swarna Palace converted into Covid Care Centre by Ramesh Hospital.

Dr Kodali Rajagopala Rao, Chief Operational Officer, Ramesh Hospitals, Dr Kurapati Sudershan, General Manager, Ramesh Hospitals and P Venkatesh, Covid Care Centre Coordinating Manager, Ramesh Hospitals were taken into custody.

3

PMU launched to step up vigil
on village, ward secretariats

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagannathan Reddy on Monday launched the Pursuance and Monitoring Unit (PMU) call centre that will oversee the functioning of village and ward secretariats and help the government remove any delay in providing services. The Chief Minister also released guidelines for social audit besides launching

internet services to village secretariats in remote areas. The PMU Call Centre's main task would be to keep track of the deadlines in providing services and it will alert the CMO if any application is pending at any point.

The Call Centre will keep the official machinery on alert and will see that the applications are cleared and disposed of within the stipulat-

ed time. Starting with four services, the scope of the PMU will be widened to 543 services and will have 200 employees. During a review meeting here on Monday, the Chief Minister said that all applications for rice card, pension, Aarogya card, house site patta will be tracked by the PMU and the follow-up would be relentless.

3

AP making unnecessary fuss over projects: KCR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

An angry Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao and took exception over what he termed the "Centre following faulty policies and the AP State government making meaningless, baseless and unnecessary fuss over the projects being constructed in the Telangana State" and decided to present his point of view during the Apex Council meet-

ing to be held soon. The Telangana Chief Minister has also decided to place the complete facts before the Apex Council about the projects being constructed in the State with complete data and put forth strong arguments. It

was opined that a befitting reply should be given to both the AP State government and the Centre.

The CM also expressed deep regrets at the AP Government for lodging false complaints against the Telangana State. He also expressed his dissatisfaction over attitude of the AP Government.

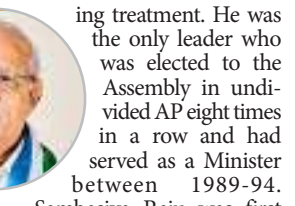


3

Sambasiva Raju, 8-time
MLA, passes away at 87

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and YSRCP leader Penumatsa Sambasiva Raju passed away on Monday due to age-related health issues. He was 87. Sambasiva Raju was suffering from health ailments for the past few days and was admitted to Apollo Hospital in Visakhapatnam where he breathed his last while undergo-



ing treatment. He was the only leader who was elected to the Assembly in undivided AP eight times in a row and had served as a Minister between 1989-94. Sambasiva Raju was first elected to the Assembly in 1968, from Gajapatinagar and Satavada segments eight consecutive times on Congress ticket.

3

India, UK ink new med-tech pact to fight Covid-19

PNS ■ LONDON

Innovative Indian medical technology (med-tech) start-ups were on Monday invited by the UK and Indian governments to apply for a Rs 5.6 million manufacturing support programme as part of a new bilateral med-tech partnership to combat Covid-19.

The programme involves the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) joining forces with the UK government to plug the gap between the demand and supply of ventila-



tors and essential medical equipment, crucial in the fight

against the deadly coronavirus. Selected start-ups, who have

until the end of August to apply, will be hosted at AMTZ's MediValley incubation centre, receiving financial, technical and infrastructure support necessary to make their equipment market-ready.

"I am delighted that this new med-tech programme takes our partnership even further. I look forward to seeing the life-saving solutions we can pioneer by bringing the best scientific minds from the UK and India together as a force for good in the world," said Sir Philip Barton, the British High

Commissioner to India.

Covid-19 affects every human being on the planet and respects no border. The need for collaboration on science and innovation between nations has never been more important, he said.

The envoy highlighted that the UK is already India's second-biggest research partner, with joint research expected to be worth 400 million pounds by 2021, with five new projects to tackle anti-microbial resistance announced last month.

3

Modi, the
undisputed
leader

2

Vasundhara
Raje factor in
Sachin Pilot's
'Ghar-wapsi'

5

'Rs 10k cr Fund
of Funds for
MSMEs to be
operational soon'

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Shravana & Krishna Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Sapthami: 09:06 am

Nakshatram: Bharani: 12:47 am

(Next Day)

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start

any important work)

Rahukalam: 03:30 pm - 05:05 pm

Yamagandam: 09:11 am - 10:46 am

Varjyam: 08:50 am - 10:37 am

Gulika: 12:21 pm - 01:55 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Abhikalam: 07:34 pm - 09:22 pm

Amritakalam: 11:55 am - 12:46 pm

VIJAYAWADA
WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly cloudy

Temp: 29/25

Humidity: 79%

Sunrise: 05:58 am

Sunset: 06:45 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated August 10, 2020 5:00 PM



While it's not easy for those in power to sustain their popularity, this phenomenon is alien to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

His image has remained unaffected even at a time the world is ravaged by a pandemic and the country's economy came to a standstill for about two months.

The global economic slowdown and flow of investments and exports hitting roadblocks left the Government in confusion on how to put the economy back on the rails. Moreover, the face-off between the Indian and Chinese soldiers in Ladakh that claimed the lives of 20 Indian jawans left the country in deep shock.

Some other Prime Minister would have buckled from sheer helplessness and left the people demoralised.

We are fortunate enough to have a Prime Minister like Modi at the helm of affairs during such a crisis.

Unfazed by the challenges, he has addressed the people now and then and boosted

MODI, THE UNDISPUTED LEADER

Sporting white robes, a shawl and white beard, Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks like a yogi and a sanyasi. His words infuse confidence and boost the people's morale. His presence in the PMO gives us a lot of reassurance, as revealed by the latest survey, conducted to gauge the pulse of the people

their morale. Further, he also took the CMs of various states into confidence. Modi took measures necessary for the good of the country and tried to streamline the socioeconomic systems in the country. Because of these measures, the people did not lose their confidence.

Sporting white robes, a shawl and white beard, he looks like a yogi and a sanyasi. His words infuse confidence and boost the people's morale. His presence in the PMO gives us a lot of reassurance, as revealed by the latest survey, conducted to gauge the pulse of the people.

In fact, 44 per cent of the people surveyed indicated that the country never had a PM like him, while over 66 per cent said that there was no worthwhile candidate for PM other than Modi for the next Lok Sabha elections.

Only 8 per cent of those

surveyed aspired to see Rahul Gandhi in the PM's chair. In fact, 78 per cent of those surveyed rated Modi as the excellent PM, while only 17 per cent gave an average rating to his administration. Compared to a survey conducted in 2017, it was revealed that the popularity of Modi increased.

Analysing this, the important reason emerges is Modi trying to project the identity of the country in whatever decision he takes and that the people are leading their lives with their heads held high.

Modi abrogated Article 370 and declared J&K as an integral part of the country. When

he announced the decision one fine morning, the Opposition was flabbergasted and rushed into the Well of the House to create pandemonium. But the people of the country, in sharp contrast, rushed onto the streets and lit firecrackers to celebrate. They described annulment of special status to J&K as the best decision of Modi.

When he performed bhoomi puja for the Ram temple at Ayodhya, the Opposition parties criticised him. But the people of the country offered aarti to their beloved deity. Therefore, the people voted the second most crucial deci-



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

sion of the Modi administration is to build a temple for Lord Sriram. Decisions of Modi to salvage the crisis-ridden economy of the country in the name of Atma Nirbhar package are regarded by people as a means to achieve a self-reliant and self-sufficient India.

The people are closely observ-

ing the decisions taken by Modi to develop infrastructure in the country on a large scale. Many appreciated the timely measures initiated by PM to prevent crores of people falling prey to the virus.

The people approved Modi's leadership and his guidance by sounding bells and lighting lamps during the lockdown. The people felt that they would have faced many more difficulties had Modi not initiated suitable action. That is why 77 per cent of those surveyed rated Modi's handling of the Coronavirus crisis as excellent and 77 per cent reaffirmed their faith in the healthcare system of the country.

Today, India is in a better position to manufacture PPE kits, beds and ventilators and

other equipment needed to keep the virus at bay. Moreover, the country is a supplier of emergency medicines to many countries. The country is competing with other nations to develop a vaccine. This is attributed to the PM boosting our morale.

As the country is limping back to normalcy from Covid pandemic, the Chinese aggression incensed the people. They stood behind the PM like a rock. The Opposition did not condemn the Chinese aggression and did not extol sacrifices made by Indian Jawans, but chose to criticise the PM, which was not to the liking of the people of the country.

In fact, 72 per cent of those surveyed opined that the country would be able to rebuff the Chinese aggression. This demonstrates the unflinching faith the people

have in Modi's leadership. About 69 per cent surveyed said that India would be able to teach a bitter lesson to China.

There is none to compete with Modi or question him in patriotism. When Rafale warplanes touched down in Haryana, thousands cheered their arrival and celebrated the event, it reflects their thinking pattern.

Within two days of imposing lockdown in the country, the Modi Government released thousands of crores in the name of Garib Kalyan Jojna and other welfare schemes.

Recently, the Centre released Rs 90,000 crore under its PM-Kisan scheme. There is no doubt that the rural contours will undergo sea change with the release of Rs 1 lakh-crore to strengthen agricultural economy.

The people feel that Modi is the only leader able to understand their problems and uphold their respect and country's identity whether it is at the borders or inside.



SCR-Vja Dvn manufactures 45,000 masks

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The South Central Railway, Vijayawada Division, has successfully manufactured 45,000 facemasks and 6,500 litres of sanitisers with own resources available to further strengthen its effort to fight the Covid-19 pandemic till date. Staff of Mechanical and Electrical Depots in Vijayawada and Kakinada collectively took the lead to achieve this big feat.

The staff of Electric Loco-shed, Diesel Loco Shed and Wagon Care Depot has come up with a productive way of making own sanitisers from available Iso-Propyl alcohol and other raw materials as per the WHO guidelines. A total of 6,500 litres of sanitisers were produced in-house by the staff of depots in Vijayawada so far.

Electric Loco Shed alone produced 5,500 litres of sanitisers and supplied it to all the staff during the lockdown. More than 45,000 masks, which are reusable and washable, were manufactured by the depots. Carriage and Wagon Depot staff in Kakinada and Vijayawada stitched 25,000 cloth masks with the material available and supplied it to various departments. Not only staff, but also their family members took part in this noble initiative to step up the production and to continue its fight against pandemic.

P Srinivas, Divisional Railway Manager, Vijayawada, complimented K Srinivas, Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer, and Dinesh Reddy, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer/Electric Loco Shed, for taking such a novel initiative by supplying face masks and sanitisers to the hard-working frontline staff of the Division on war footing.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 58,470 (10 gm)	₹ 670
SILVER	
₹ 75,150 (1kg)	₹ 1,350

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹173
Without Skin	₹196
Broiler at Farm	₹119

EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	345
VIJAYAWADA	375
VISAKHAPATNAM	375
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.00

State has emerged as global hotspot for Corona: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government should stop implementing lopsided policies as they were crippling agriculture, irrigation, industry and all sectors in the State, advised Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu.

Addressing the fourth in a series of press conferences here on Monday to create awareness against the government on three capitals plan, Naidu alleged that the ruling party leaders had only focused on Amaravati demolition and suppression of different sections of people in the past 15 months.

He asserted that the TDP had completed 72 per cent of Polavaram project but the YSRCP's bad policies led to obstructions and non-completion of this project till date.

"If works were continued,



this huge project would have been completed by 2019. The YSRCP was not spending a single paisa, while the TDP had spent Rs 64,000 crore by beginning 62 irrigation projects of which 23 projects were completed," he pointed out.

He deplored that Chief

Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had not held a single press conference till now to create awareness on Coronavirus prevention. As a result, situation became so pathetic that Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a global hotspot next only to America and Brazil, he pointed out.

Governor greets people on Sri Krishna Janmashtami

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan has extended his warm greetings and best wishes to the people on the occasion of Sri Krishna Janmashtami on Tuesday.

In a message, the Governor said that the festival of Sri Krishna Janmashtami reminds us of the eternal message of Lord Sri Krishna through the Bhagavadgita, affirming the foundation for building a harmonious society. He wished that this auspicious occasion would be a harbinger of peace, progress and prosperity and strengthen the bonds

Krishnashtami wishes by CM



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has extended his greetings to the people on the occasion of Krishnashtami, also known as Janmashtami, and said that the day is celebrated across the country with joy and fervour. The Chief Minister wished for good health and happiness to the people on the occasion.

of brotherhood, amity and harmony among the people.

Bankers all praise for YSR Cheyutha, YSR Aasara schemes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Major scheduled banks appreciated the State government for the YSR Cheyutha and YSR Aasara schemes, which are aimed at empowering women.

During a video conference with officials of CMO here on Monday, bankers assured to provide complete support for the implementation of the schemes and said that recent pacts with ITC, Amul, HUL and Procter & Gamble will bring in a new revolution.

Elaborating on the welfare schemes, officials said that the State government is determined to empower women

financially and asked the bankers to extend their support for the government initiatives.

Besides these, bankers have come forward to provide farm loans to dairy farmers, along with insurance facilities as the State government has made a pact with Amul for boosting the dairy sector in the State.

Principal Secretary to Chief Minister Praveen Prakash, SERP CEO Rajababu, MEPMA MD Vijayalakshmi, SLBC Convenor Brahmananda Reddy and bankers from Union Bank of India, SBI, Indian Bank and other officials took part in the meeting.

Follow Coronavirus protocol, TDP MP advises YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ruling party MLAs and ministers were violating the lockdown restrictions, organising large gatherings and moving across the State with no regard for the rules that were in place, alleged TDP MP Galla Jayadev. He lamented that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy continues to ignore wearing a mask during meetings and sought the YSRCP government to take strict measures to contain spread of Covid-19 across the State.

Jaydev lamented that Andhra Pradesh is now the global epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic as Andhra Pradesh, after Maharashtra, is reporting the highest positive cases in the country with registering of around 10,000 new cases daily for several days in the last two weeks. He stated that since the start of the pandemic, Maharashtra has



always been recording the most number of cases in the country, but now the numbers from Andhra Pradesh are rivaling them.

He said they cannot blame the people for not following social distancing and mask norms when the leaders and public representatives, who are supposed to set an example to people in following the Covid norms, continue to violate the rules since the start of the pandemic. He

● Jaydev lamented that Andhra Pradesh is now the global epicentre of the Covid-19 pandemic as Andhra Pradesh, after Maharashtra, is reporting the highest positive cases in the country with registering of around 10,000 new cases daily for several days in the last two weeks. He stated that since the start of the pandemic, Maharashtra has always been recording the most number of cases in the country, but now the numbers from Andhra Pradesh are rivaling them

demanding Jagan, ministers, legislators and party leaders to follow Corona protocol strictly.

Jaydev demanded that the YSRCP government take corrective action to avoid any future disruptions to the economy and the lives of the people due to the increasing Corona crisis.

New Policy will attract more investments: CII

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CII Andhra Pradesh on Monday in a statement welcomed the new industrial development policy 2020-23 released by Mekapati Goutham Reddy, Minister for Industries, Commerce, Investments, Infrastructure, Information Technology, Skill Development & Training, here on Monday.

D Ramakrishna, Chairman, CII Andhra Pradesh, in a statement thanked the Industries Minister for laying greater focus on MSME, end to end business facilitation and focusing on balanced regional development in the new policy. The policy laid emphasis on promoting skill development and entrepreneurship with 30 Skill Development Centres, which will be set up across the State, to help the industry and ensure the availability of skilled manpower.

"The policy is in line with CII recommendations to the

government. The advantage of the State in sectors like aerospace, defence, pharma, textiles, automobile, electronics and petrochemicals would attract greater investments under the new policy," he said.

Under the Ease of Doing Business, the policy envisages setting up of YSR AP ONE, a multi-faceted business enablement centre, to assist investors throughout the investment life cycle is welcomed by the industry.

"As a part of policy consultations with the industry, CII also suggested to the government to focus on more industrial clusters in the State, which was accepted by the government. The policy, which was framed with an inclusive development approach, would greatly help the development of all sections of society particularly encouraging women and youth entrepreneurs apart from job creation," he said,



G Sambasiva Rao, former President, AP Chambers, addressing the media (File photo)

+ Buy model" with low upfront payment and option to buy land post 10 years of successful operation. Among the other key features of the policy are clear cut incentive structure for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. One of the key features of the policy is the handholding during pre-establishment and set up of the unit.

G Sambasiva Rao, Former President, AP Chambers, said

this is one of the best industrial policies in the country. This policy offers special incentives for the women entrepreneurs belonging to SC/ST/BC and Minority communities in reserving 16.2 per cent and six per cent of plots in the APIC parks for SC and ST entrepreneurs respectively. This will ensure balanced growth across the 13 districts of the State, Rao said.

FIRE AT COVID-19 CARE CENTRE

Govt panels launch probe

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

A day after the fire mishap that left nine Covid-19 patients and another cured person dead in Vijayawada, official panels formed by the government launched a swift probe into various aspects related to the incident, including non-compliance of fire safety norms by the Swarna Palace hotel management.

The committees were also investigating whether the Ramesh Hospitals management, which leased the hotel and converted it into a Covid Care Centre, had requisite permission and adequate facilities to run it.

While the fire was suspected to have been a result of an electrical short circuit, presence of stocks of hand sanitisers in the reception area of the hotel literally added fuel to the fire. "The (hotel) staircase is an internal one and due to stack effect the smoke clogged the entire corridor, staircase and rooms. This made the Covid-19 patients unable to locate a safe place and they could not come out, resulting in the death of 10 persons," Director General of State Disaster Response and Fire Services Md Ahsan Raza noted in a preliminary report to the govern-



ment.

"As we have already established, the hotel is a major fire hazard. It did not even have basic firefighting equipment. Though there was a rear exit staircase, it was not opened when the fire broke out. This was a major lapse on part of the management," a senior fire official pointed out.

Some crucial documents and computer hard disks were confiscated as part of the investigation to obtain vital clues, a senior official involved in the process said. The two-member committee headed by Aarogya Sri Health Care Trust CEO A Mallikarjuna visited the scene of the accident as well the Ramesh Hospitals located at two places in Vijayawada essentially to take stock of the safety measures for the

patients.

A team also visited Swarna Heights, another hotel leased by Ramesh Hospitals for a second Covid Care Centre in the city, and inspected the facilities. Joint Collector (Development) Sivasankar Lotheti, who is heading a committee constituted by the Krishna

District Collector, conducted an investigation on the lapses, if any, on part of the hospital management in respect of safety norms.

It was also looking into charges of collection of exorbitant fee by the hospital management. "Prima facie we learnt that the Covid-19 patients were being charged exorbitant rates running into lakhs of rupees. We are verifying all records and also recording

"As we have already established, the hotel is a major fire hazard. It did not even have basic firefighting equipment. Though there was a rear exit staircase, it was not opened when the fire broke out. This was a major lapse on part of the management," a senior fire official pointed out

statements of the patients," a senior official said. As the committees have been asked to submit reports within 48 hours, they were going about their tasks at a rapid pace, roping in other officials to undertake a wider inspection of other Covid Care Centres and quarantine centres in Vijayawada and other parts of Krishna district, where about 425 people were under quarantine now.

On the instructions of the Collector A Md Imtiaz, teams led by the respective tahsildars also began inspecting the other Covid Care Centres being run in hotels by some private hospitals.

TDP asks SEC to order CBI probe into 'YSRCP lapses'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar back in the saddle as State Election Commissioner, the Telugu Desam Party on Monday demanded him to order a probe by the CBI into what it alleged were over 2,500 poll code violations by the ruling party, at the time of filing of nominations for the local body polls.

TDP MLC G Deepak Reddy appealed to Ramesh Kumar to order a CBI probe into these violations allegedly committed by the YSRCP activists at the time of filing of nominations for the local body elections.

Deepak Reddy said that the elections, put off by the SEC due to the Coronavirus spread, should be held under the supervision of Central observers with security provided by Central forces.

He said that if ruling party activists or leaders were not suitably punished for committing the poll violations, the SEC should not conduct the polls at all. The TDP MLC further said that a CBI inquiry would expose the YSRCP's election offences and this would surely lead to the dismissal of the Jagannathan Reddy government for its involvement in the serious lapses.



TDP MLC G Deepak Reddy also said that YSRCP leaders should face serious action for making degraded comments and even threatening Ramesh Kumar and his family members. He said that the YSRCP Government should be punished for not taking any action even though the SEC had transferred two collectors, two SPs, two DSPs and four CIs besides suspending one CI for poll offences

Deepak Reddy claimed that YSRCP activists committed serious irregularities by tampering with voters lists and also by changing reservations and boundaries of local bodies. He said there was a need to remove the "oppressive Raja Reddy constitution and bring back the Ambedkar Constitution" in the State.

The MLC also said that

YSRCP leaders should face serious action for making degraded comments and even threatening Ramesh Kumar and his family members. He said that the YSRCP Government should be punished for not taking any action even though the SEC had transferred two collectors, two SPs, two DSPs and four CIs besides suspending one CI for poll offences.



MLA Udayabhanu tests positive for Covid-19

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MLA from Jaggayyapet and Government Whip Samineni Udayabhanu was tested positive for Covid-19. He said that he was tested positive and appealed to everyone not to worry. The MLA released a video on Facebook on Monday.

The MLA appealed to the people not to panic if infected with Coronavirus, one should be careful by following social distance and wearing mask. "It is advisable to consult a doctor immediately if Corona symptoms appear and get tested. People who undergo Corona tests should stay at home until the report is negative." He further appealed to people, who recovered from Corona to come forward to donate their plasma and save others, who are suffering from the virus.

Private hospitals flouting norms, alleges Chief Whip

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Whip Gadikota Srikanth Reddy said that private hospitals are flouting norms and Ramesh Hospitals should be responsible for the fire mishap at Covid facility.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, Srikanth Reddy has flayed Chandrababu Naidu for drawing controversies over the fire accident and blaming the government. The MLA stated that the Chief Minister also included Covid under Aarogyasri for getting treated in private hospitals. However, private hospitals like Ramesh Hospitals have been violating the rules and charging exorbitant fees for treatment. Without taking any safety precautions they have been hiring private hotels and operating quarantine centres, he said and added that the government has constituted a committee for investigation and soon strict action will be taken against those responsible.

He said that TDP leaders kept mum over the accident only because the hospital belongs to their party supporter and the mistake lies on their end. He said that Dr Ramesh is a staunch supporter of Naidu, who even



Chief Whip Gadikota Srikanth Reddy said that TDP leaders kept mum over the accident only because the hospital belongs to their party supporter and the mistake lies on their end. He said that Dr Ramesh is a staunch supporter of Naidu, who even took part in the Zoom conferences of Naidu, and found fault with the government measures on Covid-19 control

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He asserted that the government under is putting relentless efforts in implementing Covid-19 measures and has conducted over 20 lakh tests. He stated that Andhra Pradesh stands as a role model to many States in taking effective measures for containment of virus and conducting a large number of tests. In this context, he recalled that Chief Minister YS Jagannathan Reddy has secured third place in the country as the Best CM for his transparent governance and effective implementation of welfare activities.

He slammed Naidu for politicising all issues and playing spoilsport. He stated that the public has been watching double standards of Naidu and the cheap politics he has been playing on decentralisation, opposing three capitals, and are waiting to reject him forever. He dared Naidu to give an open letter opposing the Kurnool as Judicial Capital.

Less tests, cases dip to 7,665 in AP

Continued from Page 1

The states gross testing increased to 25,34,304, leading to a cumulative positivity rate of 9.29 per cent as against the national average of 9.01 per cent. The fresh cases took the state's tally of positive cases to 2,35,525 while 80 fresh deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the overall toll to 2,116.

Also, 6,924 coronavirus patients got cured and discharged from hospitals.

After a total of 1,45,636 patients recovered from the infection, the state now has 87,773 active Covid-19 cases,

the bulletin said.

Only East Godavari reported cases in four digits (1,235) while all other districts stayed on a three-digit count.

Though it has been adding less number of cases, Prakasam district continued to report more number of deaths 42 in the last five days with 22 coming in the last two days.

Guntur reported 10 new casualties, West Godavari 9, Kadapa and Srikakulam seven each, Chittoor and Kurnool six each, Anantapur, SPS Nellore, Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram five each. East Godavari added four more deaths to its tally.

Sambasiva Raju, 8-time MLA, passes away...

Continued from Page 1

Deputy Chief Minister Pushpa Sreevani expressed her grief at the passing away of the former minister.

Remembering his services to the state, she said that he was a great leader who left an indelible mark in Vizianagaram politics. Sreevani said that Sambasiva Raju's contribution to the development of the district was invaluable. On July 29, former AP minister and YSRCP leader Koppuna Mohan Rao (75) passed away due to ill health while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Kakinada.

New Industrial Policy for AP unveiled with eye on investors

Continued from Page 1

The current lease and buy models for land allotment are being replaced with a composite lease-buy model, where an industrialist gets to purchase the land after successfully running his unit for 10 years.

"The manufacturing sector, as an employment provider, remains a high priority for the state. The government will undertake structural reforms to accelerate industrialisation in the state. We believe that providing the right facilities at the right cost and offering transparent approvals is critical to the success of the industrial sector," Goutham Reddy noted.

The thrust areas identified by the government, under the new industrial policy include food processing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, textiles, electronics, footwear and leather, toys and furniture, petrochemicals, aerospace and defence, automobiles and components, machinery, precision equipment and mineral-based industries.

under the government of Andhra Pradesh, dedicated to medical device manufacturing.

It has reserved 100,000 square feet rent-free manufacturing space for start-ups to facilitate quick commercialisation of successful solutions. It has been contracted by the government of India for the manufacture of ventilators and other essential medical equipment, such as masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits, etc.

MediValley is the incubation and innovation arm of AMTZ, funded by NITI Aayog, as Atal Incubation Council.

State enhances registration...

Continued from Page 1

The Special Chief Secretary said a very scientific approach had been followed using GIS maps, cadastral maps and superimposing Google maps with the latest land use maps provided by the urban local bodies. This was compared with the data available on the 'Meebhoomi' website of the state government. "We now have a better indexing of urban properties as per the prevalent land use like residential, house site or commercial. We also prepared a list of converted land and land where layouts and colonies were approved by the Town and Country Planning Department," Bhargava said.

AP making unnecessary fuss...

Continued from Page 1

"I, on my own, invited the AP State elders in the government, offered them lunch and discussed the matter. I have extended a friendly hand to the AP Government saying that both the states should construct projects based on the needs of the people. We have made our stand clear that there should not be any egos or Basins (River Basins). But yet, the AP State government had unnecessarily poked us and picking up a fight. The AP State government lodged baseless allegations and complaints without any truth. Let us give a befitting answer in the Apex Council to effectively counter the AP State government's meaningless charges and shut its mouth once and for all. We will create a situation where in the AP State government will never make such allegations in future," KCR said.

"The Central government has also faulted in its attitude on the Telangana projects. We are constructing projects based on our share of the river waters. It is not

at all correct to raise objections on the projects whose allocation of water was agreed upon before the formation of Telangana State, permissions given and huge funds were spent," the CM observed.

"The Central government is also raising unnecessary objections over releasing water from Srisailem to Nagarjunasagar. In fact, it is only after filling up of Nagarjunasagar project that other projects should be filled up with water," he said.

"After formation of Telangana we have embarked on redesigning and construction of the projects, based on the share of water, needs and rights of the state. The Telangana Statehood movement began against as dissatisfaction over projects not being completed despite the water allocations and discrimination being done on the Irrigation sector to the region," KCR said.

He reminded that Pranahita-Chevella project was redesigned to construct Kaleswaram project, Kanthanapally redesigned to

construct Sammakka Sagar, Rajiv Sagar, Indira Sagar redesigned to construct Sitarama Project, and Dummugudem is redesigned to construct Sithamma Sagar.

"In the first Apex Council meeting, AP government raised objections over the Palamuru-Rangareddy Lift Irrigation Scheme. The Telangana State government mentioned about the Machumari project taken up by the AP government. Then it was decided that both

the projects would continue. It is not proper for the AP to raise the same matter now. We will also once again explain facts about Palamuru-Rangareddy Scheme," the CM said.

Principal Secretary (Irrigation) Rajat Kumar, CMO Secretary Smita Sabharwal, CM OSD Sridhar Deshpande, Government's Chief Whip Dasayam Vinaya Bhaskar, State Rythu Samiti president Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, MLC Seri Subhash Reddy, MLA Surender, E-in-C Nagender Rao, Deputy E-in-C Anita and other officials were present.

3 employees of Ramesh Hospital arrested

Continued from Page 1

Earlier, Vijayawada city central MRO, P Jaya Sri lodged a complaint with the Governorpet police under whose jurisdiction the hotel comes.

In her complaint, Jaya Sri stated that Ramesh Hospital Vijayawada had signed an MoU with Swarna Palace for running of a private Covid-19 centre to treat Covid patients on paid basis.

The complainant further stated that the management of the hospital and hotel had knowledge about the electrical defects in the hotel and deliberately avoided repairs as it need huge expenditure.

The complaint also said that the management went ahead with opening the Covid Care Centre while being aware of the dangers posed by the electrical defects.

As per the instructions of Vijayawada police commissioner B Srinivasulu, DCP Vikrant Patil formed three teams and filed cases on Ramesh Hospitals management and Swarna Palace hotel management and arrested three people.

India, UK ink new med-tech pact...

Continued from Page 1

The new med-tech programme follows a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed recently between the UK government and AMTZ and aims to boost med-tech collaboration between the two countries by creating direct research and development linkages between UK companies and AMTZ's manufacturing and testing facilities, as well as to the wider Indian healthcare market.

AMTZ is happy to sign a memorandum of understanding with the British High Commission for encouraging

innovations in medical devices, particularly on those products that are necessary for fight against the pandemic, said Dr Jitendra Sharma, Managing Director and CEO, AMTZ.

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

The call for applications is open to all Indian start-ups, micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and innovators, including those at prototype, development, pilot, validation, early traction, and scaling stages.

It signifies a major development as part of the UK-India Tech Partnership, which was established in 2018 to bring together the best tech minds from both countries to deliver high-skilled jobs and economic growth as well as to collectively tackle some of the world's biggest challenges.

AMTZ is an enterprise

Teams begin probing cause of fire, lapses

Continued from Page 1

During the investigation key documents were seized from the house of Muthavarapu Srinivas, owner of Hotel Swarna Palace. While the search operation was on, the police did not allow anyone to enter or leave the house.

According to sources the police seized key documents related to the agreement between Ramesh Hospitals and Hotel Swarna Palace. The police and the fire officials

Authorities are investigating allegations of non-compliance with fire regulations, safety standards and possible short circuits.

Electricity department officials and fire safety officials inspected Hotel Swarna Palace and Swarna Heights.

Elsewhere, the authorities began collecting details on the Covid treatment conducted under the auspices of Ramesh Hospitals at Swarna Palace and Swarna Heights. The police and the fire officials

also began checking if the construction of the hotel was done as per the approved plan. District Committee also inspected the hotel where the fire accident took place at Swarna Palace.

Sub Collector Dhyan Chandra, District Joint Collector (Development) Shiva Shankar, VMC Health Officer, Deputy Electrical Inspector were part of the teams. A report is likely to be submitted to the government after the inspection is concluded.

Sonia completes one year as party chief amid crisis in Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sonia Gandhi completes one year as the Congress interim President in her second stint as the party chief with the Grand Old Party in turmoil following the high profile rebellions of Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot.

After Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the party is also facing a problem in Punjab where two MPs have opened a front against Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh.

Sonia Gandhi in her second stint is battling ill-health as well as the feuds within the party. She was unable to stop Jyotiraditya Scindia from breaking the party and joining the BJP which led to the fall of the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh. She could not intervene between the two factions and General Secretary in-charge Deepak Babaria could not bring about a truce between the two high profile leaders Scindia and former



MP Chief Minister Kamal Nath.

The same thing happened in Rajasthan where former Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot revolted against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, leading to a crisis in the government. There also the Congress leadership remained weak and could not broker peace between the two factions.

The third state where the Congress is facing problems is Punjab. The party is trying to downplay the rift and said that the media is trying to read too

The third state where the Congress is facing problems is Punjab. The party is trying to downplay the rift and said that the media is trying to read too much into it

much into it. The second stint of Sonia Gandhi came about following her resignation of her son Rahul Gandhi as the party President. A controversy erupted when some leaders demanded that the party should introspect on the reasons for its electoral defeats, to which leaders close to Rahul Gandhi raised questions over the UPA rule, which led to a war on the social media. Senior leaders had to intervene and say that they should desist from making comments on social media.

Rajya Sabha MPs where the issue of leadership was discussed, many leaders demanded that Rahul Gandhi should be brought back as Party President. A controversy erupted when some leaders demanded that the party should introspect on the reasons for its electoral defeats, to which leaders close to Rahul Gandhi raised questions over the UPA rule, which led to a war on the social media. Senior leaders had to intervene and say that they should desist from making comments on social media.

Venkaiah lays foundation stone for RS staff housing complex

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Monday laid the foundation stone for a Rs 46 crore housing complex for Rajya Sabha employees here and expressed concern over the delay in launching of the project.

Land in R K Puram was allotted for the project as early as in 2003.

The long period of 17 years taken for launching the housing project resulted in avoidable costs for the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Naidu, who is the chairman of the Upper House of Parliament, said during a virtual event.

He also referred to the social-economic-legal-administrative cobwebs that resulted in non-utilisation of the precious land resource and the several rounds of meetings he had held over the last two years with various officials to remove the hurdles in the way of utilisation of the land, according to a statement.

Naidu pointed out that if



The long period of 17 years taken for launching the housing project resulted in avoidable costs for the Rajya Sabha Secretariat, Naidu, who is the chairman of the Upper House of Parliament, said during a virtual event

the 8,700 square metres of land allotted for the Rajya Sabha Secretariat in 2003 was put to use in time, the secretariat could have benefitted significantly in the form of house rent allowance, besides recovering substantial portion of the

investment in the housing project by now. Referring to the huge annual rent of Rs 30 crore being paid by the secretariat for locating RSTV in the NDMC Complex, he said relocation of the channel to R K Puram would have also benefitted substantially.

BMC starts phase-II of sero-survey

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai civic body has started the second phase of sero-surveillance study in the city from Monday to assess the spread of COVID-19 and how many people have developed antibodies against the disease.

The survey will cover F-North (Dadar, Matunga and Dharavi), M-West (Deonar and Govandi) and R-North (Dahisar) wards, where a similar study was conducted last month, a Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) official said. The study will provide information about the spread of the infection and also throw light on herd immunity, he said. "The sero-surveillance study will give an insight into the spread of COVID-19 and development of antibodies. The paper work for the survey has begun from today," Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani said.



If everything goes as per the plan, the survey is expected to be completed in 12 days, he said. A serological survey involves testing of blood serum of individuals to check for the prevalence of antibodies against an infection. The sero survey conducted in the first half of July revealed that 57 per cent of slum population and 16 per cent of non-slum residents in the three civic wards had developed antibodies. It showed high proportion of asymptomatic COVID-19 infection in the city.

Rahul objections to draft EIA ‘premature’: Javadekar

New Delhi, Aug 10 (PTI) Those raising objections to the draft environment impact assessment (EIA) notification are the same people who took "big decisions without consultations" when they were in power, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said on Monday, hitting out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Gandhi had on Sunday tweeted that the draft EIA was a "disaster" and urged people to protest against it. Speaking to the media after an event to celebrate World Elephant Day, Javadekar said, "Saw reaction of some leaders demanding protest against the EIA draft. How can they protest against the draft? It is not a final notification. It was kept for public consultation for 150 days because of COVID-19. Otherwise it is only 60 days as per rules." "We have received thou-



sands of suggestions which we welcome. We will consider those suggestions. Then take a call and come out with final draft. So people jumping just on the draft is not fair practice. Those who want to now protest, during their regime took many of the big decisions without consultations. It is unnecessary and premature. I have mentioned it in my letter to (Congress leader and former Union minister) Jairam Ramesh," the minister told reporters.

"It (Gandhi's comment on EIA and demanding protests) is unnecessary and premature," Javadekar said. Gandhi had on Sunday tweeted, "This EIA 2020 draft is a disaster. It seeks to silence the voice of communities who will be directly impacted by the environmental degradation it unleashes. I urge every Indian to rise up and protest against it." The Congress leader has also called for its withdrawal, saying it will lead to further environmental destruction and looting.

Trinamool questions defence sector reforms

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A day after the Centre imposed restrictions on import of 101 weapons and military platforms, the Trinamool Congress on Monday sought to know if the country's defence industry has the ability to produce these items.

Senior TMC leader and the party's national spokesperson Saugata Roy said the central government should create a "proper roadmap" to make India's indigenous defence sector self-reliant.

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, transport aircraft and sonar systems.

"The announcement might sound good, but there are a few things that have to be looked into. The Centre has put an



embargo on 101 items, but the question remains whether our indigenous defence sector has the ability to produce those items. If not, what is the Union government doing to enhance its capabilities," the senior TMC leader said.

Roy, a veteran parliamentarian and former union minister, claimed that attempts have been made to undermine the country's ordnance factories over the last five years.

"On one hand, you talk of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) and on the other, you weaken our ordnance factories instead of strengthening them. This is unacceptable," he said.

Trump end run around Congress raises questions on his claims

■ BRIDGEWATER (US)

President Donald Trump's end run around Congress on coronavirus relief is raising questions about whether it would give Americans the economic lifeline he claims and appears certain to face legal challenges.

Democrats called it a pre-election ploy that would burden cash-strapped states.

"When you look at those executive orders ... the kindest thing I could say is he doesn't know what he's talking about or something's wrong there," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

"To characterise them as even accomplishing what they set out to do, as something that will take the place of an agreement, is just not so."

After negotiations with lawmakers on the next package of pandemic economic assistance



hit a wall, Trump used what he said were the inherent powers of the presidency to forge ahead on tax and spending policy that Congress says it is granted by the Constitution.

Trump asserted he had the authority to defer payroll taxes and extend an expired unemployment benefit, although at a lower amount than what the jobless had been getting during the crisis.

His reelection chances

imperiled by the pandemic, the president contended his orders "will take care of pretty much this entire situation, as we know it."

But the orders appeared to carry less weight than Trump promoted and cut federal relief spending by shifting more onto the shoulders of struggling states.

Critics said the actions crossed a legal line and fell well short of what is needed to help right the fragile economy.

"Paltry," said Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York, given the scope of the economic and health crises.

Though certain to further strain relations with Congress, the moves were framed by the White House as the president breaking through the Washington gridlock in order to directly distribute aid.

15% students enrolled in Delhi govt schools not traceable since lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Close to 15 per cent students enrolled in Delhi government schools are not "traceable" since the lockdown was announced and have not been attending the alternative classes conducted online or through phones, according to Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia.

Sisodia, who is also the Education Minister, said efforts are being made to locate these students either physically or telephonically to get them into the system.

"We are conducting full fledged teaching learning either online or through phones and teachers have been instructed to ensure personal involvement with each student. So far, there are maximum 15 per cent students who are not traceable and are not in contact with their schools and hence not attending



the classes," Sisodia said.

"I have been reviewing this personally and we have been able to trace few students, for others either they are not staying at the same addresses or their phone numbers mentioned in our records are not traceable. I have asked that School Management Committees (SMCs) should be roped in to track these students. There are certain students who have gone to places like

Uttarakhand and Bihar but are still connected with us and are attending the classes and doing assignments," he added.

Asked about a definite number of the students who have not been traced, Sisodia said, "On an average there are 4-5 students in every class who are in this category. Many of them are class 6 students and numbers for other classes are quite low".

There are around 15 lakh

students enrolled in over 1100 Delhi government schools. "We started conducting online classes for class 12 students from April 6 and sending e-learning material or activities to those enrolled in classes nursery to eighth over WhatsApp or SMS. The government has also provided a subsidy of Rs 200 for internet packages to all its class 12 students who had registered for the online classes," a senior Directorate of Education (DoE) official said.

The HRD ministry had last month asked states and union territories to ensure that the names of children of migrant workers who returned home during the COVID-19 pandemic are not struck off their school rolls. Issuing a set of guidelines, the ministry had also directed the states to prepare a database of children who have left the local area for their homes in other states or other parts of the same state.

Blast destroyed landmark 19th century palace

■ BEIRUT

The 160-year-old palace withstood two world wars, the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the French mandate and Lebanese independence. After the country's 1975-1990 civil war, it took 20 years of careful restoration for the family to bring the palace back to its former glory.

"In a split second, everything was destroyed again," says Roderick Sursock, owner of Beirut's landmark Sursock Palace, one of the most storied buildings in the Lebanese capital.

He steps carefully over the collapsed ceilings, walking through rooms covered in dust, broken marble and crooked portraits of his ancestors hanging on the cracked walls. The ceilings of the top floor are all gone, and some of the walls have collapsed. The level of



destruction from the massive explosion at Beirut's port last week is 10 times worse than what 15 years of civil war did, he says.

More than 160 people were killed in the blast, around 6,000 were injured and thousands of residential buildings and offices were damaged. Several her-

itage buildings, traditional Lebanese homes, museums and art galleries have also sustained various degrees of damage.

The Sursock palace, built in 1860 in the heart of historical Beirut on a hill overlooking the now-obiterated port, is home to beautiful works of arts, Ottoman-era furniture, marble

"In a split second, everything was destroyed again," says Roderick Sursock, owner of Beirut's landmark Sursock Palace, one of the most storied buildings in the Lebanese capital

and paintings from Italy — collected by three long-lasting generations of the Sursock family.

The Greek Orthodox family, originally from the Byzantine capital, Constantinople — now Istanbul — settled in Beirut in 1714.

The three-story mansion has

been a landmark in Beirut. With its spacious garden, it's been the venue for countless weddings, cocktail parties and receptions over the years, and has been admired by tourists who visit the nearby Sursock museum.

The house in Beirut's Christian quarter of Achrafieh is listed as a cultural heritage site, but Sursock said only the army has come to assess the damage in the neighborhood. So far, he's had no luck reaching the Culture Ministry.

The palace is so damaged that it will require a long, expensive and delicate restoration, "as if rebuilding the house from scratch," Sursock says. Sursock has moved to a nearby pavilion in the palace gardens, but this has been his home for many years alongside his American wife, his 18-year-old daughter and his mother, Yvonne.

Lebanon's justice minister resigns in wake of explosion

■ BEIRUT

Lebanon's justice minister has resigned in protest, the third Cabinet member to do so following last week's devastating explosion in Beirut, the state news agency reported on Monday.

Marie-Claude Najm's resignation on Monday came a day after the ministers of information and environment stepped down.

A Cabinet meeting is scheduled for Monday, amid reports that the whole government might resign. If a total of seven ministers resign, the Cabinet would effectively become a caretaker government.

The explosion, along with a severe economic crisis, has



been widely blamed on decades of corruption and misrule by Lebanon's entrenched political class.

The blast on Tuesday killed

SHORT READS



Mulayam's condition improving: Hospital

LUCKNOW: The condition of Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav who was admitted to a hospital in Lucknow last week is improving, the medical facility said on Monday. Yadav was admitted last Friday following an infection in the urinary tract. His test results for coronavirus were negative. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister's condition is improving and he is responding to treatment. Medanta Hospital director Rakesh Kapoor said. Kapoor had earlier said the 80-year-old SP leader also underwent ultrasound, blood and urine tests. SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary had said on Saturday that party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his wife Dimple Yadav had gone to the hospital on Friday night to enquire about the condition of the party patriarch.

Pakistani troops fire at border posts along LoC

JAMMU: Pakistani troops opened fire on forward posts along the Line of Control (LoC) in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir on Monday in violation of a ceasefire agreement, a defence spokesman said. The unprovoked firing from across the border started in the Balakote sector around 10.15 am and was given a befitting response by Indian Army personnel guarding the LoC, the spokesman said. He said the cross-border firing between the two sides was going on when last reports were received. However, there was no report of any casualty, the spokesman said. Officials said Pakistan Army personnel also fired mortar shells targeting Tarkundi village, causing panic among residents. On Sunday, Pakistani troops resorted to heavy shelling in Mankote, Shahpur, Kirni and Krishna Ghati sectors.

Maha: Two girls die after stack of plywood falls on them

THANE: Two minor sisters died after a stack of plywood sheets fell on them at a godown in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Monday. The incident took place around 9 pm on Sunday when the girls were sleeping in their father's godown in Shil area of Thane, police inspector C J Jadhav said. A dog jumped on the stack following which the plywood sheets fell on the girls, trapping them, he said. The girls, aged 9 and 11 years, were taken to a civic-run hospital where they died while undergoing treatment, he said. A case of accidental death was registered, he added.



SHORT READS



India's deepest Metro vent shaft completed

KOLKATA: The country's deepest underground rail ventilation shaft equal to a 15 storey building and an important part of the city's East-West Metro line was completed on Monday, officials said. The ventilation shaft, which is 43.5m deep, was completed jointly by Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC) and Afcons, a private engineering company. Such shafts are not only used to provide ventilation to the tunnels, but also for evacuation during an emergency. The evacuation shaft is located on Strand Road near Hooghly river, a statement said. "The Metro shaft has been constructed adopting innovative engineering techniques and methodology to navigate geological challenges and overcome any impact on Kolka's circular railway track along the Hooghly, Afcons project manager Satya Narayan Kunwar said.

Former CM mocks Centre's package for agricultural sector

BENGALURU: Former Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday ridiculed the agriculture package, saying the Centre has only re-announced its own scheme announced in May this year. Her tweeted, "Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had already announced the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund package in May 2020. Now, our... Narendra Modi has announced it again." He said, "We were seeing UPA schemes being rebranded but now their own schemes are being re-announced." The former Chief Minister was referring to the Rs one-lakh crore package announced to boost the agriculture sector. According to Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, the PM Kisan Scheme has benefited 52.50 lakh farmers in the state. Yediyurappa had said the first instalment of Rs 1,049 crore would be credited to farmers' accounts.

Raped minor commits suicide in Karnataka's Dharwad district

BENGALURU: A minor girl committed suicide after allegedly being raped in a village in North Karnataka recently, police said on Monday. According to police, the incident occurred when the girl, aged 13-14 years and studying in the eighth standard, was on her way to a temple on July 30 at Bogur in Dharwad rural. The girl returned home and reported the matter to her mother. Later, she consumed poison, police said. She was rushed to a hospital but could not be saved. The accused has already been arrested, they added. State Minister for Medium and Large Industries, Jagadish Shettar has promised justice to the family. "An incident of rape and death of a minor girl has taken place recently in village Bogur in Dharwad district. I met the family of the victim and consoled them," the minister said in a tweet.

Vasundhara Raje factor in Sachin Pilot's 'Ghar-wapsi'

PNS ■ JAIPUR

In the Sachin Pilot-Congress truce after a month-long rebel crisis, a key role was played by the BJP's reality in Rajasthan and the quiet power of its former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia. Sachin Pilot's meeting with the Gandhis for the first time since his revolt set the stage for reconciliation just four days before a likely test of strength in the Rajasthan assembly.

The BJP, accused by the Congress of snatching power in states by luring its MLAs, officially kept a distance from the Ashok Gehlot government's crisis, calling it the Congress's "internal problem".

The BJP's Rajasthan chief Satish Poonia tweeted: "We had been saying all along - it is the Congress's internal fight and it was needlessly blaming BJP. Poor Rajasthan had to watch Congress's 31-day Ramilla...sister Priyanka Gandhi and brother Rahul Gandhi woke up late..." He added: "Now that your crisis is resolved, apologise to the people and do some work."

Gehlot accused the BJP of collaborating with his estranged for-



mer deputy, Sachin Pilot, to stage a coup. The Congress even accused Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat of a role in bribing Congress MLAs and filed a complaint against him based on audio tapes that emerged online.

The BJP's hand, said the Congress, was clear also in the fact that Sachin Pilot's 18 rebels were staying in resorts in Haryana. When a Special Operations Group team from Rajasthan came searching for rebel MLAs accused of deal-

making, they were blocked by a large team of Haryana policemen. Sources say secret meetings of rebels with BJP leaders were

also allowed in buildings officially designated as coronavirus quarantine centres.

But the BJP officially maintained it had nothing to do with the Congress crisis, and would not push for a test of strength. Sources say the party had no choice, given the loud silence of its Rajasthan powerhouse Vasundhara Raje Scindia.

Vasundhara Raje reportedly refused to fall in with any plan to join forces with the rebels to pull down the Congress government.

The BJP was forced to cancel a meeting which she was to attend but reportedly did not plan to.

The BJP's Rajasthan chief Satish Poonia tweeted: "We had been saying all along - it is the Congress's internal fight and it was needlessly blaming BJP. Poor Rajasthan had to watch Congress's 31-day Ramilla... sister Priyanka Gandhi and brother Rahul Gandhi woke up late..." He added: "Now that your crisis is resolved, apologise to the people and do some work"

In the past month, since rebellion broke out in the Congress, Raje posted just one tweet on July 18, saying the people of Rajasthan were paying the price for the Congress crisis. Sources say without the former CM's cooperation, the BJP could do little. Rajasthan is the rare state where regional leaders enjoy more influence over MLAs than the central leadership. The BJP has 72 MLAs in the state and 45 of them are extremely loyal to Raje.

India's Covid death rate down to 2%, decreasing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the total coronavirus patients across the country crossed the 22-lakh mark, India's fatality rate dropped to its lowest two per cent in the last 24 hours whereas the recoveries reached a new peak of over 15 lakh so far.

The latest data shared by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) reveals that the current Case Fatality Rate (CFR) is two per cent and is steadily declining. The report came at a time when the country tested a record over 1,000 deaths in a single day, pushing the death toll so far to 44,386.

The central government said the fatality rate is at its lowest and India is among the countries with lowest fatalities.

As per the Health Ministry, the coordinated efforts of the Centre and states/Union Territories on early detection through aggressive testing and efficient clinical management of hospitalised cases have shown results with continuously decreasing CFR. "Early identification of cases has also led to steep fall in percentage of active cases," it said.



62,064 new Covid cases take tally past 22 lakh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's novel coronavirus tally crossed the 22-lakh mark on Monday with 62,064 new cases, while the recoveries surged to over 15.35 lakh, the Health Ministry said. The death toll from the pathogen climbed to 44,386 with 1,007 more fatalities, according to the ministry data. There are 6,34,945 active cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The total coronavirus cases now stands at 22,15,074, it said. India's COVID-19 recoveries have

crossed the "historic peak" of 1.5 million with the recovery of 15,35,743 patients that was possible because of the policy of "testing aggressively, tracking comprehensively and treating efficiently", the Health Ministry said in a statement. "Better ambulance services, focus on standard of care and use of non-invasive oxygen have given the desired results," the ministry said. With the highest-ever single-day recoveries of 54,859 in the last 24 hours, the recovery rate has scaled another high of almost 70 per cent, it said.

Rlys clamps down on agencies recruitment ads

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Railways has initiated action against a private agency for issuing a fake advertisement for over 5000 posts in the national transporter. The advertisement printed in a prominent newspaper said the Railways was seeking applications for 5,285 posts in eight categories.

"It has come to notice of Ministry of Railways that one organization by name of 'Avestran Infotech' having website address 'http://www.avestran.in' www.avestran.in has given an advertisement in a prominent newspaper on 8th August 2020 calling for applications against a total number of 5,285 number of post in eight categories on outsourcing

basis on Indian Railways on 11 year contract. The applicants have been asked to deposit Rs.750/- as online fee and last date for receipt of applications has been mentioned as September 10, 2020.

"It may be informed to all that advertisement for any Railway recruitment is always done by Indian Railways ONLY. No private agency has been authorized to do the same. The said issuance of said advertisement in question is illegal," the ministry said in a statement. The ministry said railways will initiate strict action against the agency. It also clarified that the recruitment of various categories of Group 'C' and erstwhile Group 'D' posts on Indian Railways is presently catered.



This academic year will not be 'zero year', hopeful of conducting exams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The current academic year will not be a "zero year" for colleges and higher education institutions, Education Ministry officials told a parliamentary panel Monday, indicating that they hoped to conduct exams by the end of the session, sources said.

They also told the panel that online classes are only meant for school children above Class 3 and only limited number of online classes are allowed for those up to 8th standard.

However, panel members raised questions on the viability of online classes for poor families who cannot afford mobile phones or laptop computers, the sources said.

A majority of poor families, especially in rural areas, may have one mobile phone among



the members. How would their kids get access to online education, the MPs asked the officials.

Panel Chairman Vinay Sahasrabudhe suggested that children can be taught via community radio and transistor, which is cost-effective compared to mobile phones, the sources said.

A majority of poor families, especially in rural areas, may have one mobile phone among

suggested creation of a "big question bank" of all subjects for students on the basis of which questions should be asked whenever the exams are held for this academic session.

Quoting Sahasrabudhe, the sources said it would solve the exam management-related issues and ease the anxiety and fear among students amid this coronavirus crisis.

TN CM directs officials to bring back bodies of students from Russia

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Four students from Tamil Nadu pursuing medical education in Russia drowned in a river in that country and directions have been issued to bring back their remains back home at the earliest, Chief Minister K Palaniswami said on Monday.

He said he has directed senior government officials to immediately get in touch with the External Affairs Ministry and the Indian embassy in Russia, and arrange for bringing back the bodies of the four who drowned in the Volga river. The victims were studying



at the Volgograd State Medical University and died due to the 'current' in the river, he said in a statement here.

The four students are Mohammed Ashiq of Tiruppur district, R Vignesh (Cuddalore), Manoj Anand (Salem) and Stephen (Chennai).

Inquiry on in 63 moons complaint against Chidambaram: CBI tells HC

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The CBI told the Bombay High Court on Monday that it was conducting preliminary enquiry into the complaint filed by 63 moons technologies limited against former Union finance minister P Chidambaram and two other bureaucrats alleging abuse of official powers. CBI advocate Hiten Venegavkar told a division bench of Justices S S Jadhav and N J Jamadar that since the allegations pertain to the year 2012-2013, the agency has to recover relevant documents which will take some time.

The court was hearing a petition filed by the Jignesh Shah-promoted company, earlier known as Financial Technologies Ltd, questioning the 'delayed' action by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against senior Congress leader



Chidambaram and bureaucrats K P Krishnan and Ramesh Abhishek. Abhishek was chairman of the Forward Markets Commission and Krishnan was an additional secretary and joint secretary in the Ministry of Finance when Chidambaram was the finance minister.

We (CBI) are conducting preliminary enquiry. Since the case dates back to the year 2012 and

2013, we need to apply our mind and verify the allegations levelled and recover all relevant documents, Venegavkar said.

He said the complainant (63 moons technologies) was summoned by the CBI for recording of statement and the firm was asked to submit further evidence in support of its allegations.

"However, till date CBI has not received any further evidence or documents from the petitioner company, Venegavkar said.

Advocate Aabad Ponda, appearing for 63 moons technologies, refuted this argument and said all relevant documents have already been submitted to the CBI. "A preliminary enquiry, as per provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, has to be completed within a period of four months. In this case, the preliminary enquiry was initiated in February.

Yogi posts official to monitor pvt hospitals

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday asked the Medical Education Department to post an official for monitoring at each private medical college hospital treating Covid patients. According to a statement, the CM during a review meeting at his residence here said the private medical colleges where COVID-19 hospitals have been established, an officer should be appointed by the department for "monitoring and ensuring quality treatment to patients". He also asked officials to increase the number of beds in hospitals. He directed to appoint two special secretary-level officers each to support the district magistrates of Lucknow and Kanpur in tackling coronavirus outbreak

Rhea, family appear before ED again for questioning in money laundering case

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday began a fresh round of questioning of actor Rhea Chakraborty and her family members in connection with its probe in a money laundering case linked to the death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Rhea, her brother Showik and father Indrajit Chakraborty reported at the office of the central probe agency in the Ballard Estate area around 11 am in response to their scheduled summons for Monday, officials said.

Later, Shruti Modi, the business manager of Rhea and Rajput, also reported at the ED office. All the four were questioned by the agency on August 7 too. Post 2 PM, Rajput's friend and roommate Siddharth Pithani also arrived



at the ED office and his statement is expected to be recorded too.

Pithani, an IT professional, had told various news channels that he was present in the Bandra flat on June 14 when the 34-year-old actor hanged himself.

Called 'Buddha' by Rajput, he is stated to be living with Rajput for about a year, and

had earlier recorded his statement with the Mumbai Police as part of their accidental death report (ADR) probe in the case. Among those questioned earlier, Showik has been grilled for about 22 hours till now. He had left the ED office around 6:30 am on Sunday after an overnight questioning session that began around noon on Saturday.

SC to hear tomorrow pleas on merger of 6 BSP MLAs with Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday said it would tomorrow hear the petitions filed on the issue relating to merger of six BSP MLAs with the Congress in Rajasthan last year.

The apex court was hearing a plea filed by a BJP MLA who has challenged the Rajasthan High Court order which had refused to stay the functioning as Congress legislators of six BSP MLAs who after election to the assembly merged with the ruling party in the state.

A bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra said that appeal filed by BJP MP Madan Dilawar would be heard along with a separate plea filed by the six MLAs. In their plea, these six MLAs have requested the apex court to transfer to itself



Dilawar's plea pending in the high court seeking their disqualification for allegedly violating the party whip.

Dilawar has challenged in the apex court the August 6 order of a division bench of high court which had disposed of his plea against the order of a single judge, who had refused to

stay the functioning of these six MLAs as Congress legislators. During the hearing conducted on Monday through video-conferencing, senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Dilawar, told the apex court that in September last year the Assembly Speaker had passed an order accepting the merger.

More than 500 people, 100 elephants die every year due to conflict with each other: Officials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 500 people and 100 elephants die every year due to conflict with each other, officials of the environment ministry said on Monday. Releasing the figures at an event ahead of World Elephant Day on August 12, the officials said interactions between humans and elephants have led to the death of both.

As per the last census conducted in 2017, India is home to 30,000 elephants.

Addressing the event, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said elephant conservation is vital as it balances the ecosystem. Elephants have to be kept in forests for which fodder and water augmentation programme has been initiated, the minister said, adding that by next year results will start showing.



Speaking about the significance of elephants, Union Minister of State for Environment Babul Supriyo condemned the May 27 incident in Kerala where a pregnant elephant died after consuming a firecracker-filled pineapple. "We must protect our elephants. The Kerala incident was inhuman and such criminal acts will be dealt with. The ministry and states have zero toler-

ance approach to such activities and I am sure exemplary punishment will be given to the culprit," Supriyo said.

Giving out the figures of deaths due to human-elephant conflict, Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife) Soumitra Dasgupta said hundreds of elephants migrate and come in contact with human beings. "More than 500 human and 100

Elephants have to be kept in forests for which fodder and water augmentation programme has been initiated, the minister said, adding that by next year results will start showing

elephant deaths take place each year due to the conflict. In last five years, the ministry has unleashed a series of activities for the conservation of elephants. More elephant corridors have been identified, budget has been increased by 30 per cent and several committees have also been formed," said Dasgupta.

No quarantine for air passengers visiting Assam

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Any air traveller to Assam who will depart from the state within 72 hours of his arrival will not have to undergo quarantine provided his Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) result at the airport is negative, an order issued by the state government said on Monday. The passenger will also have to provide a copy of his return ticket indicating his departure within 72 hours, the order issued by the state Health Department's Principal Secretary Samir Sinha said. The visitor shall provide swab samples for Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) immediately on arrival and if the result is negative, then he will be allowed to proceed.

Needed, full-time chief

The Congress needs to conduct inner party elections and get a president though it has saved Rajasthan



If indeed Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi, who met rebel Congress leader Sachin Pilot, have worked out a rapprochement in the troubled Rajasthan Congress, then it is their first decisive move, indicating a generational shift. Their efforts have at least built a tenuous bridge between the old guard and the younger breed. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot climbed down, as he was told sternly that Pilot needs to be reinstated and given space. This is a high stake game for Rahul if he sees himself as reclaiming the Congress fortunes with his peers, who are getting disgruntled, impatient and sometimes even impervious to the need for accommodating experience.

But then he has to play the part proactively and wisely, not from the shadows as mother Sonia Gandhi will continue to remain interim president for a little longer. He has to have a strategy, rather than running a lone warrior race on social media. Sure the seniors have fattened up their turfs and positions while letting the Gandhis take the credit or blame publicly as the case may have been, but in securing their interests, they have respectively developed the party's matrix creditably and have a depth of experience in political manoeuvring. But they are status quoist, preferring continuity into their sunset years in ways that they understand, choosing fiefdoms over the larger national revival of the party. The fact is the Congress has lost the hunger to be a national alternative in the changed political template of the times that is disruptive, dynamic, performance-driven, result-oriented and avowedly authoritarian. The party looks rudderless and hopeless in comparison. The younger breed, Rahul included, now want to leave their mark, and reclaim some respectability for the party and as Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot have shown, can live down their entitlements, work the ground and deliver results. Ambition is not a bad thing and maybe the propeller the Congress needs, provided it creates a *margdarshak*-like structure for the old hawks the way BJP has. Besides, the elders forget that they were mavericks once and should let the fresh winds blow in, failed as they have in arresting the party's erosion.

But as mentioned before, the party first needs a strategy. And must speak in a united voice. To give the elders their due, they are right in suggesting that Rahul stop the personal attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is understandable why Rahul, the nation's butt of ridicule courtesy the BJP's online army, and the recipient of digs about his family legacy, is tempted to make it personal. But he is ending up making Modi look like a victim of dynastic snobbery, something that cost the Congress the Lok Sabha election last year. Despite India's unwieldy pandemic and the mishandling of the Chinese incursion in Ladakh, Modi's personality cult remains unaffected. Attacking him is proving counter-productive for Rahul. The Congress needs to work on issue-based campaigns at a pan-India level, be it of economic slowdown, joblessness or the youth. Only when issues are made bigger than the personality will the Congress be able to force a serious discourse beyond the muscularity of Modi or the triumphalism of religiosity. Let's face it, Rahul cannot win a personality war but can present a cogent alternative plan that may yet find takers. Instead of interviewing experts and luminaries, he should get their inputs to prepare this agenda. Besides, while team Rahul is brimming with ideas, they are not tested in the crucible of the political laboratory and they would need seniors in scripting party responses rather than running down past UPA Governments. Rahul should at least insist upon a disciplined public posturing. While he did try to appear responsible and principled by withdrawing from public life after the Lok Sabha rout, the fact is this move made him look like an escapist. If the high command thought this would lead to a yearning among partymen to get him back, that's not the case. Perceiving the party as a rudderless ship, many grassroots workers and members have just migrated to other parties, be it the BJP or federal outfits, to barter their worth. If he was really keen on a rebuild, he should have stuck through the worst. Something that sister Priyanka at least attempted in Uttar Pradesh. Most importantly, if he really wants to be a reformist and take everybody along, he should usher in democracy within by calling for the Congress Working Committee elections at the earliest. There should be a permanent president and not a stopgap one as MP Shashi Tharoor has indicated. Rahul's problem is that he knows that the chair is his; every Congressman would acquiesce to Sonia's wishes on this matter, even his peers. That probably fuels his complacency or stubbornness, depending on which side of the prism you want to look from. But the Bihar and the Assembly elections aren't too far away. So the Congress needs campaign planks than ego wars. And Rahul must engage with other federal front leaders on his own steam than leave that to his mother. The Congress has already frittered away too much time and talk. Now it is action or perish. And the *baba log*, too, are greying.

Atmanirbhar raksha

Shooting from the hip or shooting oneself in the foot? Is a ban on defence items enough to make India self-reliant?



India is one of the world's largest buyers of defence equipment. It is also unique among big nations with large armed forces to have an abysmally small domestic arms industry. The country imports everything — from frontline fighter aircraft to clothing equipment and bulletproof vests worn by frontline infantrymen. It is a trade that has made many people in Delhi very rich and led to a completely corrupt military decision-making process, both from the political front as well as inside the forces. Therefore, should the announcement by the Raksha Mantri, Rajnath Singh, to gradually move a hundred items from the import list to beef up domestic production be seen as a positive? Frankly, yes and also no. Yes because there is a desperate need for India to build up a military-industrial complex of companies, both public and private, that can supply our defence needs in a hurry. To give an example, the speed with which Boeing delivered the last batch of Apache attack and Chinook transport helicopters after the events of June 15 shows just how agile and efficient American military suppliers are. Nobody is saying that India can reach this efficiency, from both a scientific or production standpoint, but the knee-jerk reaction with which our country buys arms from abroad at any sign of trouble has to change. With some notable exceptions such as Larsen & Toubro and various Tata Sons companies, the private sector's involvement in defence production has been abysmal. Mainly because of the Government's reluctance to involve them, thanks to strong Defence Public Sector Unit (DPSU) lobbies among politicians and bureaucrats. Various research institutions, including the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), too, must chip in to develop technologies and boost in-house capabilities. Even in an area where India is fairly self-reliant — building surface warships — we barely produce one large capital ship annually. Yet China is churning out destroyers and frigates by the dozen every couple of years. If we are to bridge this gap, Indian industry must be encouraged.

However, there is a counter-argument. For several items on Singh's list, India simply does not have the capabilities. Consider transport aircraft; Indian companies were unable to upgrade the extensive fleet of Antonov 32 medium aircraft. While the Modi Government ought to be complimented on finishing the long gestation period for the Light Combat Aircraft Tejas, its three-decade development story is a joke. We have not built any commercial or military transport aircraft in our history. And even if the proposed measures allow for joint development and Indian fabrication, pretending that we suddenly have the skills to make planes is outright bizarre. The same applies to state-of-the-art radar and sonar systems. If we are to get the best systems, we will have to import them until we are able to reverse-engineer or collaborate with the likes of France and Israel to develop our own. Yes, domestic manufacturing is a start and will save considerable resources but it should not come in the way of ensuring that India's frontline warriors have access to the best technology.



KK PAUL

Recently, the Prime Minister inaugurated the country's largest photovoltaic (PV) cell-based solar energy plant at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh. While inaugurating this 750 megawatt (MW) plant, he stressed upon the need for *atmanirbharta* (self-reliance). Considering that about 80 per cent of our solar power generation equipment is of Chinese origin, the inauguration of the solar plant was timely. The Prime Minister used the occasion to emphasise this aspect. Said he, "India won't be able to fully use its solar power potential if the country doesn't develop better solar panels, batteries and storage manufacturing capacity." India imported \$2.16 billion worth of solar photovoltaic cells, panels and modules in 2018-19.

India is lucky that sunlight is available in abundance here but the challenge lies in the procurement of the PV cells. This has been one of the major constraining factors in our efforts to realise the full potential of solar energy. According to a report submitted by the parliamentary Standing Committee, in order to achieve the target of 100 GW of solar electricity capacity by 2022, India should have had an installed capacity of 32,000 MW by 2017-18. But as of January 31, 2018, the country only had a capacity of 18,455 MW. As per the standing committee, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has to install the remaining 81,545 MW in just four years — this is over 20,000 MW a year and appears difficult to achieve.

However, despite the constraints, the price of solar energy has come down from ₹2-2.50 per unit from ₹7-8 per unit in 2014. A serious lacuna in this entire exercise of achieving the solar power target continues to be our poor record of indigenous manufacturing of solar panels and our near-complete dependency on Chinese imports.

Today, China is the only country that caters to most of the global PV cell demands. It produces the cheapest solar panels. It is difficult for any country to match such low prices. This has led to a situation where China has a virtual monopoly and this may not be desirable in the long run. Our own imports, mostly from China, accounted for 90 per cent

Set new energy goals

Perovskite-based solar cells are a good alternative to silicon-based PV cells. But the problem of degradation due to weather conditions needs to be addressed



PEROVSKITE IS A CRYSTALLINE FORM OF THE CHEMICAL CALCIUM TITANATE. IT MAY SOUND FORMIDABLE BUT FORTUNATELY, ALL THE RAW MATERIALS USED TO MANUFACTURE IT ARE INDIGENOUSLY AVAILABLE. THE PROCESS, TOO, IS MUCH SIMPLER, LESS POLLUTING AND CONSUMES LESS POWER THAN THE PRODUCTION OF SILICON CHIPS

based PV cells, which is the speciality of China, has since been found in the form of Perovskite solar cells. This is also a tried and tested method. According to the work done at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, the efficiency of the Perovskite cells, which was about three per cent in 2006, showed a marked improvement. It has now been determined to be at about 22 per cent, which makes it quite viable.

Perovskite is a crystalline form of the chemical called calcium titanate. It may sound formidable but fortunately, all the raw materials used to manufacture it are indigenously available. The process, too, is much simpler, less polluting and consumes less power than the production of silicon chips.

Perovskite is the product of limestone, which is abundantly available in the country, and titanium oxide, which is obtained from sands containing ilmenite, an ore of titanium. Ilmenite, too, is available in abundance as we have reserves of several million tonnes of this ore in the sands along the shores of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

The present usage of titanium oxide is confined to the paints and pigment industry as

well as in the manufacture of cosmetics and sunscreens as it offers good protection against UV rays.

The absence of Chinese products from now onwards needs to be considered as an opportunity for accelerated research so as to put this technology to commercial use at the earliest. Perovskite-based solar cells have performed exceedingly well in controlled conditions but the problem of degradation due to weather conditions needs to be addressed. The silicon-based PV cells are almost weather proof, so the durability of Perovskite has to be brought up to that level.

Perovskite technology has the potential of being a game-changer in our quest for harnessing solar energy with less polluting and low cost solutions. The renewable energy firm, ReNew Power Pvt Ltd, has already announced that it is in discussion with various States to set up a ₹1,500-2,000 crore facility to make solar cells and modules. The need is for close monitoring and allocation of sufficient funds for research. India can't afford to lose the new solar race.

(The writer is a former Governor and senior advisor at the Pranab Mukherjee Foundation)

SOUNDBITE

It is true, how many times did Sushant go to Patna to meet his father? I have sympathy for his father but there are many things that will surface.

Shiv Sena leader
—Sanjay Raut



You have an audience that is exposed to so much content from across the world, which is why you really have to push the envelope to grab its attention.

Actor
—Kunal Kapoor



It is a disastrous situation for people living without access to safe water and safely managed sanitation. The chronic underinvestment has left billions vulnerable.

UN-Water Chair
—Gilbert F Hounbo



Economic slowdown in the country is a humanitarian crisis. The Government's shock and awe approach to the lockdown has caused tremendous pain to people.

Former PM
—Manmohan Singh



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Humanity exists

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Tragedy in Kozhikode" (August 10). Credit must be given to the local residents, who rushed to the aid of those on-board the ill-fated flight. However, many people forgot to follow COVID-19 protocols, the downpour and even the possible danger of a fire. It must be noted that the airport area has been listed as a pandemic containment zone. Their help in spotting passengers and later disseminating information using social media were outstanding gestures. There were large queues of blood donors at hospitals even at midnight, proving that humanity, humanness and hope are still alive.

M Pradyu
Kannur

Avoidable crash

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Tragedy in Kozhikode" (August 10). The Kozhikode plane crash incident is a reminder that the findings of the safety audits were not taken

Lessons from a series of tragedies

This refers to the editorial, "Tragedy in Kozhikode" (August 10). Tragedy after tragedy seems to be unfolding even as the COVID-19 pandemic shows no signs of slowing down. The hooch tragedy in Punjab, fire accidents in Ahmedabad and Vijayawada, landslides in Idukki and the plane crash in Kozhikode have all occurred in quick succession. The hooch tragedy in Punjab claimed 113 lives and highlighted how bootlegging and consumption of spurious brew continue in times of crisis. The incessant rain caused a landslide in Idukki, Kerala, which flattened a row of 20 houses of tea estate workers. More than 40 people died. The estate workers were not evacuated in time to escape the nature's fury. Every year, the living quarters of these workers become precarious during the rainy season, a fact that underlines the vulnerability of labourers to natural disasters. The workers must be provided with safe accommodation.

The Kozhikode plane crash turned the homecoming of Indian repatriates into a tragedy. Poor meteorological conditions, low visibility and the less-than-adequate length of the "table-top" runways are said to have led to the crash. The exact cause will be known in the coming days. Local residents and security personnel braved unfavourable weather conditions to rescue the passengers trapped in the debris. Then, the fire that broke out at an Ahmedabad hos-



pital snuffed out the lives of eight COVID patients. It was attributed to short-circuit in a life-support system. The fire at a hotel-turned-COVID facility in Vijayawada claimed the lives of 11 people. This happened due to the Government's callousness and the management's negligence. The fire tragedies in Ahmedabad and Vijayawada were very much avoidable. All such incidents should be a wake-up call for the Government to ensure that health facilities are well-equipped and fire-proof. Flying protocols, too, need revision. Indian aviation deserves better.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

seriously. In a similar incident in 2010, a Boeing 737 aircraft had overshot the tabletop runway at the Mangalore airport,

killing 158 passengers and crew. Experts had warned of a repeat but all in vain. The present crash has proved no lessons

were learnt by the authorities. Why was such a big aircraft allowed to operate from a tabletop? Why did the operators

allow water to collect on the runway? Given that the pilot had already aborted an attempt to land sensing the condition, why wasn't the aircraft diverted to a nearby airport? Although a few recommendations of the aviation safety report submitted to the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2011 were implemented, lapses remain. Instead of jumping to conclusions, we must wait for reports to emerge. Hereon, suggestions of the audit report must be implemented without any delay.

V Nagendra Kumar
Hyderabad

Focus on safety

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Tragedy in Kozhikode" (August 10). The Karipur airport is in a hilly area and has a tabletop runway. This has been a matter of concern since long as four major incidents have taken place in the past. Authorities need to focus on improving safety levels.

Aditi
Via email

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

State laws don't hold water

India needs a comprehensive national water law, which should be a collection of rules and principles to address all related issues in the country



RATNESH KUSHWAHA

Water is a unique substance as it is one of the few materials on Earth that exists naturally as a solid, liquid and a gas. There is an estimated over one billion cubic kilometre of water on our planet, which covers nearly three-fourth of the Earth's surface. Though this seems an inordinately huge amount, less than one per cent of it is fresh and usable and is found in lakes, ponds, rivers and groundwater. Though it is not possible for life on the planet to exist without it, about 97 per cent of the water covering the Earth's surface is salty ocean and not suitable for drinking without desalination. So, here's how the Earth's freshwater is spread around the globe: A whopping 70 per cent of freshwater is locked in ice caps; less than one per cent of the freshwater is readily accessible; Brazil, Russia, Canada, Indonesia, China and Colombia have 50 per cent of the world's freshwater reserves. Sadly, about one-third of the world's population lives in "water-stressed" countries, defined as a nation's ratio of water consumption to water availability. Countries labelled as moderate to high stress consume 20 per cent more water than their available supply.

India is home to nearly 17 per cent of the world's population and is bestowed with just four per cent of the total water resources. In our country, 50 per cent of the annual rainfall is received in approximately one month, resulting in non-optimal utilisation due to our limited water-harvesting capacity. We optimally utilise only 36 per cent of the total rainfall that translates into about 252 billion cubic metres of water getting harvested against a total rainfall of 690 billion cubic metre. India is still coping with issues like water pollution, water purity and a worsening potability factor. All these may lead to scarcity in the coming years. That, too, in most parts of our country. Despite this, water laws in India are largely a State-based subject. These have been crafted from various formal and informal laws, various kinds of rules and principles which evolved over the years in a parochial and casual manner.

The Indian Constitution has empowered the States to legislate in this area. Therefore, they have exclusive powers regarding framing of rules and guidelines on all water-related issues like irrigation, canals, water management, embankments and so on. Though the Indian Parliament adopted the Water Act in 1974 but the objective of the Act was skewed towards prevention, control of water pollution and the maintenance/restoration of the wholeness of water. This implies that it was designed to assess pollution levels and to penalise the polluters. In the present situation, where India's population is ascending at a rapid pace and water resources are limited, various challenges are emerging, like indiscriminate usage of groundwater, encroachment of water bodies and water pollution, to name a few. There are also various related issues like rejuvenation of moribund rivers, interlinking of rivers, riparian rights and negotiations with neighbouring countries on sharing resources which traverse both the nations.

Apart from these challenges, if we analyse water resources from a development perspective, there is a need to do a lot in the field of inland waterways in the country, interlinking of rivers and water management for better irrigation plans or promoting water-based economical projects like fisheries and developing fox nut (*makhana*) clusters.

The existing legal framework concerning water in India is mostly complemented by human rights dimensions. The overall picture is that there is multiplicity of principles and rules in the water sector and a lack of an overall framework. This is largely the legacy of the colonial Government, which was more focussed on irrigation work. As a result of this, basic principles of water laws applied in India are derived from these irrigation Acts, like the Northern India Canal and Drainage Act, 1873. Thereafter, Acts like the Madhya Pradesh Irrigation Act, 1931, the Regulation of Water Act, 1941 and the very recent Bihar Irrigation Act, 1997 came into existence, in which it was provided that all the rights on surface water shall rest with the State Government.

One trend which should be followed and must be highlighted is the gradual formalisation of national water laws by taking into confidence all the stakeholders. This should ultimately and amicably replace the existing local laws, incorporate every part of water resource and its components and address all water-related issue comprehensively. Any law is a collection of rules prescribed under the authority of the State or nation so as to manage, preserve and ensure proper use of our water resources. India needs a comprehensive national water law, which should be a collection of rules and principles to address all kinds of issues which the country is encountering or may encounter in the foreseeable future.

(The writer is an Advocate, Patna High Court and a water activist)

SYED ABDUL MALIK WAS A POET, WHO WAS
INDULGING IN INTELLECTUAL
JIHAD IN THE COUNTRY.
—BJP LEGISLATOR FROM HOJAI
SHILADITYA DEB



THE COMMENTS MADE BY DEB ARE POLITICALLY
MOTIVATED AND EXPOSE HIS LOW MENTALITY AND
LACK OF KNOWLEDGE.
—LOP IN ASSAM ASSEMBLY
DEBABRATA SAIKIA

Bailout or blowout?

When the wheels of the economy on ground zero are stuck and there is little demand for credit, lowering of interest rates will not help in any way



UTTAM GUPTA

Following marathon deliberations of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) over three days, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) Governor, Shaktikanta Das, made four important announcements under the central bank's bi-monthly monetary policy review on August 6.

First, Das warned that India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is set to contract in 2020-21 but did not give a specific forecast. He also cautioned that "while an early containment of the COVID-19 pandemic may impart an upside to the outlook, a more protracted spread of the pandemic, deviations from the forecast of a normal monsoon and global financial market volatility are key downside risks." Furthermore, the MPC sees "upside risks to food prices and elevated headline inflation during the second quarter of the current financial year (July-September), which would ease in the second half."

Second, "in respect of MSME (micro, small and medium enterprise) borrowers facing stress on account of the economic fallout of the pandemic, lending institutions may restructure the debt under the existing framework, provided the borrower's account was classified as standard with the lender as on March 1, 2020; this restructuring will have to be implemented by March 31, 2021." The banks will have to make an additional provision of five per cent on restructured loans.

Third, large companies will also be eligible for one-time restructuring without declaring it as a non-performing asset (NPA) or requiring a change in the promoter's. The borrower account has to be standard as on March 1. The decision on the restructuring scheme has to be taken by December 31 and restructuring must be implemented within six months. An additional provision of 10 per cent on the restructured loans should be made. An expert committee under KV Kamath will recommend to the RBI the required financial parameters, along with the sector-specific benchmarks for this special window.

Fourth, the policy repo rate — the interest rate charged by the RBI on loans it gives to banks — remains unchanged at four per cent. The reverse repo rate or the interest rate the banks get on their surplus funds parked with the RBI also remains unchanged at 3.35 per cent. Further, the RBI will continue with the "accommodative" stance of the monetary policy as long as necessary to revive growth and mitigate the impact of COVID-19, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target.

The first announcement is on expected lines even as intermittent lockdowns by States and associated disruptions in both supply and demand have dashed all hopes of a V-shaped recovery in economic growth (as alluded to by the Chief Economic Advisor, KV Subramanian during the initial stages of the pandemic). Several agencies, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), have projected a significant deceleration in growth.

As regards the second, this is an extension of the existing scheme of one-time restructuring introduced last year. That was applicable to restructuring plans implemented by March 31, (over 5,00,000 MSMEs had benefited from it). Following a commitment given by the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, in the Budget for 2020-21, the scheme was extended to December 31 this year. For a borrower to be eligible, his/her aggregate exposure, including non fund-based

“THE RBI MAY HAVE PAUSED NOW BUT BY MAINTAINING AN ACCOMMODATIVE POLICY STANCE, IT HAS KEPT THE DOOR OPEN FOR A RATE CUT IN THE FUTURE. THIS SHOULD BE AVOIDED. INSTEAD, IT NEEDS TO WORK ON OTHER FRONTS SUCH AS CREDIBLE MEASURES TO REDUCE NPAs, GOADING BANKS TO BE PROACTIVE IN LOOKING FOR VIABLE PROJECTS FOR FUNDING (MONEY IS NOT A CONSTRAINT AS THE MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY THE RBI ON MARCH 27/APRIL 17 HAVE MADE AVAILABLE PLENTY OF LIQUIDITY TO THE TUNE OF ₹5,00,000 CRORE). STEP-UP INVESTMENT BY THE GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SO ON



facilities, of banks and NBFCs (non-banking financial companies) should not be beyond ₹25 crore as on January 1. Further, the borrower's account was in default but was a "standard asset" as on January 1 and continues to be classified as a "standard asset" till the date of implementation of the restructuring (according to an RBI notification in February). In addition, the borrowing entity is GST (Goods and Services Tax) — registered on the date of implementation of the plan except those that are exempt from GST-registration. The RBI has now further extended this to restructuring plans implemented till March 31, 2021 with some relaxation in the conditions.

The exposure limit, including non fund-based facilities of banks and NBFCs to the borrower, should not exceed ₹25 crore as on March 1. Further, the account should be standard as on March 1 (against January 1 earlier).

Via the third announcement, the RBI has extended huge relief to large corporates, too. Unlike the existing arrangement under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), wherein the loan account gets a NPA tag and the promoter stands no chance of retaining the firm, the proposed one-time restructuring treats the account as standard and there is no change in the promoter's. This special dispensation is meant only for "COVID-19 related stress" and the Kamath committee will have to ensure that the facility is not misused. In other words, all stressed accounts prior to March 1, as well as those which were unaffected during the pandemic, must be excluded.

With the introduction of the above one-time restructuring for MSMEs and corporates, the need for extending the moratorium on servicing of loans (this was initially allowed by the RBI for three months from March 1-May 31 and for a further three months ending August 31) automatically becomes redundant. While the latter was merely a deferment

of the payment liability, the former offers concrete relief by extending the period of repayment, relief in interest and so on.

The Governor sees the scheme as a win-win for both, the lenders and borrowers. According to him, while this will enable the latter to sail through the crisis period without getting permanently impaired, the former's balance sheet will look healthier (as this will put a lid on the NPAs) and they will be able to expand credit for supporting revival of growth. Hopefully, things pan out as per his wish. If not, the banks could be in for bigger trouble even as borrowers come up with more demand for restructuring.

Coming to the fourth announcement, Das has done the right thing by applying the pause button on the repo rate. Ever since he took charge (December 2018), the RBI has handed out a cumulative reduction in repo rate of 2.5 per cent, of which a 1.35 per cent cut was prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. Despite this, during 2019-20, growth in the GDP hit a low of 4.2 per cent.

This was because other factors such as compression in demand (due to massive loss of jobs and decline in incomes) and increasing risk-aversion of banks to lending (during 2019-20, bank credit grew by 6.1 per cent, down from the 13.4 per cent growth during 2018-19) were at work.

Apart from these factors coming in the way of spurring growth, even the cut in the repo rate was not fully transmitted (according to Das, reduction in lending rate was just about 0.6 per cent), thanks to the high cost of the banks' funds (an overwhelming share of these comes from public deposits of varying maturity) on the one hand and high NPAs on the other.

Both these factors make the lending rate downward inflexible. After the COVID-19 crisis, the RBI has reduced the rate by 1.15 per cent (0.75 per cent on March 27 and 0.4 per cent on May 22) thereby bringing the rate down to a

record low of four per cent. And this has come at a time when the intermittent lockdowns are simply not allowing economic activities to get into full swing. When the wheels of the economy on ground zero are stuck and there is little demand for credit, how will lowering of its cost (interest rate) help?

At this juncture, therefore, it makes no sense to keep lowering the policy rate. It sounds like the driver is merely pressing the accelerator while the car is in the neutral gear. He will only end up burning fuel without any outcome. Far from any help in giving a boost to growth (as the real bottlenecks lie elsewhere), this will do collateral damage. For instance, each time the RBI cuts the policy rate, it expects banks to follow suit. This will propel the latter to pay less to depositors on fresh deposits or when the old ones come up for renewal.

The RBI may have paused now but by maintaining an accommodative policy stance, it has kept the door open for a rate cut in the future. This should be avoided. Instead, it needs to work on other fronts such as credible measures to reduce NPAs, goading banks to be proactive in looking for viable projects for funding (money is not a constraint as the measures announced by the RBI on March 27/April 17 have made available plenty of liquidity to the tune of ₹5,00,000 crore), step-up investment by the Government, especially in infrastructure and so on.

By propelling demand — both investment and consumption — and helping businesses run, this will also help reduce the cost of "one-time" restructuring and bring about a real improvement in the banks' balance sheet in the near term. Meanwhile, all-out efforts should be made for early resumption of economic activity even while strictly complying with Coronavirus-related protocols and guidelines.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

New performance measure metrics needed

With students crossing the virtual threshold, everyone is trying to decode employability skills in educational institutions and workplaces



SHARAD MEHRA

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." This quote by one of America's founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, encapsulates the challenges and possible solutions to the new-age education in India and across the globe in today's pandemic-afflicted world. With millions of students crossing the virtual threshold and Work From Home becoming the new normal, everyone is trying to decode employability skills, performance metrics in educational institutions and workplaces. Amid the uneasy and unpredictable change, one thing is certain: The human spirit won't change — and that's our biggest solution.

Now let's step into a more familiar

past of conventional classrooms. Here, body language, facial expressions, physical projects and practical experiments were integral to learning, besides theory and concepts. Learning outcomes took into account personality traits, cognitive skills, life skills, critical thinking and more, for creative and conventional courses. But the digital world has turned these features into challenges. Or, not.

For instance, for fashion design studies, real-world scenarios and industry-live projects that hinged mainly on sensory and cognitive skills, put a big question mark on virtual teaching of concepts and practical training. The challenge was how to keep students engaged and achieve the desired outcomes? Teaching from books was fine but what about practical learning? The answer to this was, by understanding the process backwards. For example, construction stream students were asked to take apart a stitched garment at home and understand the process, in reverse. They were asked to raise open-ended and close-ended questions and prioritise them. For styling, students used

their mobile phones and narrated stories with the limited resources available while they were at home. In the textile stream, students developed interesting and innovative prints using natural dyes.

Similarly, the University of Petroleum and Energy Studies, Dehradun, decided to take the Coronavirus challenge head-on by developing AeroOpt, an airport management tool to improve efficiency at counters, staff requirements for boarding gates and immigration security with social distancing norms. Both these instances highlight how critical thinking, innovation, creativity and adaptability were channelled as everyone struggled with the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. And this is exactly what is needed now: A design-thinking approach, with problem-solving skills, critical thinking, risk-management and most importantly adaptability.

With these developments, one aspect is clear: To shape and mentor this kind of an approach, boxed methodologies cannot be a point of reference. Instead, we need to look at

alternative approaches to teaching, experimentation with available resources, providing critical feedback and delivering learning assessment outcomes. This means re-structuring pedagogies and adapting courses to the online mode with necessary tweaks and improvisations. Learning assessment is a fundamental feedback mechanism in education, allowing all stakeholders of the learning process to understand what is being learned and where learning resources need to be focussed. The wheels are moving now. But is India prepared to handle these on a larger scale for the next phase? Yes, because we have tremendous technology expertise and political will to tide through. Besides the Digital India initiative, strong indicators come from the recent move by our Government to encourage more Foreign Direct Investment in education, provide ₹3,000 crore for skill development and recognise foreign online degrees for Indian students. At present, the Centre and States are collaborating with broadcasting services to deliver education through television and radio. But for these media to suc-

ceed, it is important to operationalise talent and skills. These can be done via projects, classroom discussions, encouraging feedback and curiosity. In my estimation, these key metrics will define the future:

Critical thinking: This is a key skill that equally defines both educational and professional spheres. With the pandemic-induced restrictions, how do teachers enhance critical thinking? The answer is, by asking for real-time projects drawn from the students' immediate environment and asking for solutions from different perspectives. How can things be made better? Is there a new way of looking at a situation? How will more people benefit from a solution? Is this safe and has every loophole been plugged? These are some indicators for enhancing critical thinking.

Adaptability and innovation: In a 2018 Barclays Life Skills Report in the UK, 60 per cent of the employers have clearly stated that adaptability has become more important now than during the previous decade. Therefore, how do you respond to a situation and how quickly do you adapt to change?

Are you able to control your thoughts, emotions and behaviour under pressure or in certain situations? Adaptive students are certain to be a professional success, wherever they go. Some of the world's best innovations have debuted in the worst situations. Are you willing to experiment, take risks and create something new? An innovator will always be valued in every situation.

Empathy and collaboration: How do you respond to your peers? Are you supportive, understanding and display compassion? Are you a team player and do you believe in taking individual credit? Do you believe in "We" over "I"? These values are critical to the future. The pandemic has eroded everything that we took for granted in workplaces, businesses, economies and even our education systems. This sudden pause from the physical world is significant to herald change. And remember, as Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."

(The writer is CEO Asia Pacific Region, Global University Systems)



WILDLIFE CAUGHT IN CROSSHAIR

Wildlife conservation is costly and reliant on philanthropy and Western visitors as well as far-sighted policy-makers. While the environmental benefits of a permanent reduction in long-distance air travel are indisputable, it also threatens the viability of wildlife tourism. While COVID-19 doesn't affect animals and ecosystems in the way it affects humans, it is putting them at risk. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Sensex rises 142 pts; L&T spurts over 4 pc

MUMBAI: Equity benchmark Sensex jumped 142 points on Monday, tracking gains in L&T, ICICI Bank and HDFC twins amid positive cues from global markets. After rallying 390.12 points during the day, the 30-share BSE benchmark pared some gains to end 141.51 points or 0.37 per cent higher at 38,182.08. The NSE Nifty climbed 56.10 points or 0.50 per cent to close at 11,270.15. L&T was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying over 4 per cent, followed by M&M, Sun Pharma, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, ICICI Bank and ITC. On the other hand, Reliance, Asian Paints, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv and Bajaj Finance were among the laggards. According to traders, market sentiment was positive amid firm cues from global indices and consistent foreign fund inflows.



Rupee settles 3 paise higher at 74.90 against \$

NEW DELHI: The rupee settled with gains of 3 paise at 74.90 (provisional) against US dollar on Monday tracking positive domestic equities. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened weak at 74.96, then recovered the lost ground and finally settled at 74.90 against the greenback. During the day, the domestic unit witnessed an intra-day high of 74.85 and a low of 74.96 against the American currency. The rupee had settled at 74.93 against US dollar on Friday. Forex traders said, the rupee traded in a narrow range as positive domestic equities and foreign fund inflows supported the rupee, while strong US dollar and rise in crude oil prices weighed the local unit. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.17 per cent to 93.59.



TTK Prestige Q1 PAT dips 94 pc to Rs 2.14 cr

NEW DELHI: Kitchen and home appliances maker TTK Prestige Ltd on Monday reported a 94 per cent decline in consolidated profit after tax at Rs 2.14 crore for the first quarter ended June 30. The company had posted consolidated profit after tax of Rs 35.81 crore in the April-June quarter last fiscal, TTK Prestige Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations during the first quarter stood at Rs 226.64 crore, as compared to Rs 461.2 crore in the year-ago period, down 51 per cent, it added. During the quarter, total expenses were down at Rs 230.58 crore, as compared to Rs 413.22 crore a year ago. The company's operations were impacted by the complete lockdown announced by various states.

‘Rs 10k cr Fund of Funds for MSMEs to be operational soon’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To provide Rs 50,000 crore equity support to stressed MSME units, a Fund of Funds announced as part of the Rs 20.97 lakh crore Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package is expected to get operation soon, State Bank of India Chairman Rajnish Kumar said on Monday.

The objective of the Rs 10,000 crore Fund of Funds scheme is to help MSMEs with growth potential at a time when they are facing severe shortage of equity and low revenues.

Talking about various steps taken to help MSMEs, he said banks have announced an emergency credit line for such businesses to improve their liquidity which has been hit by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Another liquidity enhancement measure was through support by way of a subordi-



nated debt which was guaranteed by the government for the troubled MSMEs, he said.

"Fund of funds, which I presume would also get operationalised very soon. So these take care from the point of view of finance," he said at a virtual event organised by Ficci. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in May

had announced the Fund of Funds (FOF) will help MSMEs with growth potential and viability even as they face severe shortage of equity.

Moreover, the fund will be operated through a Mother Fund and a few daughter funds to enable MSMEs expand in size and capacity and would also encourage them to list on

the main board of stock exchanges, she had said.

The FOF scheme is intended to help those businesses who are in their nascent and initial stages, where there are almost no prospects to raise funds through the help of professional corporations or venture capitalists. The scheme proposes to buy up to 15 per cent growth capital in high credit MSMEs.

Speaking about other initiatives of the bank, the SBI chairman said the bank recently launched a gold loan scheme for MSMEs and sanctioned Rs 88 crore under this product within one month.

"In a way it is monetization on the ideal gold at least for businesses...safety of your jewellery we are ensuring you don't have to even pay locker and this product has received very good traction and we are planning to further build up this product," he added.

Cochin Shipyard Apr-Jun profit down 65 pc

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The country's largest commercial shipbuilder Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL) on Monday reported a 64.54 per cent dip in standalone profit at Rs 42.64 crore in three months ended June, adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and subsequent lockdown.

The company had posted a profit of Rs 120.25 crore in Q1FY20, as per a regulatory filing.

Income from operations declined 54.87 per cent to Rs 332.47 crore in June quarter of the current fiscal from Rs 736.85 crore in the same period last year.

"The company's operations and financial results for the quarter ended June 30, have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic had prompted a lockdown resulting in a temporary disruption of operations from March 23 to May 5," CSL said in the regulatory filing.

Equity MFs see first outflow in over 4 yrs in July on profit-booking

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity mutual funds witnessed an outflow of Rs 2,480 crore in July, making it the first withdrawal in more than four years, primarily on profit-booking by investors.

Overall, the mutual fund industry witnessed a net inflow of Rs 89,813 crore across all segments last month, much higher than Rs 7,265 crore seen in June, data by Association of Mutual Funds in India showed on Monday.

This inflow could be attributed to infusion in liquid funds and low duration funds.

As per the data, outflow from equity and equity-linked open ended schemes was at Rs 2,480.35 crore in July as compared to an inflow of Rs 240.55 crore in June.

Such schemes had attracted Rs 5,256 crore in May, Rs 6,213 crore in April, Rs 11,723 crore in March, Rs 10,796 crore in February and Rs 7,877 crore in January.

July 2020 saw the first outflow since March 2016, when equity schemes witnessed a pull out of Rs 1,370 crore.

In July this year, except for



equity linked saving schemes (ELSS) and focused fund categories, all the other equity categories witnessed net outflow.

Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) Chief Executive N Venkatesh attributed the outflow from equity-oriented funds to withdrawal from multi-cap and large cap funds due to profit booking by investors.

"Equity-oriented mutual funds witnessed their first major monthly net outflow in a long time. Multi-cap fund category was the worst hit followed by mid-cap and value

fund categories," said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director – Manager Research at Morningstar India.

This could be largely attributed to investors booking profit given the surge in the equity markets, across market segments, in the recent times, he added.

Multi-cap, midcap, value fund and multi-cap saw outflows to the tune of Rs 1,033 crore, Rs 579 crore, Rs 549 crore and Rs 365 crore, respectively, during the month under review.

BSE StAR MF launches direct investment portal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading bourse BSE on Monday said its mutual fund distribution platform STAR MF has launched a direct investment portal for corporates, which will simplify the investment process.

The portal — STAR MF Corp Direct — will simplify and provide end-to-end value-based services to the asset management companies

(AMCs), distributors, investors, and mutual fund industry participants, BSE said in a statement.

The portal is currently live for corporates. It will soon will be available for other non-individuals like HUF, partnership firms, societies among others.

Earlier this year, the market

regulator Sebi allowed exchanges to process mutual fund investments directly from investors.

Taking this opportunity, BSE has developed STAR MF Corp Direct portal, which will go a long way in improving the existing experience of corporates, said Ganesh Ram, Business Head-

Mutual Funds at BSE.

"Now, corporates can seamlessly transact (both in direct and regular mode) with all AMCs and schemes, at one go using Corp Direct instead of switching between multiple platforms which is cumbersome, he said.

"Corp Direct will simplify the MF investment process and significantly reduce time and increase efficiency for corporates," he added.

Studds commissions two new facilities in Haryana

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading helmet manufacturing company Studds Accessories on Monday said it has commissioned two new facilities at Faridabad in Haryana entailing total investment of Rs 200 crore.

Spread across an area of over 5.5 acres, the company has made an initial investment of over Rs 160 crore to set up the largest helmet manufacturing

facility in Asia, Studds Accessories said in a statement.

Besides motorcycle helmets, including the Shifter and Thunder series, the facility will also produce bicycle helmets for domestic market, it added.

The company said it has also commenced operations at another production unit which has in-house production line for expanded polystyrene (EPS), which is the most important safety feature in a



helmet. Spread across 1.5 acres, the company has invested Rs 40 crore in the second plant, marking a total investment of over Rs

200 crore in the manufacturing plants, Studds said.

"With the goal of expanding our production efficiency, our new plants would provide employment prospects for local citizens as well as add to the overall economic growth," Studds Accessories Ltd Managing Director Sidhartha Bhushan Khurana said.

The new plants will have production capacity of 75 lakh units of motorcycle helmets and

RIL's asset monetisation to boost credit quality: S&P

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Monday said that Reliance Industries Ltd's sizable proceeds from asset monetisation over the past four months should significantly improve its credit quality.

"RIL's deleveraging could exceed our expectations, given the extent and magnitude of its asset monetisation," the rating agency said in a statement.

The asset monetisation was despite operations that are trending weaker than anticipated for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

The oil-to-telecom conglomerate has amassed Rs 2.1 lakh crore in investment proceeds since Facebook announced its investment in its digital unit Jio Platforms Ltd (JPL) in April 2020.

The proceeds include Rs 1.52 lakh crore investments into JPL, a Rs 53,124 crore rights issuance, and Rs 7,600 crore from BP PLC for the fuel retail joint venture.

"The developments suggest that RIL's adjusted debt could be less than Rs 1 lakh crore by the end of fiscal 2021. This is better than our base case,



which already assumes a sharp decline in adjusted debt to Rs 1.7 lakh crore by fiscal 2023, from Rs 2.7 lakh crore in fiscal 2020," it said.

As a result, S&P believes RIL's credit quality will improve over the next two to three years, even if the company's fiscal 2021 earnings are well below forecasts.

"Our sensitivity analysis indicates that RIL's debt-to-EBITDA ratio will be resilient to earnings volatility, implying material buffer for its current financials," it said.

RIL's first-quarter (April-June) earnings were resilient

despite weaknesses shown by its peers.

Consolidated EBITDA fell 12 per cent year-on-year to Rs 21,600 crore as the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, both globally and locally, weighed on the company's oil refining and petrochemicals as well as retail businesses. The digital division was a bright spot, however.

"Although earnings recovery could be slow, we expect RIL's fundamentals to remain supported by ongoing strength in the digital division and the gradual improvement in its energy segment," it said.

IFC to invest \$10 mn in Endiya Partners Fund II

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Endiya Partners Fund II, a city-based venture capital fund has received a commitment of Rs 75 crore (USD 10M approx.) from the International

Financial Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, the company said on Monday. IFC has also committed an additional USD 10 million for direct co-investments alongside Endiya Fund II, it said in a press release.

"Early Stage VC investment volumes in India are markedly lower than VC volumes in countries like the U.S. and China. Our investment in VC funds like Endiya helps mobilize capital from other LPs and brings that capital to path breaking early stage businesses.

Endiya Partners has demonstrated differentiation in access to high-quality Pre-Series A opportunities in Enterprise Technology and Healthcare sectors," Jun Zhang, IFC Country Head, India said. Endiya Partners is a seed and early-stage venture capital firm investing in IP-led Indian product start-ups that are globally relevant. Endiya Fund II has a corpus target of Rs 500 crore (USD 65 million) and has already completed its first close at Rs 280 crore (USD 40 million) in May 2019.

Flipkart launches its first startup accelerator programme

PNS ■ BANGALURU

Flipkart on Monday announced the launch of 'Flipkart Leap' — the company's first startup accelerator programme.

With the call-for-entries beginning today, 'Flipkart Leap' will identify B2C and B2B startups and help them scale through an intensive 16-week virtual programme, the company said in a statement.

Throughout the programme, Flipkart's leadership from business, operations, product and technology will mentor the selected startups and share best practices, in addition to master class sessions hosted by industry experts, it said.

The programme aims to provide tools, framework, knowledge and an ecosystem to help startups create 'world-class value-driven' products by

supporting them in building market-ready solutions, Flipkart said.

Flipkart Leap has identified five themes to shortlist relevant high-potential startups — Design & Make for India, Innovation in Digital Commerce, Technologies to Empower the Retail Ecosystem, Supply Chain Management & Logistics and Enabling Relevant Deep Tech applications.

Tata Projects completes transmission line project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Infrastructure major Tata Projects on Monday said it along with its consortium partner has completed 110-km stretch of the 200-km Surathani-Phuket transmission line project in Thailand.

This transmission line passing through forests and mountainous terrains will carry additional electricity to Phuket.

"Tata Projects Limited... and its consortium partner has completed an important 110-km stretch of the 200-km Surathani-Phuket transmission line project in Thailand. This 500kV transmission line is an achievement since it passes through thick jungles and mountainous terrain," the company said in a statement.

Of this 110-km stretch, about 80 km was executed by Tata Projects and the remaining by its partner, the company said adding that it utilised drone technology for stringing of transmission lines thereby reducing timeframe

and avoiding manual work. The company, however, did not provide the project cost.

Vivek Gautam, COO — Tata Projects Ltd, said, "We are proud to complete this important transmission line project which is a true testimony of our top-notch expertise and vast experience. With successful completion of our second transmission line project in Thailand, we have once again proved our execution capabilities not only in India but also around the world."

Going forward, the company shall continue to deliver projects on-time, using world-class project management techniques and uncompromising standards of safety, he added.

Global shares push higher on stimulus moves, US jobs data

PNS ■ LONDON

Shares advanced on Monday in Europe and Asia after President Donald Trump issued executive orders to provide tax relief and stopgap unemployment benefits for Americans hit by the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Investors are watching for further developments on stimulus for the US economy and on trade tensions between Beijing and Washington. Trade talks are planned for Friday, to be held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Germany's DAX was flat at



12,673.25 while the CAC 40 in France added 0.5% to 4,911.65. Britain's FTSE 100 picked up 0.3% to 6,050.82. The future for

the S&P 500 was flat, at 3,345.80 while the future contract for the Dow industrials gained 0.2% to 27,389.00.

"It has been an unusually risk-friendly start to the Monday proceedings, but there is still a lot of wood to be chopped on the US stimulus deal, while August 15 trade talks loom ominously," Stephen Innes of AxiCorp said in a commentary.

Stock prices fell in Hong Kong after the authorities arrested pro-democracy media tycoon Jimmy Lai and some of his associates on suspicion of collusion with foreign powers.

The Hang Seng index dropped 0.6% to 24,377.43.

Lai was arrested Monday under the city's national secu-

rity law and posts on Twitter showed him being taken away by police, as dozens of uniformed police searched the headquarters of his newspaper, Apple Daily. The national security law that came into effect June 30 is widely seen as a means to curb dissent after anti-government protests rocked Hong Kong last year. It has raised questions over whether and to what extent Communist Party leaders in Beijing will respect the "one-party, two-systems" arrangement promised to the former British colony for a half-century after China took control of

the semi-autonomous in 1997.

Elsewhere in Asia, South Korea's Kospi jumped 1.5% to 2,386.38 and the S&P/ASX 200 in Australia surged 1.8% to 6,110.20. The Shanghai Composite index advanced 0.8% to 3,379.25.

China reported its consumer price index rose to 2.7% in July from 2.5% in June as flooding disrupted farming across much of the country, pushing food prices higher. But producer prices and core inflation, which exclude food and energy prices, fell to a ten-year low of 0.5%, reflecting continued weakness amid the pandemic.

We've learnt of influencers, coaches on Instagram, and more. Meet the new-gen of social entrepreneurs who hope to make the world a better place to live in. *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL speaks to a few of such social entrepreneurs from the city to understand what they do, why, and how they do it

Entrepreneurs with a SOCIAL IMPACT!



preneurs in today's era. With a blend of idealism and common-sense, social entrepreneurs are bringing about broad transformation in Hyderabad, one such being is Khalida Parveen, a social activist and founder of Amoomat Society.

Parveen is on a mission to connect women from the remotest of areas towards the best opportunities. A pharmacist by profession, she believes community leaders play an exceptional role in dealing with diverse situations as she is, an example being, providing premarital counseling, basic computer coaching, hiring candidates for assistant nurse training, etc. and these leaders are dealing with the crisis in their own creative and capable ways. You will find numerous of these groups in Hyderabad, she says.

"The youth of today is energetic, enthusiastic, morally sound, and leading the city. They are aware of the problems we as a city are facing currently — the plight of migrants, insufficient ration for the needy, disrespectful last rites, unavailability of beds for COVID patients, etc. Some young torchbearers stepped up to light the way amid this lockdown from our society of aid too! Young community leaders need proper opportunities to prove themselves that they can actively participate as well. COVID-19 offered them with this opportunity-

from distribution of dry ration kits, cooking food for the locals, distribution of medical essentials, arranging transportation for migrants to return to their homeland and offering free ride services for the deceased, these leaders of indomitable spirit took control of all these activities," tells Khalida.

Relying upon strong notions of a city where netizens are bereft of even basic necessities of nutrition, education, and healthcare, Khalida Parveen trusts the reality of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs help alleviate these issues by putting those less fortunate on a path towards a worthwhile life. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government, they solve the problem by changing the system.

"Rural mass in desperate need of economical dependency. This new arena of entrepreneurship may help provide a market to them so that they can sell their customary products such as handlooms. The importance of social entrepreneurship is in front of you, education and healthcare sectors are being alleviated by them," adds the active citizen of Hyderabad.

"There must be a balance between economic growth and the welfare of society. With the current ecological crisis, sustainable entrepreneurship is highly in demand. I always believed in what Mahatma Gandhi had said, 'There is no beauty in

the finest cloth if it makes hunger and unhappiness'. Fostering change to our business organisations towards greater ecological integrity and social justice is very crucial. At this hour, we call for a long-term structural strategy of organisations for the world's economic and social systems to further reduce the burden on the ecosystem. Fast money is like fast food. After the sugar rush, it just leaves the bad taste in the mouth," reveals Kanthi Dutt, a social entrepreneur creating better literacy funds in rural India.

Talking about the digitisation of India helping social entrepreneurs connecting to remotest of areas, Kanthi Dutt indicates digitisation has become rapid in today's business growth having the pandemic hit businesses. Companies that were planning to go digital in five years down the lane have gone digital in a few days. The ability to connect and interact quickly is essential, digitisation ever more relevant for companies and citizens alike. Through digital entrepreneurship, it is easier to develop, fund, and implement solutions to social, cultural, or environmental issues. Right from creating better literacy standards, building awareness programs to further impacting collective business growth.

The future looks bright, thanks to a new wave of social entrepreneurs.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE THE ONES WHO'RE KEEN ON CONTRIBUTING THEIR INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE CITIES, ESPECIALLY AMID THE PANDEMIC.



When a problem arises, people tend to talk about it, but they seldom consider finding solutions. But social entrepreneurs are the ones who're keen on contributing their innovative solutions to address social-economic challenges for their respective cities, especially amid the pandemic. People whose only dream is to watch the city become a better place to live in. These are the very people we call social entre-

Ensuring safe online learning for our little ones

This unprecedented change in online learning for children has certainly raised many concerns regarding the child's long-term health. Increased use of electronic gadgets, prolonged near work, and lack of daylight exposure can result in the progression of myopia or near-sightedness in children. Electronic devices are known to emit short-wavelength blue light, suppressing the hormone melatonin which maintains the circadian rhythm in the body. Prolonged exposure to blue light, especially before their bedtime can cause sleep disturbances in children. Too much screen time can also result in dry eye, headache, stress, anxiety, behavioural and mental issues.

Hence, it has become all the more important to strike a balance between academic learning via digital technology and good physical, mental, and personality development in children. Hence, the restricted use of electronic devices for studying has been advocated by doctors. Certain practices should be followed routinely by teachers and parents to ensure a better lifestyle for children.

The amount of time the child spends using digital devices should be proportionate to the child's age. While 12 to 16-year-olds can be allowed 8 hours of online study, the hours of screen time for younger children should be restricted to less than 4 hours. Toddlers (younger than 3 years) must refrain from using any digital device.

Teachers must give appropriate breaks during classes; a short break every 45 minutes and a long break of 1-2 hours during long sessions. Online

During these times of a pandemic, with several restrictions in place, schools are forced to shift from classroom learning to online teaching. Classes are being conducted through virtual platforms and homework has now gone digital. Children are required to spend long hours indoors, focussing on their mobile phone, iPad, or laptop. Here's tiny but certain changes we can make to our children's learning process that can help their overall health

classes should be scheduled in the morning and afternoon hours only, ensuring that children do not use these devices in the evening and night time. It is important that the child sits on a straight-backed chair with armrests, with the screen placed about 2 feet away at eye level. This ensures good posture and avoids back and neck problems in the future. Larger screen devices like desktop, laptop, or TV are preferable. Room lighting should be good and the screen's brightness should be optimum. Screen protectors can be used to reduce exces-

sive reflection. There also should be good ventilation in the room. Sitting for long hours directly in front of the fan or air conditioning can cause the eyes to dry up quickly. This adds to the strain. They should be encouraged to consciously blink frequently. An easy method to follow is the 20-20-20 rule, where every 20 minutes, the child should take a 20-second break and look at any object 20 feet away. This will relax the ciliary muscles of the eyes and ease the strain due to prolonged near work. At times, preservative-free

lubricating eye drops can be used to ease mild symptoms of dry eye. Also, children who usually wear glasses must continue to wear them during classes.

Also, various ways to reduce screen time can be devised by teachers. Each day, there should be at least one session of physical exercise, yoga, dance class, or virtual workout, intercepting the online teaching schedule. This will be fun as well as healthy for children. For homework, they should be encouraged to use their textbooks and notebooks and avoid all digital devices.

Parents must themselves set a good example by staying away from mobile phones and TV as much as possible. They can also develop 'quality family time', encouraging children to interact, play games, and connect with family members during leisure time. It should be emphasised that the use of electronic gadgets is only during classes and for learning. Children must be taught to accept and acclimatize to these new practices and to follow them effectively.

Children's health and well-being must be the collective responsibility of families, teachers, and doctors. Adapting to changing times, using technology to our advantage, but following safety measures can give a better and healthier life to our children.



Kids should be encouraged to consciously blink frequently. An easy method to follow is the 20-20-20 rule, where every 20 minutes, the child should take a 20-second break and look at any object 20 feet away. This will relax the ciliary muscles of the eyes and ease the strain due to prolonged near work.

DR RAMESH KEKUNNAYA

(The writer of the article, Dr Ramesh Kekunnaya, is the head of Child Sight Institute, L V Prasad Eye Institute)



Road trips, outdoor time linked to happiness: Survey

Social distancing norms is the "new normal" and it has the world spending more time indoors than ever, but a new survey revealed that 94 per cent of people report they are happier and healthier when they spend time outdoors.

As per Outdoorsy's Road to Wellness report, the open road is a welcome relief as people search for safe travel options. 71 per cent of respondents who had to cancel their summer travel plans are now considering alternative vacation, such as a road trip.

It seems like remote workers have also caught the travel bug. For those

with the flexibility to work from the road, a change of scenery doesn't have to tap into vacation days. Work-from-home (WFH) workers are 2.5 times more likely to say they would take more road trips if they had access to an RV, with 72 per cent of respondents reporting they are planning to take more road trips as a result of widespread work-from-home policies.

The survey shows 70 per cent of respondents would rather go on a road trip with family or a significant other than go alone, and that air travel could be a hassle. Three out of four people noted they would describe their last road trip as a "much needed escape"

and would plan to take one again soon.

Time spent outdoors has a positive effect on an individual's wellbeing, but with this survey we learned more about the wellness benefits attributed to time spent outdoors with family, said Outdoorsy. "The survey found an overwhelmingly positive sentiment to family road travel and anecdotal reports found that family ties were strengthened in direct correlation to the amount of time a family spends together in nature," it said.

Overall, 88 per cent of survey respondents say they want to incorporate the outdoors into their daily routine more often.



Hansal Mehta to direct web series on gangster Vikas Dubey

Filmmaker Hansal Mehta is set to develop and direct a web series based on gangster Vikas Dubey, who was killed in an encounter by Uttar Pradesh police last month.

Eight policemen, including DSP Devendra Mishra, were ambushed in Bikru village in Chaubeypur area of Kanpur when they were going to arrest Dubey and fell to bullets fired from rooftops shortly after midnight on July 3.

Dubey, who was carrying a reward of Rs five lakh on information leading to his arrest, was arrested from Ujjain in Madhya

Pradesh on July 9.

He was killed in an encounter on the morning of July 10 when a police vehicle carrying him from Ujjain to Kanpur met with an accident and he tried to escape from the spot in Bhauti area, the police had said.

Producer Shailesh R Singh's Karma Media and Entertainment, in association with Polaroid Media, have bought the rights for the upcoming project on the gangster.

Mehta, known for directing acclaimed films like *Aligarh*, *Omerta* and the National Award-winning Rajkummar Rao-starrer *Shahid*, said he

will approach the subject responsibly.

"It is a reflection of our times and our system where politics, crime and lawmakers form a curious nexus. It is early to discuss approach but it will be approached responsibly and as a fascinating recounting. I see an edgy political thriller emerging out of this, and it will be very interesting to tell this story," the director said in a statement.

Singh, who has backed films like *Tanu Weds Manu*, *Shahid*, Manoj Bajpayee-headlined *Aligarh*, *Omerta* and *Judgemental Haiin Kya*, said he is excited to

bring Dubey's life to the screen.

"I have been following the whole story quite closely through news agencies and other means, killing of eight policemen shook the nation and started the seven days trail of Vikas Dubey which finally saw him killed in an encounter.

"I thought why not tell this story to the entire nation and bring out some real facts and go to the inner depth of the great to tell this story. I am overwhelmed to tell this story and really looking forward to it," Singh said.

Prior to Dubey, five of his alleged associates were killed in separate encounters.



VIDYA BALAN says people thought she was 'mad' when she signed *The Dirty Picture*

Actor Vidya Balan revealed that when she signed Milan Luthria's *The Dirty Picture*, people thought she was 'mad' and told her she could not be 'doing things like these' as she had a girl-next-door image. However, her parents asked her to follow her intuition.

In an interaction with *India Today*, Vidya said that she had no reservations about doing *The Dirty Picture*. "The moment I met Milan, he inspired faith in me. So I knew that he has a certain aesthetic sense, I knew it won't be cheap. Also, Ekta (Kapoor, producer) was involved and she is a woman. I knew her, I started my career with her. So I was safe on those accounts. But there were people who told me that 'Are you mad? You are a girl next door and you can't be doing things like these.'"

When Vidya went to her parents for advice, they asked her to go with her gut feeling. "I

remember speaking to my parents at that time and I asked them 'Should I do it?' My parents, they are obviously not from this industry, so they kept saying 'No, do what feels right'. I asked myself 'what feels right' and the answer was loud and clear: 'Do the film'. So I went ahead and did it," she said.

In *The Dirty Picture*, which was a semi-biographical story of the controversial actor Silk Smitha, Vidya played a small-town girl who comes to Chennai to try her luck in films. Her character, Silk, embraces her sexuality and does not hesitate to use it to get what she wants.

Vidya said that she felt quite

comfortable wearing skimpy outfits in *The Dirty Picture*, as she was not expected to have the 'perfect body'. "You know, as a child, my mom had made me wear shorts and everyone teased me because I was really fat. After that, I had never worn shorts in my life. And during the first costume trials, Niharika Singh gave me a pair of hot shorts/hot pants and I came out in that and I actually felt fully okay."

During the dance rehearsals, the choreographer kept asking Vidya to 'thrust' more, she said. "So I think slowly I was letting go of my inhibitions and maybe that's why when I wore the shorts and walked out I was fine. Because there was no expectation of being perfect. I was not expected to have the perfect body in the shorts."



Bosco Martis' directorial debut titled 'Rocket Gang', to be shot in virtual reality amid COVID

Choreographer Bosco Martis' directorial debut, a dance-horror-comedy, has been titled *Rocket Gang* and the makers will use real-time Virtual Reality (VR) to shoot some of its sequences.

Bosco said the use of VR in *Rocket Gang* would come as a "huge support" amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The process would reduce post-production time and decrease expected manpower, thereby adhering to safety guidelines when the film goes on floors.

"The strength of the film is the virtual reality experience which would be first of its kind in Bollywood. It will be challenging but we are very excited to explore this. Especially in today's times when we are fighting COVID-19 and the situation we are in right now.

"We can't get the support of the full team so how does one work? We would follow all the norms and VR is

going to help us in a big way to support this," Bosco told PTI.

Rocket Gang stars *Student of the Year 2* actor Aditya Seal, Nikita Dutta, last seen in Netflix's *Maska*, and five kids. It would also feature select dancers who participated in the reality show, *Dance India Dance*.

The film was supposed to go on floors on March 18 but was pushed due to the coronavirus-induced nationwide lockdown.

The team ultimately had to pull down the set but Bosco said when he pitched the idea of VR to producers Zee Studios, they immediately came on board.

"The challenge was how to start the film as soon as possible because I don't want the kids to grow up, because they were cast for a certain reason and look."

"Then VR came into play and we started working on it. I shared it with Shariq (Patel, CEO, Zee Studios) and he loved it. The team needs to be excited for the vision and I'm so glad we all are," Bosco added.



BIPASHA BASU: THRILLERS MAKE FOR A PERFECT CANVAS FOR AN ACTOR

Actress Bipasha Basu loves to do thriller projects as they give her a chance to emote so much, ranging from drama, action, romance to fear.

"Thrillers make for a per-

fect canvas for an actor — there's so much to emote, be it drama, action, romance, fear and that's what really pulls me towards this genre," Bipasha said.

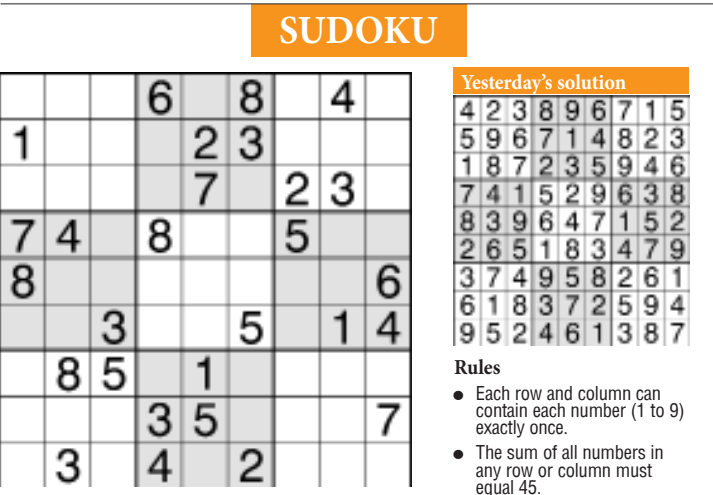
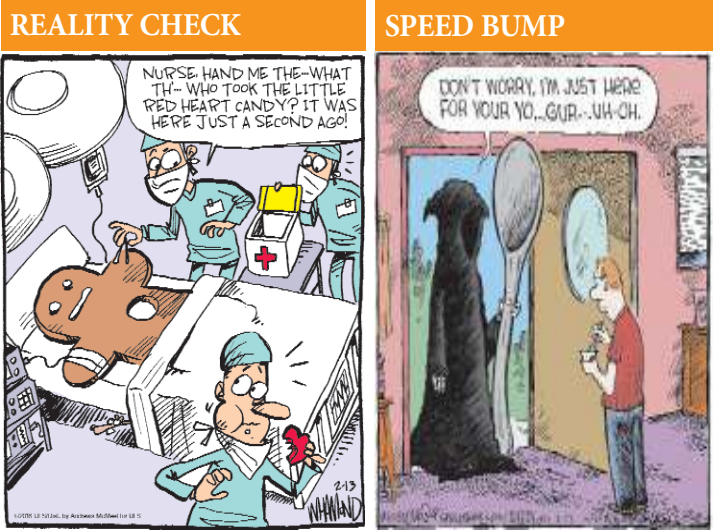
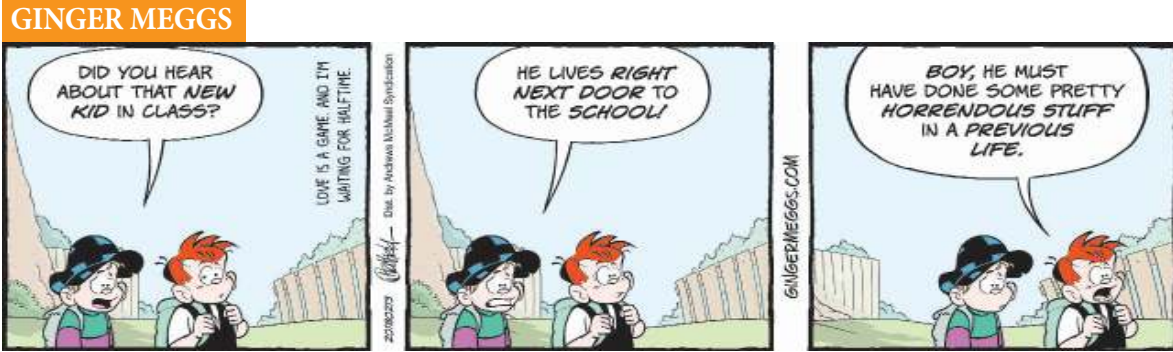
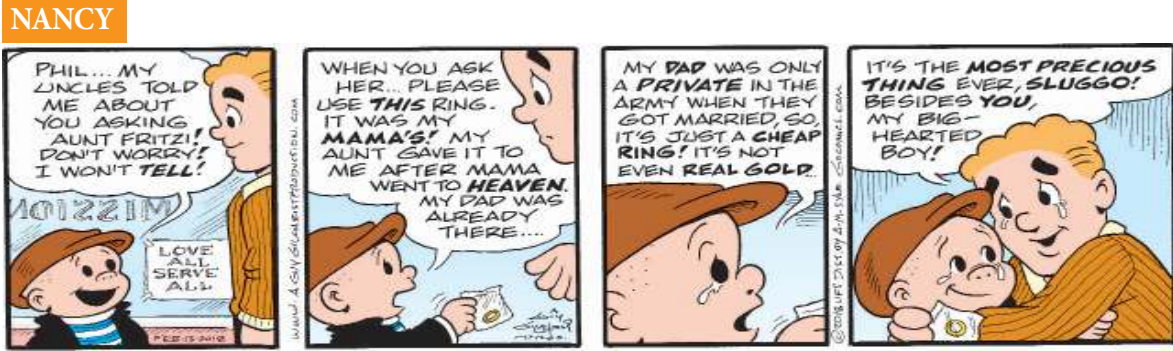
"I also believe that this genre is enjoyed by audiences because it makes you feel like

you're a part of the process, trying to solve the mystery in your head. While I enjoy other genres as well, thrillers have always been special for me and 'Dangerous' even more so — I love the fact that I could act with Karan (husband Karan Singh Grover)

again and collaborate with Vikram (Vikram Bhatt), Bhushan (Bhushan Patel) and Mika (Mika Singh) on this project," she added.

Bipasha is reuniting with Karan Singh for thriller titled *Dangerous*, co-starring Suyash Rai, Natasha Suri.

FUN



Most Read NEWS

Girl who scored 2 in Maths gets 100 after re-evaluation

Supriya, a specially-abled student alleged that she was Serroneously given only 2 marks in Mathematics by the Board of School Education, Haryana (BSHE) in her class 10 board examination as her answer sheet meant for "blind candidate" was not checked following proper procedure. However, after re-evaluation, she got 100 marks in the same subject. "I was given 2 marks in Mathematics exam. I was shocked and sad. My father applied for re-evaluation and after re-evaluation, I got 100 marks. I would like to demand from that board that this should not happen to any other specially-abled student," Supriya, a partially blind student said. Supriya's father Chhajjaram said that she got over 90 marks in all subjects but she got only 2 in Mathematics and hence he applied for re-evaluation. "I have spent Rs 5,000 in the process of applying for re-evaluation. I am a Mathematics teacher. My daughter scored good marks in all subjects except in maths, hence I applied for re-evaluation. Later she got 100 marks after re-evaluation," he said. The principal of the Government Senior Secondary School, Hisar, Hrishikesh Kundu said that Supriya will be honored after school re-opens. "Supriya is a hard-working student. She is good at studies and we will honor her after school re-opens," he said.



Canadian brewery names its beer 'pubic hair'!

An Alberta brewery has apologized for unknowingly naming their beer after a Maori word that is commonly used to mean 'pubic hair'. The Hell's Basement Brewery, which released the 'New Zealand hopped pale ale' two years ago, used the Maori term 'HuruHuru' which they believed meant feather, to reflect the light citrus taste of the beer. However, earlier this week, Maori former television personality Te Hamua Nikora pointed the error and posted a Facebook video, to explain 'huruHuru' was more commonly used in Te Reo Maori to refer to pubic hair. "Yes I know huruhuru means feather, fur and even hair of the head. I know this. But it is most commonly used as hair from a person's privates," he wrote. "Some people call it appreciation, I call it appropriation," he added. Accepting the mistake, Brewery founder Mike Patriquin said they did not intend to offend anyone and announced that the product will be rebranded. "We acknowledge that we did not consider the commonplace use of the term huruhuru as a reference to pubic hair, and that consultation with a Maori representative would have been a better reference than online dictionaries," Mike Patriquin said.



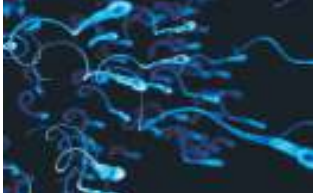
Over 100 kg cowdung stolen in Chhattisgarh

In a one of its kind theft, a large amount of cowdung was stolen at Rojhi village in Koriya district of north Chhattisgarh. The incident comes days after the Bhupesh Baghel-led Congress government launched the unique 'Godhan Nyay Yojana' scheme aimed at procuring cowdung at Rs 2 per kg from livestock and dairy owners. Lalla Ram and Sem Lal, both farmers lodged a complaint with the local Gauthan Samithi (a body that manages cattleshed premises) after they found over 100 kg cowdung missing. The farmers had accumulated the cowdung to sell it to the state government. Worried over this new form of crime, the samithi members decided to approach the police and filed a complaint. The state government, on August 5, had transferred Rs 1.65 crore to the accounts of over 46,000 cattle owners under the new scheme. In recent months, it had added economic value to cattle dung that witnessed innovative, useful and eco-friendly products moulded out of it. "The cowdung was taken away by the locals only who apparently witnessing the exasperation among the villagers and the Gauthan samiti returned it. The issue of theft raised much concern among the villagers," said Sangeeta Lakra, the Koriya public relation officer.



Human sperm swims in entirely different way!

In a breakthrough for fertility science, scientists have shattered the universally accepted view of how sperm 'swim'. About 300 years ago, Antonie van Leeuwenhoek used one of the earliest microscopes to describe human sperm as having a 'tail, which, when swimming, lashes with a snakelike movement, like eels in the water'. This is an optical illusion, according to the new study. "Human sperm figured out if they roll as they swim, much like playfulotters corkscrewing through water, their one-sided stoke would average itself out, and they would swim forwards," said study author Hermes Gadelha from the University of Bristol in the UK. "The sperms' rapid and highly synchronised spinning causes an illusion when seen from above with 2D microscopes - the tail appears to have a side-to-side symmetric movement, like eels in the water, as described by Leeuwenhoek in the 17th century," Gadelha added. Using state-of-the-art 3D microscopy and mathematics, the research team have pioneered the reconstruction of the true movement of the sperm tail in 3D. Using a high-speed camera capable of recording over 55,000 frames in one second, and a microscope stage with a piezoelectric device to move the sample up and down at an incredibly high rate, they were able to scan the sperm swimming freely in 3D.



STILL HUNGRY TO PLAY

England pacer Anderson ignores retirement whispers, eager to bounce back



James Anderson celebrates the dismissal of Babar Azam during 2nd day of 1st Test AP

AFP ■ SOUTHAMPTON

James Anderson insisted on Monday he is still "hungry" to play Test cricket after speculation the England great was considering retirement.

Anderson recently turned 38, an age where many previous pace bowlers would have long since retired.

Given his age, Anderson's meagre match haul of 1/97 during England's three-wicket win in the first Test against Pakistan completed on Saturday inevitably led to speculation about his future.

By his own admission, Anderson, England's all-time leading wicket-taker, "did not

bowl very well" at his Old Trafford home ground, where one of the ends is named after him, as England went 1-0 up in a three-match series.

But the swing specialist, whose 590 wickets are the most taken by any paceman in Test history, said he should not be written off after one poor game.

"I want to play as long as I possibly can," Anderson told reporters during a conference call on Monday.

"If I keep bowling the way I did this week, the opportunity to retire will be taken out of my hands. It will be a selection issue," he added ahead of Thursday's second Test at Southampton.

"I'm still hungry to play the

game. I think the frustration for me this week was that, after one bad game...the sort of whispers (about retirement) that go around, I don't think that's really fair."

'EMOTIONAL'

Reflecting on his own performance in the first Test, Anderson said: "It's one of those things, everyone has a bad game, every now and then.

"I've not bowled very well and felt out of rhythm. For the first time in probably 10 years I got a little bit emotional on the field, got a bit frustrated, let it get to me a little bit.

"It reminded me of when I first started playing, when you get frustrated and a little bit angry you try to bowl quicker and quicker and it doesn't help. Hopefully, I can show people I've still got what it takes to play Test cricket."

Anderson, a veteran of 154 Tests, added: "I don't think it's the toughest period of my career. I'm sure I'll have another bad game in my career. I just don't want every time I have a bad game for there to be whispers going round that I'm going to pack in."

Anderson is now in sight of becoming the first pace bowler to take 600 Test wickets and overhauling the England Test appearance record of 161 held by retired former captain Alastair Cook, one of his best friends in cricket.

"I want to be bowling well and contributing to England winning games of cricket," said Anderson. "That's been my focus throughout my career and will continue to be my focus. If I get 600 wickets then great; if I don't, then I'm happy with what I've got."

As for surpassing opening batsman Cook's cap record, which would be a remarkable achievement for a pace bowler, Anderson said: "154 does sound like quite a lot of games. But I feel like I've still got quite a few more left in me. If I can go past Cooky it will probably be the one

Buttler should always be in Eng Test side: Warne

PTI ■ MANCHESTER

Jos Buttler is the "whole package" and that is why the wicketkeeper-batsman should be a regular in England's Test side, feels Australian spin great Shane Warne.

Buttler was under immense scrutiny due to lapses behind the stumps during the first Test against Pakistan last week. He missed two chances against opener Shan Masood on 45, who went on to score 156, helping Pakistan put up 326 on the board in their first innings.

However, the 29 year-old, who had also been struggling with the bat for some time, played a crucial 75-run knock in the second innings and shared a century stand with Chris Woakes to help England win the first Test by three wickets.

"He should always be in the side. Jos is a very good and reliable keeper but, occasionally, you're going to have a few bad days — it wasn't easy out there, either," Warne told *Sky Sports*.

"But Jos should always be in your side because of what he's capable of, with the bat especially. And then his keeping, he's a good leader among the team as well — there's a calmness about him — he's the whole package.

"He's always one of the first pencilled in for me," Warne added.

Buttler changed the complexion of the game with his aggressive batting. He struck seven boundaries and a six in his 101 ball-75, helping England, who were reeling at 117 for five, chase



down the 277 run target.

"What really impressed me with Buttler was the way he went about it, he trusted himself, said 'I'm the man, I'm going to get this done'."

Warne added that Buttler's positive approach helped his non-striker Woakes, who struck a match-winning unbeaten 84 after having averaged only 5.22 in his last six Tests.

"He just played beautifully; and that helped Woakes at the other end, who had been struggling for form, but came in and played extremely well. I'm very happy for Woakes and, in particular, Buttler. It was a fantastic chase, against a quality attack, on a good pitch," he said.

Pak must move on from Old Trafford defeat: Misbah

Manchester: Pakistan cannot dwell on their defeat by England in the first Test at Old Trafford as it would make it tougher for them to respond in the next two matches, coach Misbah-ul-Haq has said.

"It was a thrilling Test match and full credit must go to England for the way they fought back, came from behind and took the game away from us," Misbah wrote in his column on the Pakistan Cricket Board's website.

"There is disappointment,

of course, but we must not keep that feeling in our minds otherwise it will be difficult to come back... the team believes we can fight back.

"Sometimes luck doesn't favour you, sometimes the opposition plays well — that's the beauty of the game."

Misbah praised opener Shan Masood, who scored 156 in the first innings, as well as pacemen Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah who picked up two wickets each.

"It was a brave decision to

bat first against England's bowling attack in those conditions," the 46-year-old said.

"Shan Masood batted really well and... should be given a lot of credit for his innings. He's been working so hard... he's changed a few things in his setup. He's a different batsman."

"The bowling was also excellent. It's a young seam attack, apart from Mohammad Abbas, and both Shaheen Afridi and Naseem Shah did really well."

Agencies



Atletico Madrid players train during team's training session

ATM/Twitter

2 Atleti players test virus +ve

Correa & Vrsaljko return positive while other remain unaffected as the Spanish giants prepare for Champions League quarters

AFP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid breathed a sigh of relief on Monday after further coronavirus tests on their players and staff turned up negative, allowing the team to travel to Portugal on Tuesday for their Champions League quarter-final against Leipzig.

Tests at the weekend had revealed two coronavirus cases at the club, which Atletico confirmed on Monday to be players Angel Correa and Sime Vrsaljko. Both players are

asymptomatic and will remain isolated at home while the rest of the squad will return to training in the Spanish capital on Monday afternoon, before flying to Lisbon on Tuesday for Thursday's game against Leipzig.

"The first team and members of the coaching staff underwent new PCR tests yesterday, the result of which has been negative in all of them, after the appearance of two positive cases in the tests carried out on Saturday," Atletico announced on Monday.

Sancho will stay at Dortmund

AP ■ DORTMUND

England winger Jadon Sancho will stay with Borussia Dortmund for the upcoming season amid reported interest from Manchester United, club sporting director Michael Zorc said on Monday.

Dortmund "plan on having Jadon Sancho in our team this season, the decision is final. I think



that answers all our questions," Zorc said at a training session.

The 20-year-old England international, who has a contract with the German club until 2022, had a stellar season with the Bundesliga runners-up and has been reportedly targeted by several top clubs, including Manchester United after the club qualified for next season's Champions League.

Athletics can grow further in post Covid world: Coe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Athletics President Sebastian Coe on Monday claimed that more people took to running to stay fit during the coronavirus-forced lockdown, something his sport can capitalise on once the world is back to being normal.

Coe said athletics can benefit from the new-found habit of more people taking to walking and running and his sport

will try to build on it to broaden its base. "We are uniquely placed to help local, regional and national health objectives. Research has shown that throughout the lockdown, more people are exercising than before. Some research even say there is 80 per cent increase at the global exercise pattern," he said at an online media seminar organised by Asian Athletics Federation.

"Athletics is the main ben-



Collin Morikawa holds the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the PGA Championship golf tournament at TPC Harding Park on Sunday AP

Mandeep latest hockey player to catch corona



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian hockey team forward Mandeep Singh has tested positive for Covid-19, becoming the sixth national player to contract the dreaded infection, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) said on Monday.

The 25-year-old from Jalandhar is asymptomatic and is being treated along with the other five players by doctors in Bengaluru, where the national camp is due to start on August 20 at the SAI centre.

"Mandeep Singh, a member of the Indian Men's Hockey team, who was given the Covid test (RT-PCR) along with 20 other players at the National Camp at SAI's National Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, has tested Covid positive, but is asymptomatic," the SAI said in a statement.



Fiona Ferro, right, and Anett Kontaveit pose with the trophy after final WTA/Twitter

Ferro upsets Kontaveit to win Palermo Open

AFP ■ PALERMO

Unseeded French player Fiona Ferro beat No 4 seed Anett Kontaveit 6-2, 7-5 in the final to win the 31st Palermo Ladies Open, the tournament marking the return of tennis after a five-month shutdown due to coronavirus.

Ferro needed one hour and 43 minutes to seal the straight-sets victory. Her solid serving saw Ferro deliver four aces in the match helped her ease to a 6-2 win in the first set.

However, Kontaveit who had ousted top seed Petra Martic

in the semi-finals started to come into her own at the end of the first set.

The gain in momentum was evident when she broke early to get into a 2-0 lead but Ferro upped her game to break straight back. The Frenchwoman won three games on the bounce to make it fives apiece before a service winner saw her through. It was Ferro's second WTA title win as she maintained fine form since the coronavirus lockdown when she had gone unbeaten in two exhibition tournaments before the Palermo Open.

SOCIETAL INFLUENCES

Debutant director M Bala Raju speaks to NAGARAJ GOUD about his passion for films, his debut film *Kanabadutaledu*, making of short films and more

Released by Sukumar last week, the teaser of *Kanabadutaledu* has found instant appreciation from one and all. The innovative cut and the rich background score helped it to be noticed by industry-wallahs as well. Noted names like Bunny Vas, Nikhil and Karthikeya among others were quick to ring debutant director M Bala Raju and shower their praise towards it. "In fact, Bunny Vas *garu* asked us to show the film to him after the post-production formalities are wrapped up," M Bala Raju tells us in a conversation.

A native of Visakhapatnam, Bala Raju was smitten by movies since childhood. While studying X, he wrote, directed and acted in a play which won him plaudits all across the district, setting off his journey in the creative field. "After the completion of my engineering, I've done a short film *Chandamama Raave*. Soon after, I came to Hyderabad and tried my luck as a writer. In the process, I've directed short films like *Chakori* and



Thaamasi. I worked as a ghost writer for seven-eight feature films, with some of them emerging as big hits," he notes.

Success on the short films circuit meant that he graduated to feature films but his debut feature, *Achuki*, couldn't go in front of the cameras due to various reasons. Undeterred, he continued to make more short films as he "hates being idle". "Last year, I won the SIIMA Best Director Award for my short film *Karthika*. It even got screened at Taiwan International Film Festival," exults the director, whose other popular short films include *Bramarambaki Nachhesanu*, *Sirivenmela* and *Priyatham*. "Producers of

Priyatham, with the help of others, decided to pool in resources for *Kanabadutaledu*. People who I know also chipped in."

Bala Raju's strong suit, according to him, is writing and screenplay. "I've grown up in different places and my life is nothing short of a journey so far. As I started to see the society from my perspective, the words started to flow. I'm a writer-filmmaker shaped up by society," he says, adding that growing up, it was Puri Jagannadh who had a lasting impression on him, courtesy smash hits like *Idiot* and *Amma Nanna O Tamila Ammayi*. "His films aside, I used to watch his interviews 100 times. He was like an addiction. I'm a big

fan of his narrative style."

Being a whodunit, he is not comfortable with the idea of sharing the story or the plot details of *Kanabadutaledu*, which was wrapped up in and around Vizag in 38 days. "A character goes missing and there are 100 reasons for it. It's a simple concept. Seven-eight characters dot the film and a majority of them come from the team of *C/O Kancharapalem*. It's a screenplay-based film," he maintains.

Talking about the art of screenplay, he admits to being a fan of the screenplay of the acclaimed American neo-Western crime drama series *Breaking Bad*. "The way the series kept the audi-

ences at the edge-of-their-seats is something I rave with great enthusiasm. Watching it helped me to become a good writer," he reveals.

The director has no issue if *Kanabadutaledu* drops on an OTT platform. "It is the producer's call at the end of the day. I don't have a burning desire to see my name on the big screen; I have the confidence it will happen in the future, with the 40 bound scripts that I have. I told my producers if we recover the money that we invested, the film is a success. Profits boil down to luck in the industry. But the way the deals are going post the teaser, offers which land the producers in profits are pouring in," he signs off with a smile.

Suniel Narang's condition is stable

Leading distributor, producer and Asian Cinemas chief Suniel Narang was admitted in Apollo Hospitals on Sunday night following a sudden heart condition. He is now doing fine. "Suniel Narang suffered with chest pain last night and was rushed to the Apollo Hospital. Doctors performed stent a procedure immediately. He is now stable and healthy. He will get discharged from the hospital on Tuesday. He extends his thanks to everyone who has enquired about his health," Suniel's brother



Bharat Narang said in a statement on Monday. Suniel along with his father Narayana Das Narang and business part-


ner P Ram Mohan Rao has lined-up projects with Nagarjuna, Naga Shaurya, Nikhil and Sharwanand for the next one year.



Rajasekhara Raju in Joseph Telugu remake

After his projects with Pradeep Krishnamoorthy and Veerabhadram failed to move forward over creative reasons, Rajasekhara Raju has finally green-lit a new project. It will be produced by Venkata Srinivas Boggaram, while Neelakanta will man the director's chair. According to a source, the project is a remake of 2018 Malayalam hit *Joseph*, an investigative thriller. "The story is right up Rajasekhara's alley and he is extremely happy with the tweaks that Neelakanta made to suit his image and Telugu nativity. It would've gone on to floors by now if not for the lockdown," pointed out the source.

The original, directed by M Padmakumar, told the story of how a retired cop, who is known for his investigative prowess, unexpectedly gets pulled into a criminal case involving organ harvesting. The source further adds that Boggaram has lined-up another film with Rajasekhara and the search is on for a director. — NG



BVS Ravi shifts focus to writing

With his two directorial ventures — *Wanted* and *Jawaan* — crash-landing at the box office, BVS Ravi has shifted complete attention to writing. After penning the story of Vikram Kumar's next with Naga Chaitanya, the writer, according to

the buzz, is now helping Shreyas ET to generate new films. He has written three stories for Shreyas Any Time Theatre model and a new director Praveen is working on them. It remains to be seen whether he will direct all the three stories. One of the stories has been titled Rave Party,

while the other two — more or less — are youthful in their flavor.

Meanwhile, shedding some light about *Thank You, Vikram*, speaking to us recently, said that it's a story that needs to be told now. "It would resonate with the audience at various levels. That said it's not a message-

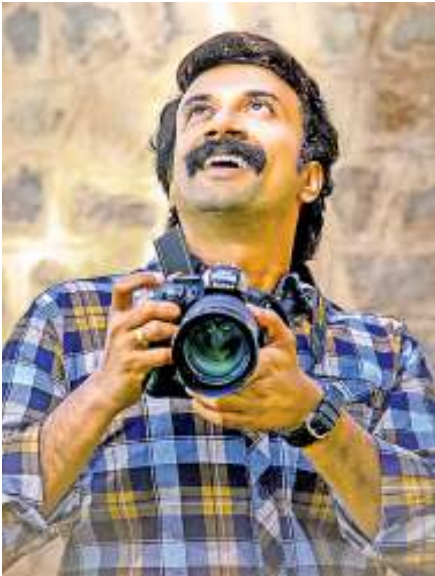
oriented film but has an undercurrent of something which is wonderful. It got me connected to the story in the first place. It has got all mainstream elements — humour, drama, romance and a little bit of action," the director, who is developing the story along with Ravi, had said.

Ram Charan all praise for 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. Industry big-wigs too are all praise for *UMUR*. Appreciating the team's work, actor Ram Charan took to twitter to extend best wishes to the

team. The actor who watched *UMUR* recently was all praise for the film. "UmaMaheshwaraUgraRoopasya is one film I absolutely loved. The film stays true to its content and I'm bowled over by the captivating performances of @ActorSatyaDev, @ItsActorNareshgaru, @ActorSuhas, Hari Chandana and Roopa. You've drawn the best from your team @mahaisnotanoun (sic)," the actor tweeted.

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.



Atul Kulkarni: Pandemic will enhance disparity, impact economy, edu

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic will only enhance the existing inequality and disparity in Indian society, and also impact economy and education, feels actor Atul Kulkarni.

"Everything is uncertain today but one thing certain, especially in a developing country like India, is that the disparity and inequality in our society are going to grow. Not only economic disparity, it will also have an effect on the education," said Kulkarni.

With educational institutions shut owing to lockdown, online education has become an alternative for students.

Commenting on the same, the actor said, "For online education, you need certain equipment at home. You need parents who can teach children at home. If you go to a village or even in Mumbai if you go to a slum, such a cultural capital is not with parents. As a result, you will see a huge inequality and disparity in education, which is going to come and bite us seven or eight years from now. The attempt of every government should be to reduce that inequality."

Asked how his life changed over the past few months of lockdown, the actor commented, "I have not really missed shooting or the sets. I have not really missed Mumbai because I have been staying in my farmhouse for the last four months. I have really enjoyed my stay at the farmhouse. My NGO works from there and work on that front is going on."

On the work front, the National Award-winning actor features in the recently-released Amazon Prime web series *Bandish Bandits*.

Sharing his experience of working in the musical, the actor said, "Music is the 'atma' of *Bandish Bandits*. I am happy that I got this opportunity to try something I have never done before — to act like a classical singer.

"Classical singing is extremely difficult, to sing the sargam isn't very easy especially when you have the breathless Shankar (Mahadevan) lending his voice to you!" he added.

Asked if he would like to go through a training to get a hold of classical singing, the actor joked, "I would perhaps need 49 births to sing classical!"