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VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY JULY 14, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



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ELVIS PRESLEY'S GRANDSON BENJAMIN KEOUGH DIES AT 27

Elvis Presley's only grandson died Sunday, his mother Lisa Marie Presley's manager confirmed to AFP, with local media reporting the death as an apparent suicide. Benjamin Keough, 27, was found in Calabasas near Los Angeles from a self-inflicted gunshot wound, police sources told TMZ. Manager Roger Widowski gave no details about the death, saying that Lisa Marie Presley - Elvis's only child from his marriage to actor Priscilla Presley - was "heartbroken, inconsolable and beyond devastated." "She adored that boy. He was the love of her life," Widowski said, adding she was "trying to stay strong" for her daughters. Benjamin Keough seldom appeared in public but the few photos of him showed his strong resemblance to his grandfather.



RS 75,000 CR FUND FOR INDIA'S DIGITAL ECONOMY: GOOGLE

Hours before Google declared setting up a Rs 75,000 crore fund to help accelerate India's digital economy, the Prime Minister's Office shared details of Narendra Modi's conversation with Google CEO Sundar Pichai on a wide range of subjects, especially use of technology to further education, agriculture and 're-skilling' the country's workforce. "I was delighted to know more about the efforts of @Google in several sectors, be it in education, learning, @ DigitalIndia, furthering digital payments and more," the Prime Minister tweeted. "We discussed the challenges the global pandemic has brought to areas such as sports.



AMID RAJASTHAN CRISIS, ED, I-T RAIDS ON PEOPLE CLOSE TO GEHLOT

The Rajasthan political crisis took a new turn on Monday when the Income Tax and Enforcement Directorate teams raided multiple premises connected to people from Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's camp. According to IT department officials, searches were underway in offices of veteran state Congress leaders, including Rajeev Arora and Dharmendra Rathod, considered close to the Chief Minister. Unaccounted cash, jewellery, property papers and lockers were seized. The team also reached Bhiwara and Jhalawad to carry out searches, officials said.



SC REFUSES TO ENTERTAIN PLEA ON CANCELLING AMARNATH YATRA

The Supreme Court on Monday said it cannot enter into the domain of the executive and district administration, as it declined to entertain a plea seeking a direction to the Centre, J&K administration and Shri Amarnath Shrine Board to cancel/restrict access of general public/devotees for the Amarnath Yatra this year in the backdrop of the coronavirus outbreak. The petitioner has alternatively sought live 'darshan' of Lord Amarnath through internet & TV 'so that crores across the country can have access'. A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud said "With due respect to principle of separation of powers...we leave it to the concerned authorities to take a decision on the matter.



CIIG Capital is Buggana's financier of choice

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

While the AP government's recent proposal to the Centre, requesting it to provide sovereign guarantee to raise a massive USD 9 billion foreign loan from a US-based private trust created a flutter in political and bureaucratic circles, has raised many questions. The AP government's proposal led to an intense debate on why it approached a US-based private trust to raise such a massive foreign loan. Also, everyone interested in AP is curious to know which

is the trust that is willing to extend such a mammoth loan to the government of a state, something that has been thus far unheard of in India's history. Enquiries by *The Pioneer* revealed that this private entity that the AP government had approached is the 'CIIG Capital' which offered to extend such a huge loan to AP. The company's official website claims that, "CIIG Capital is an alternative investment firm that possesses a unique model with a



Hari Iyer, Consultant at the Boston Consulting Group

complete diverse portfolio. CIIG Capital's portfolio con-

sists of different dynamics such as, Health Care Insurance, Alternative Lending, High Risk Industries, Venture Capital, FinTech, Technology, Bio Medical, Software, infrastructure, oil and gas and real estate projects". CIIG Capital claims that its 100 per cent funding approach simplifies the process with less approval restrictions and contracts, allowing for projects to get started in an efficient manner. CIIG Capital recently provided project funding to compa-

nies in US in several industries such as hospitality, recreation and entertainment, medical, biodiesel, waste to energy, multifamily housing, aviation and water supply. Glimpse Aviation has taken the first draw of \$60 million and securing their position on their purchase of the aircraft order for Glimpse for over \$1.1 billion, even when factories are shutting down. This project finance and investment firm has put out over \$2.7 billion in Term Sheets from project funding requests in the last two weeks

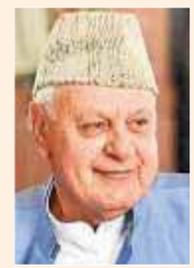
and is anticipating more to come. In a media statement recently, Charles D. Carey, Managing Partner of CIIG Capital, said "We are proud to continue our lending services and long-term support to a diverse range of industries during this Coronavirus crisis. While few lenders are continuing funding during these volatile financial times, our team is working hard and know that's a matter of time before the market will rebound. We look forward to a bright future for

all of our newly funded projects." CIIG Capital has continued to fund and just provided the needed draw for the \$90.5 million funding for the Sheraton Hotel in Atlanta, GA, when other lenders have stopped funding. In another media statement recently, CIIG Capital's Underwriting Director, Josh Leu said, "We're not afraid of what the news or skeptics say, we're funding some of the best companies in the United States and we underwrite not only today but what we believe the future will be."



While people reel under Corona, KCR cares for himself

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Farooq, Omar move HC for release of 16 NC leaders detained

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Sensex rises 99 points; RIL hits record high

8

Six more districts under Aarogyasri-project cover

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government has extended the pilot project under which medical expenses exceeding ₹1,000 will come under the ambit of Aarogyasri, to other six districts to be implemented from July 16. In addition to this, the total number of medical ailments was also increased from the existing 1,059 to 2,200, including those special cancer care services. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy issued orders to officials to this effect on Monday. As per the Chief Minister's instructions, the scheme will be made available in the six districts — Kadapa, Kurnool, Prakasam, Guntur, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam — to those people whose treatment amount crosses Rs 1,000. As promised in January this year, the Chief Minister launched YSR Aarogyasri scheme as a pilot project in West Godavari district, to cover 2,059 medical ailments.

37 dead, 1935 infected in sharpest Covid spike

A record 37 Covid-19 deaths were reported in Andhra Pradesh on Monday, the highest single-day tally so far, taking the toll to 365 as the overall infection count jumped up to 31,103 with the addition of a new record high of 1,935 positive cases. A total of 19,247 samples were tested and about 10 per cent of them turned positive for coronavirus, a government bulletin said, giving details for the last 24 hours ended at 10 AM. In all, an aggregate of 11,73,096 samples had been tested in the state of which 31,103 turned positive, with a positivity rate of 2.65 per cent. Six Covid-19 deaths were reported in Anantapur district, the highest in a day in a district so far. Kurnool, East Godavari and West Godavari districts reported four deaths each followed by Chittoor, Guntur, Krishna and Prakasam with three each. Kadapa and SPS Nellore districts had two deaths each while the north-coastal Andhra districts of Srikulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam had one Covid-19 fatality each.



Quarantine centres lack basic facilities, alleges Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition and TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday accused the Jaganmohan Reddy government of not providing the required basic facilities for coronavirus patients at government quarantine centres. Naidu said the ruling YSRCP was making claims of spending huge amounts of funds for recovery of Covid patients but the facilities being provided on the field level were far from satisfactory. Taking to Twitter, Naidu said that the people's fears and insecurities were increasing on seeing the deteriorating conditions at the quarantine centres.

HC seeks ECI response on plea for de-registration of YSRCP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday sought a response from the Election Commission of India and others on a petition seeking de-registration of the YS Jaganmohan Reddy led Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party, claiming that it has "illegally" and "unlawfully" used the abbreviation "YSR" which is an integral part of the petitioner's name. A bench of Justice Jayant Nath has sought a response from the ECI and the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party to the plea filed by Anna YSR Congress Party seeking de-registration of the ruling party in Andhra Pradesh led by Jagan. The plea states that the petitioner is aggrieved by the illegal and unlawful appropriation and



unauthorised use by Jagan's party of the integral part of the petitioner's name, i.e., "YSR Congress Party", on its letterheads, campaign material and other collaterals of party administration. "This is despite clear instructions dated January 28, 2011 from ECI barring the Respondent No. 2 (YSR Congress Party) from adopting

"YSR Congress Party" as its party name. Respondent No. 2 in its communications to ECI has consciously refrained from using the abbreviation "YSR Congress" but to the world at large, in particular to its constituents, it is freely passing itself as the petitioner party," the plea said.

HC refuses anticipatory bail for Pithani's son, aide

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major shock to former minister Pithani Satyanarayana's son Venkata Suresh, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Monday rejected the plea for anticipatory bail filed by him and two others who are allegedly involved in the multi-crore ESI scam. Fearing that they would be arrested at any moment, the former minister's son and former personal secretary to Pithani Satyanarayana, Murali Krishna, had filed the plea in the High Court. Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) officials on Friday arrested Murali Mohan, who had earlier worked as a personal secretary to Pithani Satyanarayana, for his alleged involvement in

the ESI scam. Presently, he is working as a section officer in the Municipal Administration and Urban Development (MAUD) department in the Secretariat. Pithani Satyanarayana succeeded K Athannaidu as the labour minister during the TDP rule. It has been alleged that the scam, allegedly in the purchasing of medicines and other medical equipment on a large scale, had taken place during the tenure of Pithani Satyanarayana. ACB sleuths have collected evidence on the involvement of Pithani Satyanarayana's son Venkata Suresh in the sensational multi-crore ESI scam. Venkata Suresh reportedly played a major role in giving contracts to people known to him.



Mudragada withdraws from Kapu agitations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and Kapunadu leader Mudragada Padmanabham on Monday distanced himself from his agitation for reservations to the Kapu community under Backward Classes quota. A statement to this effect was issued by him.

AP postpones all CETS, date for EAMCET later

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh on Monday announced postponement of all the entrance examinations, including EAMCET, for admission into various courses in the state. With this, eight different entrance tests stand postponed. Speaking to media persons here, Suresh said that the decision to postpone all the entrance examinations in the state was taken on the sug-

gestion of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy in view of the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic. He stated that the EAMCET entrance examination would be conducted in the third week of September and the dates for the test would be announced soon. The Minister sought to clarify that this decision was taken to make sure that there would be no difficulties for the students appearing for national entrance examinations.

To a question, he said that a policy for online courses would be sketched out. When asked about the conduct of the final year exams for Undergraduate (UG) and Post Graduate (PG) courses, he said the exams will be conducted as per the University Grant Commission (UGC) regulations. Suresh added that students who failed to clear the Intermediate second year examinations would be declared passed.



TTD wants Centre to exchange Rs 50cr in banned notes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Surprising as it might sound, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams is still in possession of demonetised currency notes worth nearly Rs 50 crore, which it desperately wants to be exchanged for valid tender. TTD Trust Board chairman Y V Subba Reddy, who met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman in New Delhi on Monday, brought to her notice that the Trust has been holding on to the currency notes worth Rs 50 crore in the denominations of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 for the last



nearly four years. He requested the Union Minister to explore the possibility of exchanging these banned notes with legal tender, since the TTD had been in huge losses by way of fall in

TTD Trust Board chairman Y V Subba Reddy told Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman in New Delhi on Monday, brought to her notice that the Trust has been holding on to currency notes worth Rs 50 crore in the denominations of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 for the last nearly four years

revenue due to the Covid-19 impact. The currency notes in Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denominations were banned as part of demonetisation by the NDA government on December 8, 2016. "Despite the ban, several devotees continued to drop these old currency notes in the

Hundi of the temple, which could not be exchanged with the banks subsequently," Subba Reddy said. He requested Sitaraman to take the initiative and exchange these banned currency notes with new notes, so that the TTD could make up for the losses caused due to lockdown.

Contract workers to get paid on time

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has instructed officials to ensure that contract workers employed in various departments get their salaries on time through green channel. During a review meeting held here on Monday, the Chief Minister said that all contract workers employed in various Departments, Societies and Universities should get

their salaries on time, like any other government employee. The previous government has given time scale in a hurry just before the elections to the 54,000 contract employees and has done nothing to them, he said. It was only from July 2019 that the minimum time scale is being implemented. The State took the burden on it and which costs the exchequer Rs 1,000 crore.

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Ashadha & Krishna Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Navami: 08:23 pm
Nakshatram: Ashwini: 02:07 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 03:36 pm - 05:13 pm
Yamagandam: 09:07 am - 10:44 am
Varyyam: 09:38 am - 11:25 am, 12:45 am - 02:32 am
Gulika: 12:21 pm - 01:59 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 06:03 am - 07:50 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:56 am - 12:47 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly cloudy
Temp: 33/26
Humidity: 77%
Sunrise: 05:49 am
Sunset: 06:54 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated July 13, 2020 5:00 PM

There is a one-of-a-kind Chief Minister in the country.

He is not seen or heard for days together — he stays for two to three weeks at a stretch in a farmhouse away from the city, where nobody dares call him.

He relaxes in the farmhouse on the outskirts of capital, unmindful of files piling up and mounting work; the administration comes to a standstill, yet he remains inaccessible to the Governor, Ministers or MLAs.

He is none other than Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.

During the past six years, KCR has never entered the Secretariat even once. He got his camp office built in Hyderabad and governs the state from there.

Now, he is busy building a grandiose secretariat building pulling down the existing one, at a time the state is reeling under Coronavirus impact.

Many of the buildings of the existing secretariat complex

While people reel under Corona, KCR cares for himself

were built with all amenities four or five years ago spending crores of taxpayers money. The CM wants to etch his name permanently on the annals of history by getting a structure built during his rule like the Nizams.

While pulling down the secretariat buildings, a temple and masjid were also demolished.

Even though the historic Osmania Hospital is getting dilapidated, the CM won't see it.

Banking on the sabotage of the people by the Congress and on the plank of Telangana self-respect, KCR captured power but never worked to uphold the self-respect of people of Telangana.

Borrowing funds to the tune of lakhs of crores, anarchic rule and his excessive talkativeness made Telangana a laughing stock on the national stage.

During the past six years, KCR has never entered the Secretariat even once. Now, he is busy building a grandiose secretariat building pulling down the existing one, at a time the state is reeling under Coronavirus impact. Now, he is busy building a grandiose secretariat pulling down the existing one, at a time the state is reeling under Coronavirus impact.

Like the erstwhile doras of the Nizam period, KCR rules from his fortress like a dictator, according to his whims and fancies. There is no meaning to words like democracy, transparency and accountability in his dictionary.

He conceptualised irrigation projects, designed them himself and got them executed according to his likes and dislikes and never bothered submitting accounts. Moreover, he did not submit the DPRs and siphoned off 15,000 crores of his administration are highhand-

edness, corruption and misuse of power.

The coronavirus crisis has brought the inefficient rule of KCR to light. He is repressing voices that question his authority, chase those who protest against him and encourages lumpen forces.

The number of corona positive cases in the country is 7.2 per cent, while it is 21 per cent in Telangana.

Even as Covid patients drop dead, the administration puts the number of cases to be 15,000 sweeping the facts under the carpet.



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

The Centre has to caution the State government as it failed to conduct even 2,000 cases per day.

KCR took shelter in his farmhouse as staff of the Pragati Bhavan contracted the virus. While the people are facing problems for want of medical amenities, KCR is both-

ered about his own health.

When it comes to wielding power, he joins hands with communal forces like Owaisi and maintains a tight upper lip even if communal forces resort to atrocities.

That is why the 'Eighth Nizam' KCR opposed the Citizenship Amendment Act, passed to give citizenship to non-Muslims who faced oppression in neighbouring countries.

As long as PV Narasimha Rao, former PM, was alive, KCR ignored him and made several rounds to Sonia Gandhi's residence in Delhi. Now he has tightened his belt to safeguard Telangana self-respect in the name of PV Narasimha Rao.

The people of Telangana are not gullible to fall for his argument. KCR might have introduced some schemes for

the benefit of people, but he and his family members and those very close to him amassed several thousands of crores. The funds given by the Centre to the state have been siphoned off for their illegal activities and the State plunged into debts. The rulers are eating from golden plates hoodwinking the people by chanting Golden Telangana.

KCR is promoting the evil culture of dynastic rule, against which the BJP is fighting tooth and nail.

The Congress by virtue of its anarchic and corrupt administration practised politics of dynasty almost disappeared from many states, including Telangana.

The Ayarams and Gayarams remind us those who can stoop to any low just for the sake of power. That is why the people rejected the

Congress even if it was instrumental in awarding statehood to Telangana.

Stepping into the shoes of Congress, what did KCR do? He promoted the same culture, same brand of dynastic rule and same kind of corrupt politics.

The Change which the people of Telangana desired cannot be seen anywhere in Telangana society. That is why BJP emerged as an alternative to the Congress for the people of Telangana.

KCR has been resorting to repressive tactics as he noticed the fires of discontent being stoked among the people against his administration. He is engineering attacks on the elected people's representatives.

The BJP which captured four LS seats in Telangana is not far way to capture power in Telangana too on the lines of Tripura. The main reason for this is attributed to sincerity of Narendra Modi and his corruption-free and clean administration.

TRULY SPEAKING



Set up medical college in Hindupur, asks Balakrishna

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Actor and TDP Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna urged the government to establish the newly sanctioned medical college in Hindupur constituency. He wrote a letter to Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney in this regard.

He stated that there is sufficient land at Maluguru village in Hindupur mandal towards Hindupur to Kadiri Road and revenue officers after conducting a survey identified 52 acres of land, which is suitable for setting up of medical College at Maluguru village in Hindupur.

He opined that this area is ideal for the construction of medical college as there were government and private educational institutions, which are running in the adjoining areas.

He stated that this place is well connected with villages and towns in Hindupur constituency by road and train. He said that in Hindupur town there is a 250-bed district hospital with new blocks like dialysis, Mother and Child Care Hospital, which are fully furnished, and recently Covid-19 centre is also added to this hospital.

He further stated that nursing homes and multi-specialty hospitals are located in Hindupur and sufficient human resources are also available in this area, hence, it will be an advantage to the medical college.

Clusters established for distribution of quality rice

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As many as 2.60 lakhs of clusters were set up across the State for door delivery of ration to the people. Of the total clusters, 1,93,488 are in rural areas, while there are 50 to 75 families under each cluster.

The government has taken this decision to strengthen the public distribution system and also to curb corruption. Each cluster will be served by one village volunteer. The mapping of ration cards in the State has been almost completed.

Door delivery of quality rice through the public distribution system was launched as a pilot project in Srikakulam and it has been going on at a good pace. Buoyed by this, the civil supplies department officials are planning to implement this policy of door delivery of



quality rice through the PDS system across the State.

Kona Shashidhar, ex-officio secretary of the Civil Supplies Department, said details of the clusters were being taken from the Village Secretariats and rice cards were being allotted on the basis of them. About 13,370 mobile units will be made available by the Department of Civil Supplies

for the door-to-delivery of quality rice.

Village volunteers will go to the homes of the cardholders in each cluster and weigh and deliver quality rice to the beneficiaries.

All the additional costs for the distribution process will be borne by the government. If this policy is made available, all 1.49 crore cardhold-

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ers in the State will get quality rice within two to three days.

TDP: Vijayasai behaving like he's an extra-constitutional authority

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLC Buddha Venkanna on Monday flayed the YSRCP government for changing and removing the IAS officers and senior civil servants at the whims and fancies of the ruling party leaders.

Venkanna said it was unconstitutional on the part of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to use the All-India Civil Services as his pocket services by denying them their constitutional roles while the Chief Minister's advisors were acting as extra-constitutional authorities with limitless powers.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the TDP MLC said senior civil servants like LV Subrahmanyam, Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, PV Ramesh and Jasti Krishna Kishore faced unforeseen harassment and victimisation. The Chief Minister was not conscious of the fact that the IAS officers were appointed at the national-level and that they were bound to act by the Constitution. Only out of ignorance, Jagan has appointed over



● In fact, Vijayasai was himself acting like a Chief Minister for north Coastal Andhra's three districts while Jagan is the Chief Minister for the remaining 10 districts, he alleged

● Vijayasai was threatening to eliminate the TDP but he should realise that power would not stay with anybody forever, Venkanna said

33 advisors to run an extra-constitutional government without involving civil servants, ministers or department heads in the decision-making process.

Stating that Jagan was acting like a dictator, Venkanna said that YSRCP MP Vijayasai Reddy was becoming an extra-constitutional force by interfering in administration.

In fact, Vijayasai was himself acting like a Chief Minister for north Coastal Andhra's three districts while Jagan is the Chief Minister for the remaining 10 districts, he alleged. Vijayasai was threatening to eliminate the TDP but he should realise that power would not stay with anybody forever.

Sub-treasury officer in ACB net

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The ACB sleuths in Srikakulam caught a sub-treasury officer red-handed while taking the bribe from a retired school head master for clearing his pending bill dues.

K Jammayya, a retired head master of MPP School at Peddalogidi village in Pathapatnam mandal of Srikakulam district, had lodged a complaint with the ACB against Chelikani Suresh, sub-treasury officer, Pathapatnam

The head master had alleged that the treasury officer demanded a bribe of Rs 20,000 for clearing and passing his earned leave and half pay leave

bills. Initially, the complainant gave Rs 10,000 to the officer to complete his work but the latter demanded the remaining amount.

ACB officials laid a trap on Monday and caught the sub-treasury officer when he was receiving the bribe at his home. The chemical tests conducted on the both hands of the sub-treasury officer and inner linings of the left side shirt pocket yielded positive results. Tainted amount was recovered and relevant records were seized. The sub-treasury officer was arrested and produced before the court of special judge for SPE and ACB cases, Vizag.



TNSF demands AU V-C's dismissal

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Nadu Students Federation president MV Pranav on Monday slammed the YSRCP government for undermining and crippling the higher education standards in different universities across the State. Pranav demanded the dismissal of Andhra University Vice-Chancellor PVGD Prasada Reddy (full additional charge) for indulging in marks scam by introducing a unique revaluation scheme in the university.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, the TNSF leader said revaluation was used nowhere in the country and abroad and this was mainly intended to benefit Prof Prasada Reddy's followers and admirers. Students staged protests for two days and they relented only after



MV Pranav

the VC promised to look into it. Students' fear was that in the name of re-valuation, the marks of genuine and hard-working students would be cut.

Pranav deplored that the Jagan's regime has spoilt the future of higher education students by not appointing full-time Vice-Chancellors not only in Andhra University

Telugu Nadu Students Federation president MV Pranav demanded the dismissal of Andhra University Vice-Chancellor PVGD Prasada Reddy (full additional charge) for indulging in the marks scam by introducing a unique revaluation scheme in the university

but also in most of other universities in the State even after completion of one year.

The Chief Minister was running the state like a Tughlaq and making a mockery of the education sector, he alleged. The government owed an explanation to the people why it did not take action against the AU VC in the marks scam and whether the VC has taken approval of the University Grants Commission and the Higher

Education Department or not for introducing the revaluation scheme in the university. The TNSF leader strongly objected to the government and its forces resorting to attacks on the Dalit professors and activists. AU Prof Premanandam was targeted and attacked for questioning the the university management. The Central Bureau of Investigation should conduct a probe into the marks scam, he demanded.

Disinfection drive by Cyberabad cops

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad police on Monday launched a disinfection drive at the Commissionerate near biodiversity flyover. A total of 1,457 vehicles will be sanitised in Cyberabad in this drive.

The Cyberabad police are hoping to sanitise all kinds of police vehicles to arrest the spread of Coronavirus. On Monday, they sanitised 611 vehicles and remaining 846 vehicles would be sanitised till July 17 for the safety of personnel. Vehicles in the Cyberabad pilet, 494 four-wheelers, 47 heavy vehicles and 916 two-wheelers, will be sanitised by the personnel of 'Craft', who are lending their services for this initiative.

Railways sets a target of going completely green

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Railways has set a target of going completely green by becoming a 'net zero' carbon emitter by 2030 through various initiatives, including electrification of broad gauge, improving energy efficiency and switching to renewable sources, the national transporter said on Monday. It has also set a target of electrification of all routes on broad gauge by December 2023.

"Railway electrification, improving energy efficiency of locomotives and trains and fixed installations, green certification for installations/stations, fitting bio-toilets in coaches and switching to renewable sources of energy are parts of its strategy of achieving net zero carbon emission," it said.



The statement said the railways has completed electrification of more than 40,000 Route Kilometres (RKM) (63 per cent of Broad Gauge (BG) routes). It said 18,605 km electrification work has been done during

2014-20 compared to 3,835 km in 2009-14.

It said 365 km major connectivity work has been commissioned even during the Covid-19 period. During the Covid-19, Kati-Satna section (99 RKM) of

● Railway electrification, improving energy efficiency of locomotives and trains and fixed installations, green certification for installations/stations, fitting bio-toilets in coaches and switching to renewable sources of energy are parts of its strategy of achieving net zero carbon emission," according to the national transporter

Mumbai-Howrah via Allahabad route has been commissioned providing an alternate route to Howrah.

Likewise, Pachore-Maksi (88 RKM) section on Indore-Guna-Bina route has also been commissioned providing an alternate route to Maksi-Bhopal-Bina, it said, adding that on the Howrah/Sealdah-SVD Katra via Patna route, Bhagalpur-Shivnarayanpur (45 RKM) section has been commissioned.

On the route connecting Kaniakal port to coal, fertilizer and steel plants in Tamil Nadu and

Andhra Pradesh, Thiruvurur-Karikal port (46 RKM) section has been commissioned, providing port connectivity to Erode, Coimbatore and Palghat.

"Indian Railways has also taken a number of initiatives to promote solar energy. Indian Railways is working to harness the potential of 500 Mega Watt (MW) energy through roof top solar panels (Developer model)," the statement said.

Till date, 100 MW of solar plants have been commissioned on roof-tops of various buildings including 900 stations.

Distribute houses to poor, demands CPM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPM state leader Ch Babu Rao demanded that the government allocate houses to the poor, which were ready for occupation. He, along with other CPM leaders, visited Eluru on Monday and inspected the houses, which were ready for occupation.

Babu Rao said that they would stage a protest against the government on July 21, along with the beneficiaries of four lakh houses that were ready for occupation across the State, which were constructed during the TDP regime. He said that the poor

are facing hardships and unable to pay rents during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. He demanded the government release a white paper on the number of houses finished and ready for occupation and unfinished houses in the State. He alleged that about Rs 20,000 crore government's money was spent on the construction of houses was going waste.

He said that a statewide protest will be held on July 21 and all the beneficiaries should participate and if the government does not respond then the protest will be intensified.

VIOLATIONS IN BLACK METAL QUARRIES UNEARTHED

Vigilance wing cracks the whip on illegal mining

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The regional vigilance squad of the Mines and Geology department led by assistant director R Pratap Reddy cracked the whip against the black metal quarries in Vizag district by conducting a series of raids.

Officials, who started raiding the mining quarries to curb illegal mining, found violations in the mining.

On Monday, the regional vigilance wing of the department led by Pratap Reddy conducted raids at the four quarries (black metal) of VRR Associates, a mining company owned by Vengamamba Srinivas Babu, at Krishnapuram area in Padmanabham mandal of Vizag district.

Pratap Reddy told that they have observed several violations at the quarries such as rig blasting, which is dangerous, as the stones fall on nearby residences, illegal mining (excavated and transported more metal but shown in the records as less excavation), misuse of bills and a few others causing a huge revenue loss (over Rs 100 crore) to the government.

It may be recalled that Pratap Reddy and his team raided the quarries of VRR Associates at Seethanagaram area in Anakapalle mandal in Vizag district a few days ago and found violations. Pratap



Reddy said that VRR Associates violated the safety norms and indulged in excess excavation by causing loss to the government. They slapped a fine of Rs 33 crore on the VRR Associates for violations and illegal mining at Seethanagaram quarries, Reddy added.

However, the owner of the VVR Associates Srinivas Babu alleged that the regional vigilance squad of the Mines and Geology department led by R Pratap Reddy raided his mines at Seethanagaram area in Anakapalle mandal in Vizag district after he refused to pay Rs 3 crore bribe.

Srinivas Babu alleged that Pratap Reddy assumed the office as an assistant director recently, suggested that he pool up Rs 3 crore from other miners and pay him as joining formality. When the pro-

posal of Reddy was taken up in the meeting of the association of mining firms its district president JV Narasimha Rao found fault with Reddy's demand four such a huge bribe at a time when the mining industry was in crisis due to the Covid-19.

When they failed to pay the huge amount, Reddy immediately raided the quarries of Srinivas and Narasimha Rao without issuing any prior notices. Reddy slapped a fine of Rs 7 crore on Narasimha Rao and Rs 33 crore on Srinivas Babu, they alleged.

Dismissing the allegations of Srinivas, Pratap Reddy said that it was not the first time that he is facing such allegations. In the past one year, he carried out several raids on the quarries and unearthed illegal mining activities and

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Dismissing the allegations of Srinivas, Pratap Reddy said that it was not the first time that he is facing such allegations. In the past one year, he carried out several raids on the quarries and unearthed illegal mining activities and slapped a fine of Rs 440 crore on the mining firms for causing revenue loss to the government and violating the safety norms. Pratap Reddy challenged that he would resign if anyone proved that he is corrupt

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APIIC told to allocate land for shifting of LG Polymers

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The High Powered Committee (HPC), which was constituted by the government to probe into the LG Polymers gas tragedy incident that claimed 12 lives and left hundreds hospitalised, has suggested the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) to allot land in any industrial estates as per rules for smooth shifting of the factory.

The HPC has suggested some measures to the government based on the safety considerations, environmental aspects and the feedback received from the public and stakeholders. Now, the LG Polymers industry is located in the thickly populated area of Visakhapatnam. The committee feels the chemical accident occurred on May 7 is a wakening call and measures should be taken to ensure safety around the industries, especially the chemical and hazardous ones.

The LG Polymers should be relocated from the human habitations preferably in the established notified industrial estates, said the High Powered Committee in its 4,000 page report adding that the present LG Polymers industrial land may be used for either Green or White category industry subject to the outcome of



environment clearance.

The report further suggested that in case this is not feasible, then conversion of the land for either residential or commercial purpose may be examined.

LG Polymers may be asked to continue the staff employed in the White or Green category industry at the same location, or may be asked to provide employment to the staff in the new factory location.

There is a need to shift the chemical factory because the residential built-up area is located on the western side and the eastern sides of the industry. On the south side, a railway track is existing and open land is located on the north side. Significant residential density has been detected in the N-NW direction in the last 15 years. In all, 52 layouts were approved in the 2 km radius of LG Polymers.

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Focus on home quarantine: Special Chief Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

KS Jawahar Reddy, Special Chief Secretary, Medical, Health and Family Welfare, informed the District Collectors to review the policy of the quarantine so as to focus more on home quarantine as a strategy.

He said that in view of the MoHA guidelines, the institutional quarantine is compulsory for the foreign returnees for a period of seven days. As of now, the people from Gulf countries are quarantined for 14 days. It is directed to have a uniform institutional quarantine of seven days for all foreign returnees. Test may be conducted between the fifth and seventh day and based on the test result follow up action is to be initiated, he said.

It is directed for random test to 10 per cent of the people based on selection of seat numbers and preference to people of more than 60 years age and children of less than 10 years coming by domestic air mode by taking swab at airports itself and allowing them for home quarantine for 14 days.

Swabs for 10 per cent of the passengers coming by trains will be collected and the test as far as possible need to be arranged near railway station in the mobile buses. In case the random test show positive, further action will be initiated as per existing health protocol. All persons must undergo home quarantine for 14 days.

Multi-specialty hospitals to be set up in ITDA

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Health and Family Welfare Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani) said that doctors will be available at all the Primary Health Centres in Agency areas and all vacant posts in hospitals will be filled immediately.

The minister said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has decided to establish seven multi-specialty hospitals in the ITDA. To provide quality treatment to the people, the government has allocated Rs 11,400 crore. In each Parliamentary constituency a medical college will be established, the minister said.

He further stated that there are about 11 government medical colleges in the State and 16 medical colleges would be established. He visited



Butteyaguden in Polavaram constituency and inspected the community health centre and enquired about the services being provided to the patients.

Later, he held a review meeting at the community health centre with the health officials. Polavaram MLA T Bala Raju, District Collector R Mutyalaraaju, ITDA PO Suryanarayana, DM & HO Dr Sunanda, DCH Dr Shankar Rao, district Red Cross chairman M Jayaprakash and others were present.

Contract workers to get paid on time

Continued from Page 1

There was a hike of 88 per cent to 95 per cent in salaries when compared to that of March 31, 2017.

Salary for Junior Lecturers was hiked from Rs 19,050 to 37,100 from July 2019 onward which works out to 95 per cent. Health Personnel, Health Assistant (Male) salary was hiked from Rs 14,860 to Rs 22,290 which is 88 per cent. The salary of secondary grade teachers (SGT) was increased by 95 per cent to Rs 21,230 from Rs 10,900. The salary of school assistants has gone up by 95 per cent from Rs 10,900 to Rs 21,230 since July.

The salaries of contract workers should be paid through green channel and the amount should be credited to their bank accounts like regular employees, Jagan instructed.

The Chief Minister asked

the officials to prepare a study report on the social and medical security benefits to contract workers and submit it.

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, Secretary Finance, Rawat, GAD (Services) Secretary Sasibhushan, Labour Department Secretary Udayalakshmi, Aarogyasri Trust CEO Mallikharjun and other officials attended the meeting. PNS n Jaipur

The Rajasthan Congress legislature Party here on Monday passed a resolution supporting the Ashok Gehlot-led government in the state amid a tussle for power between him and Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot. It also recommended strong disciplinary action against any Congress MLA and office-bearer who "weakens" the party.

Party sources claimed that 106 MLAs, both from

the Congress and those supporting it, were present in the meeting.

Sachin Pilot and some of his loyalists did not attend it. The resolution expressed confidence in the leadership of national party president Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

The Congress Legislature Party expresses full faith and confidence in the leadership of party president Sonia Gandhi and leader Rahul Gandhi. This meeting unanimously supports the Congress government led by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, the resolution said.

It said the CLP condemns all undemocratic wrongful acts for weakening the Congress Party and the state government.

If any of the Congress office-bearers or member of the CLP directly or indirectly performs acts against the government and party

or is involved in such a conspiracy, then strong disciplinary action be taken against him, said the resolution.

The resolution also blamed the BJP for conspiring to destabilise the Congress government and murdering democracy with the misuse of power and money to lure MLAs.

This is an insult to eight crore people of Rajasthan, the resolution added.

It mentioned that the Congress government led by Gehlot took revolutionary decisions in public interest in the past a year and a half and its efforts to deal with the coronavirus crisis were appreciated across the country.

After the meeting was over, the MLAs were shifted to a hotel in Kukas on the Jaipur-Delhi highway.

The chief minister and other leaders also are went there with the MLAs.

Deficit rainfall forecast for north Andhra

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Indian Meteorological Department on Monday forecast normal rain in south coastal and Rayalaseema regions and less rainfall in the north Andhra region.

V Usha Rani, principal secretary of AP Disaster Management Authority, revealed this while participating in a videoconference along with principal secretary of Panchayat Raj Gopalakrishna Dwivedi, commissioner of disaster management department Kanna Babu with the officials of various departments at the Secretariat here on Monday.

She informed the officials that the quantum of rainfall received in the state till July 12 this year was 211.4 mm which is 44.9 per cent more than the average. Rainfall was normal in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts and excess in the rest of the districts in the State. She suggested to the heads of various departments to prepare an

action plan to face the southwest monsoon keeping in view the Covid-19 guidelines. "We should stick to district disaster management plan and departmental disaster management plan to minimise the damage during the disasters," she said.

Commissioner K Kannababu said that the people should be warned of flash floods, which might occur in the next months, by coordinating with all the departments. "A booklet on 'Guidelines for Disaster Management' has been prepared to be followed during the disasters," he said.

Principal Secretary V Usha Rani released the book on Dos and Don'ts during disasters.

AP Transco JMD KVN Chakradhar Babu, Executive director of Disaster Management department Shyam Prasad, Fire Services director Jayaram Naik, IMD director Stella, the officials of NDRF, SDRF, Navy, Army, and various government departments were present.

Mudragada withdraws from Kapu agitations

Continued from Page 1

In his statement, Mudragada said that he was pained at a systematic campaign being unleashed by some big people "through some Kapu brothers demoralising me and weakening me psychologically through social media and electronic media".

"I don't know why I am being attacked by like this. Perhaps they are under the impression that I had not given them a share in the funds that I had collected during the movement for Kapu reservation or the booty collected from industrialists by threat-

ening them, after surrendering myself to the former Chief Minister or the present Chief Minister," the Kapunadu leader wrote, sarcastically.

He said former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu was responsible for the revival of the agitation for Kapu reservation. "He had promised to include Kapus in the BC list and give them reservations and I had to take up the agitation when he did not fulfil the promise," Mudragada said.

He emphasised that he had never aspired for posts and positions or making money through the Kapu reservation agitation.

"In fact, I have lost heavily both financially and health-wise. But I was never worried about any loss and always strove for the upliftment of Kapus," he said.

The former minister said though there were attempts to hijack his movement, he had never felt bad about it. "I always told my well-wishers that if any other leader could bring reservations to Kapus, it was always welcome. I never desired that I should take the entire credit. I also told Naidu that I didn't expect anything if he had provided reservations to Kapus," he clarified.

Doctor drives tractor to ferry Covid victim's body

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

At a time when one comes across news reports and visuals of inhuman disposal of bodies of Covid-19 patients, a doctor in Peddapalli has set an example for others by driving a tractor to shift a Coronavirus victim's body for burial. Dr Sriram of government-run hospital in Peddapalli came forward to drive the tractor to shift the body from the hospital on Sunday since the driver of a



Peddapalli Municipality's duty for some reason. Dr Sriram offered to drive

the tractor since the shifting of the body was getting delayed, much to the relief of the victim's family. Wearing a Personal Protection Equipment kit, the doctor later ferried the body for disposal, earning praise from one and all. The victim had died at the district hospital at Peddapalli on Sunday. Area people said the doctor was not only performing his duties diligently on the frontline despite all the risks involved but also going out of the way to help the

patients and families. "There is fear and lack of knowledge about the disease and its spread. I just wanted to set an example and show that there is nothing to fear. When handled with proper PPE, the virus spread can be arrested. The body was also disinfected before it was packed in the body bag. I drove the body to the burial ground so that our staff will also take it up without fear if such a situation arises even in my absence," Dr Sriram said.

HC refuses anticipatory bail for...

Continued from Page 1

It is alleged that contractors queued up at his native place Kommuchikalaku to get their works done. ACB found that during the tenure of Pithani Satyanarayana as labour minister, the works pertaining to the department used to be allocated at the behest of Venkata Suresh. There was also rumours then that contract works used to be given only after the aspirants met Venkata Suresh and paid a 10 per cent cut. It's learnt that the former minister's son used to write chits on who should get the tenders and the allocations used to happen based on his directions.

6 more districts under Aarogyasri-project cover

Continued from Page 1

Although only 1,059 procedures were provided during the previous government, the State government initially increased them to 2,059, which later went up to 2,200, including the cancer care procedures. Apart from revamping the healthcare services, the Chief Minister also cleared the pending bills by the previous government to network hospitals. Since June 2019, Rs 1,815 crore was utilised for the Aarogyasri scheme and Rs 315 crore for Employee Health Scheme (EHS).

Quarantine centres lack basic facilities...

Continued from Page 1

Quarantine centres lack basic facilities, alleges Naidu. He said that the Government should explain why the facilities were of very poor quality when huge funds were being spent. He said that it was not correct for the ruling party to play games with the lives of the people. Naidu said that any Government should take up such activities that would create confidence among the people about the services being rendered. He lamented that such a situation was not prevailing in the

state. Naidu claimed that the TDP efficiently provided best services at Anna Canteens by involving a proven organisation like Akshaya Patra Foundation. The TDP chief advised the CM to prove its commitment to public service in deeds and not mere words or statements. Naidu made this criticism in response to a video that showed patients at a quarantine centre complaining about poor quality of food and other services there. Both men and women patients criticised the Government and the officials for not providing even basic facilities for them.

37 dead, 1935 infected in sharpest...

Continued from Page 1

According to officials, some of these deaths happened two-three days ago but were not announced, pending approval from the Doctors Committee. The committee approved the toll on Monday and accordingly the deaths were listed in today's bulletin, a senior health official said. In the last 24 hours, 1,030 coronavirus patients had recovered and been discharged from hospitals across the state, raising the overall discharges so far to 16,464.

HC seeks ECI response on plea for de-registration of YSRCP

Continued from Page 1

The petition filed through Advocate Vipin Nair stated that the Jaganmohan Reddy led YSR Congress Party is guilty of clear, wilful, pre-meditated, deliberate and conscious disobedience to adhere to lawful directions and instructions of the ECI given from time to time. "This invites de-recognition of a recognised political party under Para 16A of the Symbols Order and for this purpose, the Election Commission possesses broad disciplinary/penal powers," said senior advocate Meenakshi Arora arguing for the petitioner. She added that this wilful and conscious disobedience is aggra-

vated by the fact that in the past the Jaganmohan Reddy led party had applied for and was not granted the right to use the abbreviation YSR Congress. The court will now hear the matter on September 3. The plea also states that the Respondent No. 2 (Jagan led YSR Congress party) is obliged under law and as directed by Respondent No. 1 (ECI), to use the name "Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party" and not its abbreviated form viz. "YSR Congress Party", which is an integral part of the petitioner's name "Anna YSR Congress Party". The plea also states that the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party in a mischievous

and cavalier manner, in order to overcome the prohibition of using the name "YSR Congress Party", chose to hoodwink the Election Commission and other statutory authorities by using the correct name of "Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party" in their correspondence with the statutory authorities and cleverly using the name of "YSR Congress Party" to the public at large as well as to its constituents. "This modus operandi can be clearly demonstrated in the annexures filed in the writ petition which clearly disclose the double standards and malafide of the Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party," the petitioner said.

Rahul, Priyanka in touch with Pilot, trying to placate him: Sources

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, are in touch with Sachin Pilot and are trying to placate him, a day after the Rajasthan Deputy CM declared open rebellion against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, sources said on Monday.

Pilot has claimed that the Ashok Gehlot government is in minority and that he has the support of over 30 MLAs in the 200-member Assembly.

According to sources, top Congress leaders have talked to Pilot and have asked him not to rebel against the chief minister. They also assured him that his grievances would be redressed at the party level.

Besides Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi, other Congress leaders who are learnt to have spoken with Pilot are Ahmed Patel, former Union finance minister P Chidambaram and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal.

It was not immediately known what transpired during the discussions.

Sources said the leaders asked Pilot to attend a Congress Legislature Party meeting in Jaipur, but he has not given any assurance.

Pilot, who is in Delhi, has not been taking calls of many



Pilot, who is in Delhi, has not been taking calls of many party leaders. AICC general secretary in-charge for Rajasthan Avinash Pande has said that Pilot has not been responding to calls and messages have been left with him



Doors open for Pilot, says Cong

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The Congress on Monday said its doors remain open for Sachin Pilot, the rebel leader who claimed that he has the support of over 30 party MLAs in the state's 200-member assembly. "Doors are open for Sachin Pilot and other MLAs," senior leader Randeep Surjewala told reporters here ahead of a crucial meeting of party MLAs. The Congress Legislature Party meeting began about three hours later than scheduled, with ministers and MLAs flashed victory signs for the cameras. The Congress said 109 MLAs have already expressed support for CM Ashok Gehlot, rejecting the claim by Deputy Chief Minister and the party's state unit president Sachin Pilot that the senior leader not have the majority.

Buses parked outside Rajasthan CM's house trigger speculation, MLAs shifted to hotel

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Four buses reached chief minister's Ashok Gehlot's residence Monday afternoon, triggering speculation that Congress MLAs holding a

meeting inside may be shifted to a hotel. A Congress Legislature Party meeting began at the CM's house at 1.30 pm, amid a tussle for power between Gehlot and Deputy Chief Minister

Sachin Pilot. Some weeks ago, ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls, the Congress had shifted its MLAs to a resort for about a week to ensure that they were not "lured" away before the voting.

party leaders. AICC general secretary in-charge for Rajasthan Avinash Pande has said that Pilot has not been responding to calls and messages have been left with him.

Pilot has raised a banner of revolt against Gehlot, after the special operations group (SOG) of Rajasthan Police sent

a notice to him for appearing before it in the case involving "horse-trading" of MLAs in the state.

The SOG has registered an FIR in this regard and has also sent notices to the chief minister, chief whip of Congress and some ministers and MLAs. Meanwhile, the Congress

has pulled out all the stops to save its government in Rajasthan and CM Gehlot has convened a meeting of the state legislature party.

Pilot, who is also the state Congress president, is miffed with Gehlot and has alleged that he was not being kept in the loop on key decisions.



Passenger demand contract by 49 pc for Indian airlines in 2020

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The passenger demand for air travel will contract by 49 per cent this year for Indian carriers in comparison to last year due to the COVID-19 crisis, said global airlines body IATA on Monday.

In a statement, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said the Indian carriers' revenues will decrease by USD 11.61 billion this year in comparison to last year due to the pandemic.

It said the airlines of the Asia-Pacific region will see passenger demand collapse by 53.8 per cent this year in comparison to last year.

The passenger demand or RPK (revenue passenger kilometers) for a flight is calculated by multiplying the number

of passengers sitting in the flight to the distance travelled by that flight.

"This is the worst year in aviation history and airlines are in survival mode. The carriers in Asia-Pacific will experience the largest losses at USD 29 billion. That's a loss of USD 30.09 per passenger," Conrad Clifford, IATA's Regional Vice President for Asia Pacific, said.

"It will take a few years for the industry to get back to 2019 levels of activity," said Clifford.

India resumed its scheduled domestic passenger flights from May 25 after a gap of two months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Scheduled international passenger flights continue to remain suspended in the country.

SHORT READS



Amitabh, Abhishek stable, 26 staff members test negative

MUMBAI: Megastar Amitabh Bachchan and his son, actor Abhishek Bachchan, who were admitted to a hospital here after testing positive for coronavirus, are "clinically stable", hospital sources said on Monday. Amitabh, 77, and Abhishek, 44, revealed their diagnosis on Twitter on July 11, saying they were in the isolation ward of Nanavati Hospital and all the people who came in their direct contact will undergo test for the virus. "They both are in the (isolation) ward and are clinically stable. At present, they do not require aggressive treatment. They are okay with the first line of medication. They are being given supportive therapy," a hospital insider said. "Their vitals and appetite are fine," the source added. Assistant municipal commissioner, K West ward, Vishwas Mote confirmed that 26 staff members working at Bachchans' bungalows have tested negative for COVID-19.

BJP leader Kalyan Singh appears before Babri trial court

LUCKNOW: Senior BJP leader Kalyan Singh on Monday appeared before the special CBI court here in connection with the 1992 Babri mosque demolition case. The 88-year-old former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and former Rajasthan Governor arrived at the court to record his statement before the CBI special judge. The CBI court is currently recording the statements of 32 accused under CrPC section 313 (court's power to examine the accused), a stage in the trial that follows the examination of accused. Other alleged accused, including former deputy prime minister L K Advani and senior BJP leaders M M Joshi, are yet to be examined at this stage. Their lawyers have indicated to the CBI court that they prefer to appear through video conferencing.

BJP MP asks Cong not to do politics in times of pandemic

DEHRADUN: BJP MP from Nainital Ajay Bhatt on Monday hit back at the Congress for protesting against what they term as poor healthcare facilities in the state, asking the party to refrain from doing politics in times of a pandemic. Advising the Congress to think of the "appalling condition" of health facilities in the state when the party was itself in power, Bhatt highlighted the major steps taken by the state government after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out to ramp up healthcare infrastructure. "Recruitment of doctors and paramedics has been carried out on a war footing in the recent months, testing facilities have been ramped up. There are nearly 22,000 isolation beds in the state and enough ventilators to deal with any emergency," Bhatt said.

I-T raids in Delhi, Jaipur against Rajasthan-based business groups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

The Income Tax Department is conducting searches in four cities, including Delhi and Jaipur, in connection with a tax evasion case against a Rajasthan-based hydropower infrastructure company and some other business groups, officials said on Monday.

The raids come at a time when Rajasthan is witnessing an intense power tussle between Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his deputy Sachin Pilot.

While official sources in the tax department did not confirm if those searched are



linked to the Congress leadership in the state, party leaders in Delhi and Rajasthan questioned the timing of the raids and condemned the action.

Congress sources in Rajasthan said the premises linked to party leaders Rajiv

Arora and Dharmendra Rathore are being searched. I-T teams were seen visiting the Amrapali Jewellers showroom in Jaipur, stated to be owned by Rajiv Arora.

While Arora is the Vice President of the Rajasthan Congress, Rathore is a former Chairman of the state seed corporation.

Income Tax officials said the tax raids have been launched early morning in Delhi, Jaipur, Mumbai and Kota and premises of the promoters and owners are being covered.

At least 80 tax sleuths apart from police officials are part of the action, they said.

SC asks Madras HC to decide TN's plea for OBC quota in medical admissions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday asked the Madras High Court to decide the pleas, including one filed by Tamil Nadu government, against the Centre's decision not to grant 50 per cent quota to OBCs in medical seats surrendered by the state in all India quota for under graduate, post graduate and dental courses in 2020-21. A bench of Justices L Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta said the high court should decide the plea of the state government and others irrespective of the pendency of another case here.

In a hearing conducted via



video link, the top court said, "All the contention raised in petitions (before it) should be decided by the High Court" and requested the High Court to deal with the

case. Earlier, the state government had moved the Supreme Court on July 2 seeking a direction to the High Court to expeditiously decide its plea challeng-

ing the Centre's decision not to grant 50 per cent quota to OBCs in medical seats surrendered by the state in all India quota for UG, PG and dental courses in 2020-21.

It had assailed the June 22 high court order which refused to grant any interim order on the OBC quota row saying that a similar petition was already scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court. The apex court, which was scheduled to hear the case titled as Saloni Kumar versus Union of India on July 8, has adjourned the hearing and had fixed the case for a later date. The High Court had fixed the state's plea on quota on July 9.

Bengal MLA found hanging, incident sets off political storm

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A West Bengal MLA was found dead under mysterious circumstances near his home in North Dinajpur district on Monday, an incident his family and the BJP claimed was a "cold-blooded murder", and blamed the ruling TMC for it.

The body of Debendra Nath Ray, in his 60s, was found hanging from the ceiling of a veranda outside a shuttered shop near his home in Bindal village in Hemtabad area of the district, police said.

West Bengal police said a suicide note was found from his shirt pocket where he blamed two people for his death.

Ray had won the Hemtabad (reserved) seat on a CPI-M



ticket in 2016 but later joined the BJP. He had, however, not quit his assembly seat.

Ray was found hanging from a ceiling outside a closed shop in the morning. Investigation has started. A forensic team has reached the spot and his body sent for postmortem, a senior district police official said.

ANTI CAA PROTESTS:

HC asks police to file replies on all pleas related to Jamia violence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Monday directed Delhi Police to file response on various pleas related to the violence during Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) university protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act last December.

The court's order came after it was informed by the counsel for some of the petitioners that Delhi Police has filed its response only in a few petitions and not all.

"Respondents (Delhi Police) have filed consolidated replies in a few matters. We direct the respondents to file replies in all the matters within two days.



Rejoinder, if any, be filed in four days thereafter," said a bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Prateek Jain.

Advocate Rajat Nair, appearing for Delhi Police, said they have filed a consolidated reply in all the petitions.

"To this, the bench said the agency has to file replies in all the

matters and added "don't take an easy recourse".

The court added that the copies of counter affidavit and rejoinder be supplied to all the parties before the next date of hearing on June 21, so that it can hear arguments on that day.

Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, appearing for some of the petitioners, said the police have not filed the reply in three petitions seeking compensation for grave injuries caused to the students due to alleged police beating and action against the erring officials.

The consolidated affidavit of the police was filed in six of the nine petitioners in the Jamia violence matter.

MCDs asked to ensure no impermissible industry in non-conforming areas: Delhi govt to NGT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has told the National Green Tribunal that municipal corporations have been directed to ensure that no impermissible industry is allowed to operate in the residential and non-conforming area of Delhi and needs to be sealed permanently.

The Delhi government said that a review meeting was held with concerned agencies and detailed discussions were held with regard to a comprehensive survey of industries functioning without a license in residential areas.

"The government has also issued a letter dated May 18 to the three municipal corporations with the direction to ensure compliance of the provisions of MPD 2021 while granting license or NOC to industrial units under the



household category in residential and non-conforming areas of Delhi.

"Because of the force majeure (unforeseeable circumstances) due to advent of COVID-19 followed by lockdown, all industries had closed in Delhi with effect from March 22, 2020. Nevertheless, all three municipal corpora-

tions have been directed to comply with the direction of the tribunal and to ensure that no impermissible industry is allowed to operate in residential and non-conforming area of Delhi with the lockdown easing of curbs and need to be sealed permanently," the Delhi government told the tribunal. The submissions were made

"The government has also issued a letter dated May 18 to the three municipal corporations with the direction to ensure compliance of MPD 2021 while granting license or NOC to industrial units under the household category in residential and non-conforming areas of Delhi"

in response to a plea to close down industries illegally operating in residential areas in violation of Master Plan of Delhi, 2021.

The tribunal had taken strong exception over the approach of the Delhi govern-

ment and other authorities on the issue and said there is continued and consistent non-compliance of the orders of the Supreme Court and the NGT.

It had said that authorities have failed to take adequate remedial action for preventing the polluting activities and recovering compensation for illegal operation of such industries.

With regard to closing 21,960 units already allotted alternative plots, it had noted that the closure is not complete and effective as many units have been found to be operative either at the same place or elsewhere.

The green panel had said that frivolous and untenable plea of the inadequacy of staff cannot be an excuse for the failure of discharge of essential governance functions and duties for uploading the rule of law.

Kerala govt respects SC verdict, will implement it, says Devaswom minister

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Devaswom Minister Kadakampally Surendran said on Monday the state government respects the apex court judgement upholding rights of the Travancore royal family in the administration of the Padmanabha Swamy temple here and will implement it.

"The state government welcomes the apex court order. We still need to analyse the Supreme Court order. The detailed order is yet to come. We will implement the Supreme Court verdict," Surendran told the media.

The government respects the verdict, he said. Some people near the temple, apparently overjoyed at the verdict, were seen distributing sweets.

Upholding the rights of the Travancore Royal family in the temple's administration, the apex court had on Monday set aside the 2011 verdict of the



Kerala High Court which had directed the state government to set up a trust to take control of the management and assets of the famed temple, considered one of the richest shrines in the country.

Welcoming the verdict, the Travancore Royal family said they were happy with the judgement.

In a message, the Royal fam-

ily said, "We regard today's Supreme Court verdict as the blessing of Padmanabha Swamy not just for the family, but for all his devotees."

"We pray for his continued benevolence on all humanity to keep us all safe and well. Thank you all who stood by us in these difficult years. God bless you", a senior member of the Royal family Pooyam Tirunall Gowri Parvathi Baiji said.

A bench headed by Justice U U Lalit said that as an interim measure, the District Judge of Thiruvananthapuram will head an administrative committee to manage the affairs of the temple.

The top court delivered the verdict on a batch of appeals, including the one filed by the legal representatives of the Travancore royal family, challenging the January 31, 2011 verdict of the high court in the matter.

SHORT READS



Raj crisis: Rahul's envy causing Cong's destruction, says Uma

SEHORE (MP): Amid the crisis in the Congress government in neighbouring Rajasthan, senior BJP leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Uma Bharti on Monday accused Rahul Gandhi of not allowing young leaders to flourish in his party due to envy. She said Gandhi creates rifts between Congress leaders and then blames the BJP when he is unable to control the resultant internal strife. "The envy of Rahul Gandhi is causing the destruction of the Congress. Rahul Gandhi does not allow young leaders to flourish. He creates an environment which creates rifts among party leaders, which he is then unable to control. And then he blames us for the crisis," Bharti said. "Rahul Gandhi feels he will be left behind if young and qualified leaders like Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot (who has revolted against CM Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan) get important posts," she claimed.

Abandoned drone sends police into tizzy in Jammu

JAMMU: The police in Jammu went into a tizzy on Monday after a drone was found abandoned in a village on the outskirts of the city, officials said. The drone was initially believed to have come from Pakistan through the International Border (IB), but a subsequent investigation revealed that it was owned by the Indian Army and got grounded after its battery drained out during a routine exercise, they said. A police party recovered the drone from village Boothai Chak in the jurisdiction of police post Phallian Mandal after getting information from the locals at around 11.30 am. Senior officers rushed to the scene on getting the information as it was believed that the drone had come from Pakistan which is making repeated attempts to smuggle weapons and drugs by such flying objects, officials said.

Kerala's first plasma bank set up at Manjeri

MALAPPURAM (KER): Kerala's first Plasma Bank has been set up at the Government Medical College Hospital at nearby Manjeri, where two critically-ill COVID-19 patients have recovered after undergoing plasma therapy. Two more people, who undertook the therapy, are now out of danger and would be discharged soon. "The bank as of today has a storage of 25 plasma donated by volunteers and 200 are in the list who would donate as and when required," said Dr Shinaz Babu, COVID-19 District Coordinator, Malappuram.

Record spike of 28,701 cases takes India's tally to 8,78,254

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India saw yet another record single-day jump of 28,701 COVID-19 cases, pushing its tally to 8,78,254 on Monday, while the death toll climbed to 23,174 with 500 people succumbing to the infection, according to the Union Health Ministry data.

The number of recoveries stands at 5,53,470, while there are 3,01,609 active cases of coronavirus infection presently in the country and one person has migrated, the updated data at 8 am showed. "Thus, around 63.01 per cent of patients have recovered so far," an official said.

The total number of confirmed cases includes foreigners. This was the fourth consecutive day that COVID-19 cases in the country have increased by more than 26,000.

According to the ICMR, 1,18,06,256 samples had been tested for COVID-19 till July



12, of these 2,19,103 samples were tested on Sunday.

Of the 500 new deaths reported, 173 are from Maharashtra, 71 from Karnataka, 68 from Tamil Nadu, 37 from Delhi, 26 from West Bengal, 21 from Uttar Pradesh, 19 from Andhra Pradesh, 13 from Gujarat, 12 from Bihar, 10 from Jammu and Kashmir, nine from Madhya Pradesh, eight from Telangana, seven each from

Rajasthan and Jharkhand, four each from Haryana and Punjab, three from Odisha, two each from Kerala, Goa and Chhattisgarh, and one each from Uttarakhand and Chandigarh.

Of the total 23,174 deaths reported so far, Maharashtra accounted for the highest 10,289 fatalities followed by Delhi with 3,371, Gujarat 2,045, Tamil Nadu 1,966, Uttar Pradesh 934, West Bengal 932,

Madhya Pradesh 653, Karnataka 684 and Rajasthan 510.

So far, 356 people have died of COVID-19 in Telangana, 328 in Andhra Pradesh, 301 in Haryana, 199 in Punjab, 179 in Jammu and Kashmir, 143 in Bihar, 64 in Odisha, 47 in Uttarakhand, 35 in Assam and 31 in Kerala.

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Modi, Google's Pichai discuss how tech can transform lives

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke with Google CEO Sundar Pichai and discussed issues such as leveraging the power of technology to transform the lives of India's farmers and youths and the importance of data security.

During the interaction, they also spoke about the new work culture that is emerging in the times of COVID-19.

"We discussed the challenges the global pandemic has brought to areas such as sports. We also talked about the importance of data security and cyber safety," the prime minister said in a series of tweets.

Modi also shared pictures of the virtual interaction.

"This morning, had an extremely fruitful interaction with Sundar Pichai. We spoke on a wide range of subjects, particularly leveraging the power of technology to transform the lives of India's farmers, youngsters and



entrepreneurs," the prime minister said.

Pichai is the chief executive officer of Alphabet Inc and its subsidiary Google LLC.

Modi said he was delighted to know more about the efforts of Google in several sectors, "be it in education, learning, Digital India, furthering digital payments and more".

Pichai and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad are participating in the sixth annual edition of "Google for India" on Monday.

"This morning, had an extremely fruitful interaction with Sundar Pichai. We spoke on a wide range of subjects, particularly leveraging the power of technology to transform the lives of India's farmers, youngsters and entrepreneurs," the prime minister said

Shah reviews Covid-19 situation in his constituency

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday held a meeting to review the COVID-19 situation in his Lok Sabha constituency Gandhinagar in Gujarat. The meeting, held via video conference, was attended by Gandhinagar Collector Kuldeep Arya, District Development Officer (DDO) Shalini Duhan and Gandhinagar Municipal Commissioner Ratan Kanwar Gadhvi.

After the meeting, Arya said Shah mainly enquired about the latest coronavirus situation. He sought information about its spread and steps taken by the Gandhinagar administration to contain it.

"He asked us to contact him if we need any logistic support or injections, testing kits or new health care facilities to combat the pandemic. He also asked us to go for rapid testing



of suspected persons identified during surveillance exercise," the collector said.

During the meet, Shah also took stock of the ongoing developmental works in his constituency.

"The Union minister stressed on timely and effective implementation of various government schemes in his constituency and told us he will review the progress at regular intervals," Arya added.

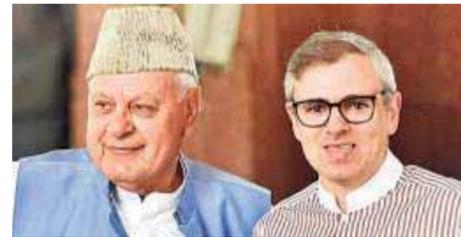
Farooq, Omar move HC for release of 16 NC leaders detained

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

The National Conference on Monday moved the Jammu and Kashmir High Court seeking early release of 16 party members who have been detained at their houses "illegally" since August 5 last year, the day the Centre announced withdrawal of the erstwhile state's special status.

NC president and Lok Sabha member Farooq Abdullah and NC vice president Omar Abdullah filed the habeas corpus petitions, challenging "the unconstitutional and illegal house detention" of senior leaders and functionaries, according to a party statement.

According to the statement, Farooq Abdullah, a former chief minister, has filed the petition for the release of Ali Mohammad Sagar, Abdul Rahim Rather, Nasir Aslam



Wani, Aga Syed Mehmood, Mohammad Khalil Bandh, Irfan Shah, and Sahmeema Firdous.

His son Omar Abdullah, who is also a former chief minister, is challenging the detention of Mohammad Shafi Uri, Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, Chaudhary Mohammad Ramzaan, Mubarak Gul, Dr Bashir Veeri, Abdul Majeed Larmi, Basharat Bukhari, Saifudin Bhat Shtrru, and

Mohammad Shafi. The petitions were filed on behalf of the two leaders by senior lawyer Shariq Reyaz.

Party spokesperson Imran Nabi Dar said the decision to move the high court was taken so as to provide relief to party members who have continuously been under house arrest or were kept under house detention after being released from custody under the stringent Public Safety Act.

No one understood UP gov't logic of weekend lockdown 'baby pack': Priyanka

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday attacked the Yogi Adityanath government over the rising coronavirus cases in Uttar Pradesh, saying no one has understood the logic of the weekend lockdown "baby pack" and efforts are on to hide failures.

Her attack came after the Uttar Pradesh government decided to impose a stricter lockdown across the state on weekends to stop the coronavirus spread.

"UP: Coronavirus cases in the last three days — July 10 — 1,347, July 11 — 1,403 and July 12 — 1,388," Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi. "No one has understood the logic of the weekend



lockdown 'baby pack' till now," she said.

Efforts are on to hide failures, the Congress secretary in-charge of UP East said, adding a couplet "Marz badhta gaya, jyon jyon dawa ki" (the disease kept on growing as medicine was taken).

Army chief visits forward areas along IB in Pathankot-Jammu region, reviews situation

PNS ■ JAMMU

Army Chief Gen M M Naravane on Monday visited forward areas along the International Border (IB) and reviewed the security situation and operational readiness of the troops deployed on ground in the Jammu-Pathankot region, a defence spokesperson said.

He visited areas falling under the operational command of the Rising Star Corps, including Kathua, Samba, Jammu and Pathankot, to review the security situation.

The Chief of Army Staff was received here by Lt Gen R P Singh, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western



Command, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi, GOC Rising Star Corps, Maj Gen V B Nair, GOC Tiger Division and Air Commodore A S Pathania, Air

Officer Commanding (AOC), Air Force station Jammu, the spokesperson said.

Gen Naravane was briefed by Lt Gen Dwivedi on the operational preparedness, upgradation of security infrastructure and the internal security matters.

The Army chief, accompanied by GOC Tiger Division, reviewed operational preparedness in the forward areas, the spokesperson said.

He interacted with the field formation commanders and troops on ground during the visit. Gen Naravane also visited the forward areas of Gurj Division and was briefed by Maj Gen Y P Khanduri, GOC Gurj Division, he added.

CA's May examination cancelled, to be merged with Nov cycle: ICAI tells SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) Monday informed the Supreme Court that the May cycle of CA examination, scheduled between July 29 and August 16, has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The counsel appearing for ICAI told a bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar that now the May cycle examination will be merged with the November 2020 cycle of the CA exam.

The apex court was hearing through video-conferencing a plea which had challenged the 'opt out' option provided by

ICAI alleging that it "arbitrarily" discriminate between the aspirants in May cycle of CA examination.

The plea had also sought more exam centres across the country.

The bench, after hearing the submissions advanced by ICAI's counsel, disposed of the matter.

Advocate Alakh Alok Srivastava, appearing for the petitioner, pointed out to certain aspects related to the CA examinations.

The top court told the advo-

cate to make a representation before the ICAI in this regard.

On June 29, the apex court had said that ICAI should be flexible in conducting exams amid the pandemic and take care of concern of candidates.

It had suggested that option for change in examination centre should be made available to the aspirants till the last week before the scheduled exams.

It had observed that situation is not static and continuously changing and the ICAI should be

flexible on the issues of 'opt out' and change of examination centre.

The ICAI's counsel had earlier told the court that out of around 3,46,000 registered aspirants, nearly 53,000 have taken the 'opt out' option.

The plea filed in the apex court had alleged that ICAI had made an important announcement on June 15 by which it "arbitrarily decided to discriminate" between the aspirants by providing an option of 'opt out'.

The ICAI's counsel had told the court that it has ensured that no prejudice is caused to anybody by notification issued regarding the examination.



14-yr-old girl found hanging at Noida school, parents allege rape, murder

PNS ■ NOIDA (UP)

A 14-year-old girl was found hanging at a boarding school in UP's Noida, with her family alleging she was raped, killed and the body cremated without their consent by the institute management, police said on Monday.

The incident allegedly took place on July 3 at the school in Sector 115 here and came to light on Sunday after an uproar on social media, demanding justice for the girl's family, police said.

No case has been registered as there has been no formal complaint yet at the local Sector 49 police station, even as senior officials assured investigation into the incident if the family approached them with any evidence of foul play.

However, the family, based in Mahendragarh district of Haryana, has written to their Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, seeking legal action against senior officials of the Noida school. The Class 10 student's mother has urged people



to support them to get "justice," citing weak financial condition of the family.

"Police got to know about the case from social media. The family has alleged that the girl was murdered and raped. The matter was taken up immediately. Police contacted the school management and gathered information from the spot," Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Ranvijay Singh said.

"It came to light that the girl killed herself on July 3 and left behind a suicide note. She clearly wrote in it that nobody, including the school, is responsible for her suicide. She also wrote about her family and some problems they faced," Singh said.

ILS takes step towards helping in drug formulations

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a major development capable of helping in drug formulations for COVID-19, the Institute of Life Sciences here has successfully established in vitro cultures of the novel coronavirus from the patient samples using vero cells, a top ILS official said on Monday.

In vitro culture refers to studies of biological properties in test tubes instead of humans or animals.

They are often contrasted to in vivo (in life) studies done inside organisms. Seventeen virus cultures have been established from swab samples originating from different locations of the country with varying virus loads by the ILS, an autonomous institute of the Department of Biotechnology, officials said. The vero cell culture technology is used worldwide to develop inactivated whole cell-based vaccines. The vero cell line is the most widely accepted continuous cell line (CCL) by regulatory authorities and has been used for over 30 years for the production of polio and rabies viruses.

First time in JK's history, Martyrs' Day observed sans official events

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

For the first time in the history of Jammu and Kashmir, no official function was held to commemorate Martyrs' Day observed on July 13 every year in memory of those killed in firing by soldiers of Dogra ruler Maharaja Hari Singh in 1931.

In a break from past, there was no function at the Martyrs' graveyard here after the government dropped July 13 from the list of gazetted holidays last year, officials said. The holidays on July 13 as well as on December 5 - the birth anniversary of National Conference founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah - were dropped after the abrogation of Article 370 by the Centre on August 5 last year.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the then prime minister of Jammu and Kashmir, had declared July 13 as a holiday in 1948. Apart from the official function at the Martyrs' graveyard, mainstream political leaders also used to visit it to pay homage to the 22 Kashmiris who were killed in Dogra army's firing while protesting the autocrat-



Apart from the official function at the Martyrs' graveyard, mainstream political leaders also used to visit it to pay homage to the 22 Kashmiris who were killed in Dogra army's firing while protesting the autocratic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh

rule of Maharaja Hari Singh. The officials said no mainstream political leader visited the graveyard on Monday in view of the strict restrictions imposed in most parts of Kashmir to contain the spread of coronavirus infection.

Separatist Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq had on Saturday called for a strike on Monday.

A National Conference (NC) leader, however, said the party had applied for permission to visit the Martyrs' graveyard, but there was no response from the district administration.

Meanwhile, both NC and

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) - the two regional forces in Jammu and Kashmir - paid glowing tributes to the martyrs on this day.

In a statement, the NC said the day marked "the inauguration of struggle of Jammu and Kashmir against oppression and discrimination".

"The day has an emblematic importance for the people of Jammu and Kashmir as it marked the launch of widespread people's agitation for the restoration of their due human rights..."

"Every year we invoke,

remember the supreme sacrifice of the martyrs of 13 July 1931, the idea behind remembering them is not merely an act of reminiscing past, memorializing, there is more to it, on this day we galvanize our lives with their mission as was done by (NC founder) Sher-e-Kashmir (Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah) all through his life," NC president Farooq Abdullah said.

Farooq Abdullah, the Member of Parliament from Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, said it is the day of assertion of Jammu and Kashmir's identity and rights of its people.

Khattar accords approval to set up three new medical colleges in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar has accorded approval to set up three new medical colleges in the state, an official spokesperson said here on Monday. In a major push to the health infrastructure of Haryana, Khattar has also approved the opening of a new primary health centre and a sub-health centre and the upgrading of a sub-divisional civil hospital, a community health centre, a primary health centre and a sub-health centre, he said. The CM also accorded approval to start a DM Cardiology course at the Pt B D Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Rohtak, he added. The new medical colleges will come up in Sirsa, Kaithal and Yamuna nagar districts, the official said. In Sirsa, the institution will be set up on the land of the Haryana Agricultural University. In Kaithal, it will be established in Sarpankheri village and in Yamunanagar, the college will come up on panchayat land, the spokesperson added.

Piloting a revolt

Gehlot has numbers but Sachin Pilot has the perception and goodwill. Congress will suffer a body blow if he leaves



That ego wars have killed the Congress is old news. What's new is that it considers its factionalism as a championship round in an arena between suitable claimants to leadership and revels in the challengers it produces as an asset rather than a weakness. Challengers mean a second rung is ready and the top leadership can be held in check. And both can be used against each other. To the point that even when it is on the brink of disaster, now beginning to lose its State Governments despite a verdict in its favour, it refuses to acknowledge chal-

lengers who become the new winners and turns them into rebels. This is exactly what has happened in Madhya Pradesh and now in Rajasthan. This feudalistic pursuit, of course, flows from its dynastic leadership that wants to be feted as the only hope of a party of warring chieftains. The old warriors, who have unquestioningly accepted the primacy of Gandhis in deciding what's good for the party, humoured them even, have sought satrap status to rule over their home turfs on their terms in return for delivering election results. This mutual prosperity flourished till the political landscape itself changed to reward a more ground-up, fresh-faced and performance-driven parties and leaders. The Congress didn't even bother to broaden its own structure by way of holding organisational polls, leave aside transforming itself. Even when Rahul Gandhi assumed leadership with his peers like Jyotiraditya Scindia and Sachin Pilot to usher in a new wave, it was merely cosmetic. Scindia and Pilot though chose to live down their dynastic entitlements and in their mid-40s, desperately wanted to create their own political legacy. To that extent, both gave up their comfort zones in Delhi and worked the ground in their States, resurrecting Congress fortunes in the process. But both were never given what they wanted, the chief ministership of their States despite delivering a winning verdict. The Gandhis were more scared of a senior revolt that would be difficult to quell than handling disappointed Young Turks, who being Rahul's friends and confidants, could, they thought, be won over. The Gandhi scion ultimately kowtowed to his mother Sonia Gandhi's propensity to go with old loyalists rather than risk them holding the party hostage by threatening breakaway units and worse, undercutting it. Rahul would never rebel because even the old hawks would endorse him so long as they continued their free run and left him to face the critique and responsibility of Congress fortunes. So there's no fight left for Rahul, who by the way has a soft corner for Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, too. The likes of Pilot, Scindia and Milind Deora resented being castaways who would have to wait perennially for their time to come as the old guard maintained status quo. And invested in politics as a career, they are now leaving the grand old party, one that has left thinking seniors like Kapil Sibal and Shashi Tharoor wondering if the party stables would be empty after "the horses had bolted."

Sachin Pilot has been deeply invested in Rajasthan, getting the verdict for the Assembly polls in 2018, when even Gehlot wasn't good enough to manage the scoreline, and ensuring favourable returns in the panchayat polls that came soon after the mammoth May 2019 verdict for Modi. Yet Gehlot got the chief ministership, partly because of his history with Indira Gandhi who always trusted his organisational skills and partly because of his hold on a sizeable number of party cadres with whom he could break away. This ability to rustle numbers is also the reason why he was able to parade about 100-odd MLAs in a show of strength compared to Pilot's claim of having about 30 MLAs, enough to dislodge the Government. Pilot's strength, the high command thought, has been incremental and he was, therefore, convinced to be his deputy. But Gehlot has never been one to share power or yield some degree of autonomy, hemming in Pilot's administrative powers by appointing crony bureaucrats in his ministries. Still Pilot held on, while disenchanting his own supporters who had bargained for some stake in the new dispensation. Matters came to a head when despite the Congress win in the Rajya Sabha elections, Gehlot accused him of toppling the Government and sent police summons to him for conspiracy. Pilot is a reluctant leaver and the Congress cannot afford to lose him so soon after Scindia flocked to the BJP. In fact, given the testimonials, the public perception and emotion are with Pilot even though he may not parade numbers. What will Pilot do? Joining the BJP won't help much, considering he won't be made Chief Minister either with aspirant Vasundhara Raje not expected to lie low. He could float a regional outfit but would still have to make a hard choice of supporting the BJP, which is keeping a hawk's eye on proceedings. Negotiating within the Congress is unlikely to give him much of legroom. But yes, by quitting, he could give the Congress a body blow and become a trigger for younger leaders like him to make copycat moves. The Congress needs him more. Censuring him won't stop the drift in the party.

Book a cycle

Like cab aggregators, micro-mobility apps have mushroomed in a post-pandemic world



As the country limps back to normal from a post-COVID lockdown, there has been a major change in consumer behaviour with apps and e-commerce ruling the roost. Doorstep deliveries are the new normal, from essential items like food and groceries to electronics and lifestyle goods. But one could not have expected even the future of our mobility, namely bicycles, to land at our doorstep. Micro-mobility service providers like Yulu and Smart Bikes are shifting their existing battery-operated two-wheeler network from non-functional zones, such as metro stations, to residential complexes where people are using them to run errands or do the short commute rather than take the auto or cab. With public transport systems yet not fully functional and given the sense of insecurity among the people to use them in these testing times, e-vehicles have emerged as a reliable, safe, cheap and personal mode of travel, especially for those who feel vulnerable. Besides, there are health benefits; you can foster an active lifestyle. And you can ride towards a fossil fuel-free future, notching up green miles.

Cycling for everyday transport has not been a part of the Indian scheme of things unlike say, New York, which introduced 40 miles of new NMT lanes for cyclists in the wake of the pandemic or Italy, which got 22 new miles of cycling lanes. The transition towards a non-motorised form of transport has been long overdue in our country. A survey by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy had estimated that the use of bicycles in major cities around the world would increase by 50-60 per cent. While the current plan is being run on a pilot basis in Delhi at a select few residential complexes, to achieve the long-term goal, we need to expand our infrastructure and develop more cycling tracks and sidewalks. To ensure that people, too, inculcate behavioural changes and make the shift to safer modes of transport, schemes such as car-free days and cycle-to-work programmes can be launched. What better time to start than now? The pandemic also has a big lesson for urban planning.

New normal with China

Now that India has sent a strong message to China and the rest of the world that it will not put up with any kind of bullying, we must Galwanise ourselves to deal with a hostile neighbour



A SURYA PRAKASH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong message to Beijing from Ladakh some days ago and the global support he has garnered for calling out China's belligerence marks a much-awaited change in India's approach to the coercive tactics of this troublesome neighbour. China's attempt to redraw the boundaries in the Galwan Valley last month is only the latest in a long list of such incursions it has resorted to. While the brave soldiers of the Indian Army challenged the People's Liberation Army (PLA) men at the site, one has not seen similar assertiveness among Indian politicians, especially in the past.

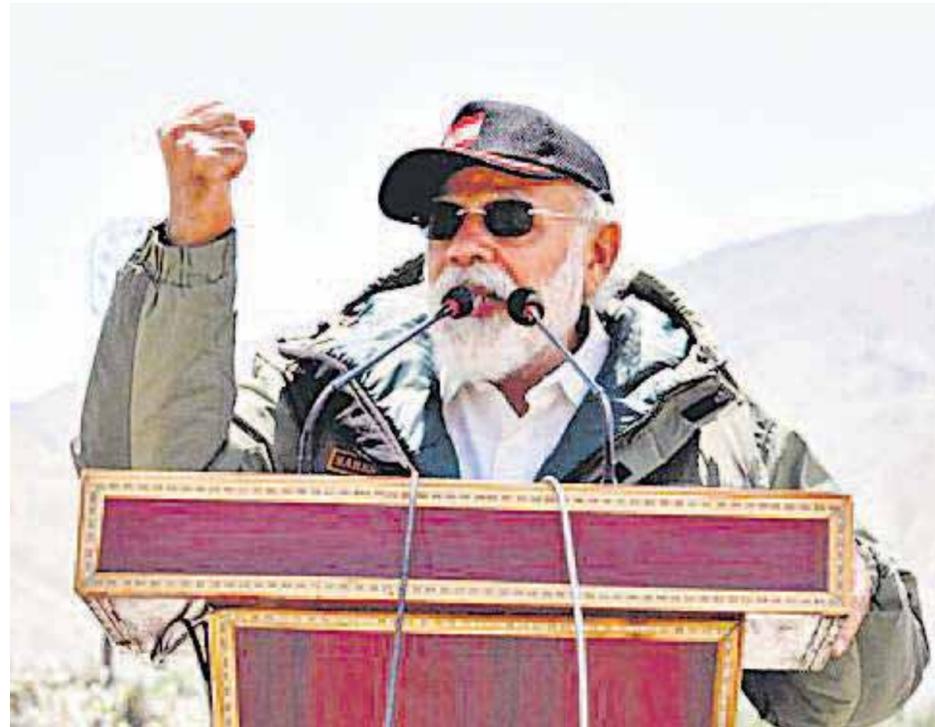
This is something that is going on from the days of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who seemed to have some totally impractical and unrealistic notions of friendship with China. Strangely, he believed that ties with our neighbour would improve with the passage of time and, therefore, he went out of the way to build bridges with that nation. This included his eagerness to see China as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

However, China has never really reciprocated. It has shown no inclination to resolve border-related issues so that there be any finality to the demarcation of territories. It has preferred a Line of Actual Control (LAC) to a regular border as the vagueness of the description of a line separating the two nations enables it to nibble away at land on our side. It has kept the pot boiling for over seven decades. Apart from this, China has, over the years, befriended Pakistan, supplied it with arms and aided its nuclear weapons programme. It has also turned a blind eye to the terror factories that are run by Pakistan to wage a proxy war against India.

What does all this amount to? The truth is that China is an enemy nation and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is an enemy organisation, as noted lawyer Mahesh Jethmalani has opined recently.

Prime Minister Modi's ringing message from Ladakh, his Government's firm resolve to ban Chinese apps and scrap many big projects, which were being awarded to Chinese companies, must have come as a shocker for our eastern neighbour. Never before had an Indian leader spoken and acted with such sternness. Modi's declaration that "the era of expansionism is over" is a sharp message to China that it must change its ways. It is also a message to the rest of the world that India will not put up with this kind of bullying any more.

The Prime Minister reminded China and the world that expansionist policies tend to destroy humanity and pose a grave threat to world peace. History has also shown us that such powers, which believed in or attempted hegemonic policies, have been destroyed or forced to mend their ways. Modi's reference to "expansionism"



and its deleterious effects on world peace brought back the dreadful memories of World War II. Modi was telling the world, without naming China, that that country, too, was behaving in a crazy way, with confrontationalist policies towards many nations.

Hitler's expansionist policy made the Germans believe that they were invincible; that they could gobble up all the neighbouring nations; and destroy the UK, Russia and the allies led by America. Hitler began his hegemonic misadventure with the invasion of Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Then came Norway, Denmark and Belgium, Yugoslavia and Greece followed by Luxembourg and the Netherlands. When he invaded France and later, Russia, he had bitten more than he could chew.

Looking back, one can say that was an act of extreme arrogance by a nation which was convinced about its invincibility. China's attempt to provoke India along the LAC comes alongside its attempts to challenge the maritime and sovereign rights of Japan, Australia, Vietnam, South Korea, Singapore and many other nations. The latest count says China has disputes with 23 nations, apart from going back on the promises made vis-a-vis

“
THE CHINESE ARMY GOT A SHOCK WHEN INDIAN SOLDIERS STOOD UP TO THEIR BULLYING TACTICS AT GALWAN AND GAVE THEM A BLOODY NOSE. TILL TODAY, CHINA HAS NOT HAD THE COURAGE TO TELL THE WORLD THE NUMBER OF CASUALTIES IT SUFFERED AT GALWAN. THIS SPEAKS A LOT ABOUT THE INNER STRENGTH OF THAT NATION
 ”

Hong Kong and Taiwan. This is a reminder to the world of the reckless and irresponsible behaviour of the Nazis 80 years ago. Many nations, including the US, Australia, Japan, France and several members of the ASEAN, have been highly critical of China after India blew the whistle.

The Prime Minister also sent across two other very important messages from Ladakh — that only strength begets peace and that India has stepped up and will continue to step up development of infrastructure along the LAC. These are very significant messages indeed and are meant for the domestic audience, which has been made to believe that neighbours will reciprocate decency and cordiality for decades. This myth needs to be busted once and for all.

China's response to the Prime Minister's speech is laughable. After having set itself on a confrontation course for many months, the Chinese Foreign Ministry issued a statement, saying this was not the time to ratchet up tensions along the border. It said India should avoid a "strategic miscalculation" with regard to China. This is strange because the way the dice has rolled out, it is China which has made "a strategic miscalculation" on India.

The Chinese Army got a shock when Indian soldiers stood up to their bullying tactics at Galwan and gave them a bloody nose. Till today, China has not had the courage to tell the world the number of casualties it suffered at Galwan. This speaks a lot about the inner strength of that nation.

There comes a time in the life of every nation when it must say "enough is enough." India must now get "Galwanised" to deal with a hostile China. It is going to be a long haul but what is a decade or two in the life of a nation? We are a nation of 1,350 million and in a couple of decades, we will be the most populous nation in the world. The time has come for the world at large and the Chinese in particular to absorb this fact. As the sociologists say "demography is destiny."

While the talks are on to disengage at the border and the Chinese Ambassador has issued a placatory statement appealing to Indians not to view China as a "war-like" country, we should not lower our guard. As the Prime Minister has said more than once, we need not put up with those who cast an evil eye on us. Also, pusillanimity does not bring peace. Strength does.

(The writer is an author specialising in democracy studies. Views expressed are personal.)

SOUND BITE

The present pandemic demonstrates that the marginalised need to be assured of a minimum form of social security and effective disbursement of public entitlements.



Supreme Court judge —DY Chandrachud

Maybe break isn't a good word but you're allowed to bend instead of standing, trying so hard to brave everything you're feeling. Give yourself time.



Actor —Ileana D'Cruz

I believe that our country needs a genuinely liberal party headed by centrist professionals committed to inclusive politics and respect for India's pluralism.



Congress leader —Shashi Tharoor

Rahul Gandhi's jealousy is the reason behind decay in Congress. He doesn't allow young leaders to grow. He is not able to control his party and then he blames us.



Union Minister —Uma Bharti

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Worldwide impact

Sir — It is ironic that the US, the nation with the highest COVID-19 tally, has decided to withdraw from the WHO. US President Donald Trump has alleged that the world body has been functioning at the behest of China, the country which he believes is responsible for the spread of the virus. China promptly defended the WHO with vehement criticism of the US stand.

As it is, the US has a tradition of withdrawing from groups and contracts. Ever since Trump assumed office, this has become the new norm. There is no denying the fact that the WHO's association with China in the wake of the calamity has not been above suspicion. The WHO has avoided direct criticism of China. And the latter has only good words to describe the world health body and it has, thus, often reciprocated China's goodwill.

Nevertheless, the US' move to withdraw from the WHO is a perfect example of the country pursuing unilateralism. The move also illustrates the foreign policy followed by Trump. At a time when nations are fighting a health

Replicate the Dharavi model pan-India

This refers to the editorial, "The Dharavi project" (July 13). With a population density of 2.27 lakh people per square km against the national average of 382, Dharavi had the lethality to pose an existential threat to the rest of Mumbai. That public-private partnership, spruced up with community participation, chased away the COVID-19 in Dharavi is a classic example of team effort. People shutting down their small enterprises and daily wagers quitting their jobs helped the agencies achieve the impossible. That Dharavi constitutes just 2.6 per cent of Mumbai's cases with recovery at 83 per cent against Mumbai's 63 per cent is a glorious testimony of team spirit. An area where there is just one toilet per 500 people, maintaining hygiene and sanitation was a challenge. But the municipal corporation of Greater Mumbai did a fabulous job. Door-to-door screening, containment and mitigation strategies were rigorously implemented by the State Government and private health professionals. Private hospitals, fever centres, well-equipped quarantine centres, community kitchens together constituted Dharavi's best-in-class health infrastructure. There was no dearth of either critical medicines or medical gear like PPE kits, thermal scanners and pulse oximeters. Masks, gloves and sanitisers were



liberally donated by Bollywood. Private sponsorship of free food was also in abundance.

Since the World Health Organisation (WHO) has also complimented it, Dharavi may well emerge as the global benchmark on how to rein in the Coronavirus. Now when Dharavi has become a treasure-trove of knowledge, the Maharashtra Government must tap into it and replicate its best practices across the State to repeat the success. In fact, these practices should be replicated pan-India.

SK Prabhakar
Gurugram

crisis, its pullout will impact the way the world fights the pandemic. The worst-hit will be the developing countries and the ones having high infection cases.

Venu GS
Kollam

Change the system

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Encounter the truth" (July 11). Without any doubt, gangster Vikas Dubey deserved severe

punishment — death penalty or life sentence — but this should have been done after all judicial processes were observed. Police brutality is unwarranted. That the police took the law into its own hands to deliver instant justice is

not only barbaric but also unconstitutional. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the police-criminal-politician nexus works to settle personal scores. Such encounters are used routinely by the police to eliminate the criminals on the whims and fancies of those in power. This needs to change. The judiciary must intervene.

Rati Singh
Via email

Face the truth

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Encounter the truth" (July 11). With the death of the dreaded gangster, Vikas Dubey, many questions will remain unanswered and unexplained. Nobody has any sympathy for the gangster but the incident gives a sad message where the police has acted as prosecutor, judge and executioner. No civil society can digest such a scenario. We need to focus on the politico-criminal nexus. Time for a change now.

AF Nadwi
Mumbai

Send your feedback to:
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Why let criminals rule the roost?

If no action is taken by the rulers of the country, this disease will grip the whole nation and India will lose its charm as the world's biggest democracy



VK **BAHUGUNA**

The recent events in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh (UP), in which eight police personnel were ambushed by the notorious gangster Vikas Dubey, have exposed deep chinks in our democratic governance and rule of law. The brazen and inhuman manner in which the eight police personnel were killed by Dubey and his accomplices shows that hardened criminals have seeped deep into our administrative and law and order machinery. Circle Officer Mishra, who wrote about the nexus between the gangster and the in-charge of the Chaubepur Police Station to his superiors, was shot in the head and his legs were cut off. The criminals had also stored kerosene to burn the bodies of the cops and dispose the remains in a well in order to bury all evidence of the massacre. However, they were forced to flee before they could execute their sinister plan. It is another matter that the UP Police liquidated the don soon after he was handed over to them by the Madhya Pradesh Police. After Dubey's encounter, there was a hue and cry over the killing but no one is discussing the true nature of this disease engulfing the country.

The daring attack on policemen in Kanpur has clearly shown that the "don of Shivli" had deep links with the police and political parties of all hues. He was a land-grabber and a strongman who was instrumental in mustering votes for politicians. Despite numerous murder cases against him, he was roaming about like a respectable citizen, attending meetings with big politicians and was very cosy with police personnel. Even then, how did he think that he would get away with the murder of eight policemen? The answer is easy to find. He was a criminal against whom 60 cases were lodged with the police. He reportedly killed many people in cold blood.

In one daring attempt he killed a Minister-rank politician inside the police station in 2001 and 19 police personnel were witness to this killing. But none of the police personnel deposed before the court despite the fact that two cops, too, were killed in that incident. As people say, justice is blind and in the end Dubey was acquitted of the crime. After this he became the uncrowned ruler of his area of influence, subjugating all Government officials and controlling and bulldozing all who opposed him.

This incident raises many questions. First, why did the UP Government not take any action against those 19 police personnel whose deliberate action was responsible for Dubey's acquittal? Why did the police not appeal to higher courts and assess why the prosecution did not make a foolproof case as the murder was committed inside the police station? This is a big shame for the police, politicians and the Government. It also brings out the chinks in the judiciary which decided such cases in a clerical style. Why did the court not ask the prosecution about the attitude of the 19 police personnel? This reflects badly on the tottering criminal justice delivery system. The Indian judiciary needs to change its Victorian mindset in order to meet the challenges of modern society.

Though the general public has welcomed the elimination of this notorious criminal, it has been ruing the fact that the encounter ends all possibility of exposing the growing criminal-police-political nexus which is turning our country into a banana republic. This clearly shows that governance has been gradually slipping out of the hands of lawfully-empowered officials and into the hands of local mafia and politicians in the hinterland. This abdication has been accepted by the whole apparatus of legally-elected governments.

The second question is why this happens and allows small-time goons to become Frankenstein's monster? The answer lies in the fact that rural areas are still divided on caste or some other lines and most of the fights are related to land grabbing and developmental issues. Gram Pradhans control lot of funds and create their own groups. The local administration virtually becomes extinct and allows these gangsters to take over the reins and slowly a monopoly of criminals and their supporters comes into shape. All in the ugly chain become rich and powerful and rule the masses. Those who oppose are punished heavily or eliminated.

For instance, the principal of Dubey's school who taught him when he was a youngster, was killed for opposing the grabbing of his school land by the don, in a most inhuman way, while the village and revenue officials looked the other way. The culmination of such an environment is complete when politicians take the help of criminals during the elections. It is no wonder then that out of 403 MLAs in UP Assembly, 143 have a criminal background, says a report of the Association for Democratic Reforms. Dubey, too, was toying with the idea of joining the BJP. Democracy is thus gasping for air in the country.

The Dubey saga must prick the conscience of our politicians and also of the citizens who elect them and, of course, of the civil servants and police who are actually responsible for governing the nation. If no action is taken by the rulers of the country this disease will grip the whole nation soon and India will lose its charm and beauty as the biggest democracy of the world.

(The writer is a former civil servant)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

IT WOULD BE BETTER IF THE PARTY CONVINCES SACHIN PILOT TO STOP. THOUGH THE PARTY DOES NOT END WITH THE DEPARTURE OF ANY ONE LEADER.
 —CONGRESS LEADER
SANJAY NIRUPAM



I WILL MAKE MY INTENT CLEAR SOON. I HAVE THE SUPPORT. YOU CANNOT KEEP MLAs AGAINST THEIR WILL FOR A LONG TIME. IT'S A LONG HAUL.
 —RAJASTHAN DEPUTY CM
SACHIN PILOT

Fix accountability

The only way to prevent and eliminate custodial deaths is to make the senior police officers directly accountable whenever such incidents occur in police stations under their jurisdiction



GOVIND **BHATTACHARJEE**

On June 26, three days after the father-son duo, P Jayaraj and Bennix, died after being brutally tortured in police custody in Sathankulam in Tamil Nadu (TN), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the National Campaign Against Torture (NCAT), brought out its annual report for 2019. It revealed that a total of 1,731 people had died in custody in India during 2019, which is a whopping five deaths every day. A majority of these deaths, 1,606, happened in judicial custody and 125 in police custody, like the present ones.

The methods of torture used, like driving nails in the body or rods through the private parts, burning or other atrocious methods of torment would put even the medieval Inquisition to shame. It also highlighted that 75 per cent of the victims belonged to poor and marginalised communities or minorities, who have practically no access to legal remedies.

Investigations into these cases almost always lead to closure without any culpability being established and instances when someone is actually punished for the deaths are extremely rare. The deaths are attributed to either "natural causes" like prior illnesses and "injuries sustained prior to police custody" or "unnatural causes" like suicides. As per the statistics provided in the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB's) latest report on *Crimes in India, 2018*, in cases of 70 deaths in police custody, not even a single arrest was made, let alone conviction.

As per the Constitution of the country, policemen are public servants and a police station is considered a public property. Therefore, the duty and the behaviour of a policeman must conform to the country's law, respect basic human freedom and obey as well as maintain law and order. However, the ground reality is far from this and time and again, policemen are involved in custodial violence and deaths.

To prevent custodial violence, elaborate guidelines to be followed in all cases of arrest or detention were prescribed by the Supreme Court in its 1996 verdict in the DK Basu vs State of West Bengal case, and subsequent judgments made in 2001 and 2015. These guidelines are observed only in their breach. Any inquiry by a human rights group through the Right to Information (RTI) Act or otherwise almost always draws a blank, with the information sought being "unavailable."

In 2015, Section 176 (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) was amended by replacing the earlier provision of inquiry by an Executive Magistrate with that by a Judicial Magistrate. This also is rarely conducted or conducted mechanically, only to satisfy the formalities. Only after the nationwide outrage after the Sathankulam incident, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court ordered a Judicial Magistrate's inquiry into the incident and the five policemen were arrested in the case and transferred to the Madurai Central Jail from Tuticorin. Now, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is probing the case.

In 2006, the apex court also directed that every State should have a Police Complaints Authority where anyone can lodge a complaint against policemen. Only a few States such as Kerala, Jharkhand, Haryana, Punjab and Maharashtra have set up the authority. But that has not prevented custodial deaths — Punjab,

INVESTIGATIONS INTO THESE CASES ALMOST ALWAYS LEAD TO CLOSURE WITHOUT ANY CULPABILITY BEING ESTABLISHED AND INSTANCES WHEN SOMEONE IS ACTUALLY PUNISHED FOR THE DEATHS ARE EXTREMELY RARE. THE DEATHS ARE ATTRIBUTED TO EITHER 'NATURAL CAUSES' LIKE PRIOR ILLNESSES AND 'INJURIES SUSTAINED PRIOR TO POLICE CUSTODY' OR 'UNNATURAL CAUSES' LIKE SUICIDES. AS PER THE STATISTICS PROVIDED IN THE NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU'S LATEST REPORT ON *CRIMES IN INDIA, 2018*, IN CASES OF 70 DEATHS IN POLICE CUSTODY, NOT EVEN A SINGLE ARREST WAS MADE, LET ALONE CONVICTION



along with Uttar Pradesh (UP) and TN, recorded the highest number of deaths in police custody in 2019.

In 1994, in its 152nd report, the Law Commission had remarked that despite all legal and constitutional safeguards, "The growing incidence of custodial torture and deaths has become a disturbing factor in society and the gory tales of dehumanising torture, assault and deaths in the custody of police are being reported almost in every morning newspaper." It observed that inquiries are conducted as a mere formality. Even more than 25 years later, things have not changed one bit on the ground. At best a monetary compensation is offered by the State. In the TN case, the State Government announced a compensation of ₹20 lakh and the DMK's Thoothukudi MP Kanimozhi declared a compensation of ₹25 lakh for the bereaved family. However, this is not enough to make up for the loss of the main bread-winners of the family, which is not backing off and is seeking justice for the two men.

But in other cases, money usually silences the victims' families, who mostly come from poor and marginalised backgrounds. In a rarest of the rare instances of its kind, for torturing a man to death in custody in 2006, a Delhi Sessions Court sentenced five UP policemen to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment in 2019. They had manipulated records to erase all evidence of custodial death before closing the case as a suicide.

The judge very aptly remarked on that occasion, "One of the reasons for custodial death is that the police feel that they have the power to manipulate evidence as the investigation is their prerogative. And with such manipulated evidence, they can bury the truth. They are confident that they will not be held accountable even if the victim dies in custody and even if the truth is

revealed." The fact remains that the inter-departmental solidarity will always tend to shield the perpetrators and give them protection in such cases. This gives them a sense of invincibility and gives them a licence to kill with impunity. The failure of the judicial system to bring the culprits to book follows as a natural corollary to the failure to fix accountability.

Indeed custodial torture should have no place in a civilised society but in our criminal justice system, it has been institutionalised. Torture and extra-judicial killings deem even to have acquired some legitimacy in the eyes of the public, as shown in the Hyderabad killing of four gang-rapists accused by the policemen last December.

Whitewashing and covering up are the norms. After the Sathankulam incident, the top police brass was busy trying to cover up the case, citing esoteric procedures. The Judicial Magistrate inquiring into the murders was intimidated by three police officers, the crucial CCTV footage in the police station was erased and the woman constable, who courageously deposed against her colleagues and whose testimony finally nailed the murderers, was under constant threats and intimidation.

It was only the widespread public anger that forced the TN Government to arrest the five culprits, transfer the probe to the CBI and take the extraordinary step of transferring the Sathankulam Superintendent of Police to keep him under "compulsory wait" at the DGP office, probably the first ever. This, however, is no punishment, and once the public anger subsides, it will be business as usual.

In the US, the 46-year-old George Floyd had struggled for nine minutes under the knee of the white Minneapolis police officer, Derek Chauvin, beseeching and begging for his life — "I can't breathe." Actually the chokehold has

been suffocating the US justice delivery system for the Blacks for a long time but the incident triggered the pent-up anger and resentment, leading to protests and violence that spread like wildfire across the globe.

The 'Black Lives Matter' movement upset many Indians, too, who voiced their anger on the social media. But no protests against police atrocities have erupted across our cities after the deaths of P Jayaraj and Bennix. Either we are too scared or we just don't care if cops go on a rampage. In the US, it has led to calls for police reforms and defunding the police. Use of chokeholds has been banned and it has also forced US President Donald Trump to issue an executive order for establishing a database to track police officers with a history of "excessive use-of-force complaints" in their records. Derek Chauvin had a history of using excessive force; such persons in future would carry it in their service records. This will likely serve as an effective deterrent.

The 18th Century French political philosopher Montesquieu wrote in his magnum opus, *The Spirit of Laws*, "There is no greater tyranny than that which is perpetrated under the shield of the law and in the name of justice."

If we aspire to have some semblance of a civilised society, we must eradicate such tyranny. The only way to prevent and eliminate custodial deaths is to make the senior police officers directly accountable whenever such incidents occur in police stations under their jurisdictions. A death should be reflected in their service records and should carry a negative weightage in their promotions and postings. Senior police officers alone can prevent this, and only when they are made directly accountable will this scourge stop.

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

China cannot be sued for Coronavirus

The Govt is protected by ambient sovereign immunity and misconduct, even if proved, will not be able to cater to sufficient grounds for its waiver



SONAM **CHANDWANI**

The wilful, negligent and unmindful attitude of the Chinese authorities has led to the catastrophe of COVID-19. While some consider the inaction and lackadaisical behaviour of China coupled with suppression of information as "treason against humanity", the possibility of maintaining a successful lawsuit against our neighbour has to be explored rigorously.

There have been a couple of instant suits filed against China, seeking compensation for the political opacity and lack of response by the Chinese authorities, which have caused humongous damage to human life and

economies across the globe. There have been charges alleging creation and release, accidental or otherwise, of the Novel Coronavirus and of unleashing biological warfare. In all probability, positive outcomes of such legal challenges are highly sceptical.

Undeniably, the Chinese authorities have deliberately chosen denial, have behaved irresponsibly throughout the saga and deserve the condemnation of the entire world. The regime of transferring patently false information all this while has made things unnecessarily worse as we stand today. Legal liability, however, is a disparate phenomenon. Here we need to realise, that the Government of China is protected by the ambient sovereign immunity, and misconduct, even if proved, will not be able to cater to sufficient grounds for a waiver of that indemnity.

Sovereign immunity is not just a judicial favour for foreign regimes. International treaties of shared under-

standing and reciprocity not allowing people to sue the country primarily guide it. The difficulty at this stage arises as the act of China, despite being in the nature of criminal negligence, fails to fall in the bracket of exception laid down by the international law to the immunity enjoyed by the States. Rather, there is a specific bar upon the exercise or performance or the failure to exercise discretionary powers regardless of whether the discretion is being abused. Possibly, the reckless behaviour of the Chinese Government is baked into the very idea of sovereign immunity.

The next leg of the argument revolves around the proposition that China did very little to stop the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, the thrust of the argument on legal principles is tremendously weak. Sovereign immunity does not work on benevolence but reciprocity. China has been rejecting all such allegations and is certain to junk every summons it receives, ulti-

mately making the entire exercise a futile thing. The World Health Organisation's (WHO's) International Health Regulations, 2005 is being referred to in order to assert that China violated its international obligations. Articles six and seven of the WHO regulations make timely notification and information-sharing obligatory on the country where an outbreak takes place. Consequently, China has been denying all such allegations, which in turn nullifies the violation as the legal liability could only be fixed if the country consents to it. There is a very minor and primarily a technical gateway to drag China to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the Coronavirus pandemic provided in the WHO's Constitution. This provision does not require the consent of the defendant country. A member country will have to establish or create a doubt that China deliberately withheld information from the WHO and the international community at large. Article 63

of the WHO's Constitution provides the legal basis for this route.

Tort law generally rests on the proposition that people will take reasonable care if they know there is an inherent danger that could cause harm to others. Under sovereign immunity, the costs of misbehaviour of the Government tend to lie where they fall. The concept of international terror and henceforth laws to tackle it were conceptualised a few years back. However, the absence of robust legislations possibly will not entail any punishment for another country's recklessness and the motive is opposite to be political.

Nevertheless, for the massive economic fallout, China cannot be allowed to go scot-free. Perhaps, world leaders have to work in mutiny to diplomatically pressurise China for causing the pandemic and the present situation. On the contrary, China has called the allegations xenophobic, which invalidates all possible actions undertaken

as of now. Further, the most difficult part of the regime is to prove the deliberate intention of China in causing all the trouble the world is in at present.

In a nutshell, China has a strong position to rescind all legal allegations brought against it by world players, including India. It is a very bleak proposition to contemplate that China will eventually compensate for the major fallout and global recession caused by its laxity and disregard for the state of affairs. However, the legal remedy of filing lawsuits seems to be futile and superfluous without much possibility of any fruitful upshot and conclusion. Nevertheless, how good the sequel stands will be eventually proven, as and when the lawsuits already instituted, are heard by the judiciary, while the wise option would be to avoid any bulging aspiration to be accrued from the judicial reaction to the legal battle.

(The writer is Managing Partner at KS Legal)



FOREIGN EYE



COVID-19 ON THE MARCH GLOBALLY

Poorer nations will need support to deal with both the pandemic and its broader impact. Hunger and poverty are surging and could kill more people than COVID-19. Leadership can't come from the US, as it withdraws from the WHO and finding agreement within the EU is proving hard. But for everyone's sake, we must recognise and honour our ties. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Hector Plus starting price at Rs 13.49 lakh

NEW DELHI: MG Motor India on Monday launched Hector Plus, a six-seater version of Hector, in the price range of Rs 13.49-18.54 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi). The 1.5 litre petrol variants of the model are priced between Rs 13.49-18.21 lakh while the 2 litre diesel trims are tagged in the range of Rs 14.44-18.54 lakh. "Hector Plus is a perfect family car for four adults and two kids," MG Motor India President and CEO Rajeev Chhaba said. The model comes with four seats for adults and two seats for children with some design changes as compared with Hector which has five seats. Hector Plus petrol variants come with six speed manual and seven speed automatic transmissions while the diesel trims feature only manual.



Snapdeal's Kunal Bahl to lead CII's e-commerce committee

NEW DELHI: Confederation of Indian Industry on Monday said Snapdeal's Co-founder & CEO Kunal Bahl has taken over as the Chairman of its e-commerce committee for the year 2020-21. The upcoming e-commerce policy, the consumer protection rules and a consistent interpretation of the intermediary status of e-commerce platforms figure high on the immediate agenda of the committee, a CII release said. "While as a nation we are living through unprecedented times, it is precisely in times like this that we need to come together and work for the larger good," Bahl said. He further noted that "accelerated digitalization in everyday lives had started to blur the demarcation between those who like to transact online and those who prefer the experience of dealing through physical channels."



Suzuki Motorcycle India rolls out 50th lakh product

NEW DELHI: Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd (SMIPL) on Monday said it has rolled out its 50th lakh vehicle from its manufacturing facility at Kherki Dhaula, Gurugram. A unit of the recently launched BS-VI compliant Suzuki GIXXER SF 250 became the vehicle to reach the milestone, SMIPL said in a statement. "This year, Suzuki Motor Corporation celebrates 100-year anniversary. We are thrilled to add another feather to our success story in India by rolling out the 5 millionth Suzuki two-wheeler product. This milestone is a testimony to the immense love and trust reposed by our customers on Suzuki products," SMIPL Managing Director Koichiro Hirao said.

NBFI recovery unlikely in near-term: Fitch Ratings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Monday said recovery of non-banking financial institutions (NBFIs) in near-term is not probable as the sector continues to wrestle with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We believe the significant economic disruption and prevailing uncertainty caused by the pandemic will impede a return to a more normal operating environment for NBFIs, with consequences for new loan disbursements, asset quality and provisioning, sector profitability, and funding conditions," Fitch said in a statement. It said uncertainty would stem from depressed consumer demand and a sustained high level of coronavirus infections, notwithstanding a gradual economic reopening that has improved collections and funding availability since June 2020.

A near-term recovery for India's non-bank financial



institutions (NBFI) is not probable, as the sector continues to wrestle with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic," Fitch Ratings said.

An investor poll at the annual Fitch on India event, held in early July 2020, revealed that more than 75 per cent participants believed Indian NBFIs would take more than one

year to show a convincing recovery in light of the effects of the pandemic. The poll results are in line with Fitch's expectations. The sector is nearly two years into its crisis, which was triggered by the default of Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited, and nearly 40 per cent of investors polled still expect

it to take another two years before a recovery is evident.

"This is longer than Fitch's base-case assumption, but a downside scenario - where the economy continues to struggle to recover in the aftermath of the pandemic - could prolong the sector downturn beyond the two-year horizon and cause irreversible damage to parts of the NBFI industry, with mid-to small-sized franchisees at greatest risk of branch closures and staff redundancies to trim costs. In this scenario, more firms could exit from underperforming business segments," Fitch said.

It said construction finance could witness downsizing amid delayed construction activity and lower unit sales.

Other segments that may also witness consolidation, should the downturn persist, include infrastructure finance, low-yielding corporate loans as well as loans against property in urban areas.

CIL dues from state power gencos mount to Rs 22k cr amid tepid demand

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Coal India's dues from state-owned power generation companies have risen to Rs 22,000 crore amid muted demand and high production, sources said on Monday.

The mining behemoth is also not in a position to regulate supplies to the power companies as demand has remained subdued over the last few months, they said.

"Dues are now at Rs 22,000 crore. We are not sure when the situation will improve, and are yet to see the flow of government funds as assistance to gencos," a company source said. The outstanding amount was around Rs



12,000 crore in January. "Majority of the dues are from state gencos and rationalisation of supply to put pressure on them is also not feasible," he said. The government had recently announced Rs 90,000 crore

worth of loans to state power distribution companies.

Net cash flow from operating activities for Coal India slumped sharply to Rs 4,146 crore in the last fiscal from Rs 16,355 crore in 2018-19.

Govt permits exports of non woven fabrics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday said exports of non-woven fabrics other than 25-70 GSM (grams per square metre) are allowed for outbound shipments.

However, exports of non-woven fabric of 25-70 GSM and melt blown fabric of any GSM is still prohibited.

All other non-woven fabrics with GSM (grams per square metre) other than 25-70 GSM are freely allowed for exports," the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

Sensex rises 99 pts; RIL hits record high

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex ended 99 points higher on Monday, led by gains in index-heavyweight Reliance Industries, amid positive global cues.

After rallying 430 points during the session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gave up most of its gains to settle 99.36 points, or 0.27 per cent, higher at 36,693.69.

While, the NSE Nifty closed 34.65 points, or 1.15 per cent, up at 10,802.70.

Reliance Industries was among the top gainers in the Sensex pack, jumping over 3 per cent to hit its record closing high, after the company said it has secured Rs 730 crore from wireless technology leader Qualcomm by selling a small stake in Jio Platforms.

Adding to a slew of investments since April that has



crossed Rs 1.18 lakh crore, Qualcomm Ventures' investment will translate into 0.15 per cent equity stake in Jio Platforms on a fully diluted basis.

Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, HUL and ITC were also among the prominent gainers.

However, the gains on the index were capped as index majors HDFC twins slumped up to 2 per cent, after a report stating HDFC Bank has conducted an investigation into allegations of improper lending practices and conflict of interest at its vehicle financing arm.

Rupee settles flat at 75.19 against US dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled on a flat note at 75.19 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid high volatility in the domestic equity market.

The rupee, which opened at 75.20 against the US dollar, closed at 75.19 against the US dollar, up by just 1 paise over its previous close.

It had settled at 75.20 against the greenback on Friday.

During the four-hour trading session, the domestic unit witnessed an intra-day high of 75.08 and a low of 75.21 against the US dollar.

Forex traders said the rupee traded in a range-bound man-

ner tracking high volatility in domestic equities. Moreover, investors awaited cues from Consumer Price Index (CPI) data expected to be released later in the day. While weak US currency supported the local unit, foreign fund

outflows and concerns over rising COVID-19 cases weighed on investor sentiment, traders said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.03 per cent to 96.62. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex was trading 34.01 points higher at 36,628.34 and broader NSE Nifty was up 13.30 points to 10,781.35.

Sebi to rope in independent agency

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital market regulator Sebi plans to rope in an independent agency to provide contract staff, including receptionist and supervisor, for its office.

In addition, the regulator is also planning to hire an agency that will provide security guards.

In two separate notices, inviting expressions of interest (Eoi) from interested parties, Sebi said the services would be required at the regulator's office in Chandigarh.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said the agency would be responsible for providing the services of the outsourced staff such as receptionist, data entry operator, office assistant and house keeper.

Pak says it will restore Afghanistan's exports

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan said on Monday that it will restore Afghanistan's exports through the Wagah border with India from Wednesday at the special request of Kabul and to facilitate Afghan Transit Trade.

Pakistan closed the Wagah border with India in mid-march March in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

"At the special request of the Government of Afghanistan and with a view to facilitating Afghanistan's transit trade,



Pakistan has decided to resume Afghan exports through Wagah border crossing from 15 July 2020, after implementing COVID-19 related proto-

cols," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

The FO stated that with this step, Pakistan has fulfilled its commitments under Pakistan-

Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA).

It also said that Pakistan remains "fully committed" to improving bilateral relations with Afghanistan in all areas including trade, and to facilitate Afghanistan's transit trade under the agreement.

Mohammad Sadiq, the Pakistan Prime Minister's Special Representative for Afghanistan, said that his country has already restored bilateral trade and Afghan transit trade at all border crossings.

Subramanian inducted as Ex Director on L&T Board

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Engineering and construction conglomerate Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday said its Board has decided to induct Subramanian Sarma as an Executive Director.

Sarma, a Non-Executive Director on the Board, is CEO and MD of wholly-owned subsidiary L&T Hydrocarbon Engineering.

Besides, L&T has decided to elevate S V Desai and T Madhava Das to the Board.

"The slew of Board level appointments reflect L&T's resolve to chart an aggres-

sive future in its businesses," L&T said in a statement.

In his new role, Sarma will be designated as Whole-Time Director & Senior Executive Vice President (Energy).

Effective August 19, he will hold Board-level responsibility for L&T's power business, in addition to his current responsibility in the hydrocarbon business.

The statement said Desai and Das are both members of the company's apex-level Executive Management Committee and have been elevated to the Board with immediate effect.

Beauty salons, nail bars reopen in next post-lockdown wave in UK

PNS ■ LONDON

Businesses, including beauty salons and nail bars, began reopening across England on Monday as part of the next phase in the easing of the coronavirus lockdown imposed in the UK on March 23.

Other venues requiring close physical contact, including tattoo and massage studios, physical therapy businesses and spas, are also among those able to welcome back customers under so-called COVID-secure guidance issued by the UK government. "Thousands more businesses which offer



close contact services like nail and beauty salons will be able to welcome customers back in a way that is safe for both workers and the public. Enabling these often small, indepen-

dent businesses to reopen is yet another step in our plan to kickstart the economy to support jobs and incomes across the country," the Indian-origin Cabinet minister said.

'PNB to focus on self-service, automation'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Punjab National Bank proposes to accelerate self-service and focus on automation with a view to optimise processes, employees and workplace and thus deal with the challenges following the outbreak of coronavirus, the lender said in a message to shareholders.

"The current crisis will steer the banking industry to remote working which is likely to shape the cost structure in the days ahead," PNB's MD and CEO SS Mallikarjuna Rao said in a letter to shareholders.

He noted that MSME, agriculture, agro-based industries,

healthcare, among others, present ample opportunities for growth and lending.

"The bank will accelerate self-service and automation initiatives through greater focus on technology to foster optimisation of processes, employee and workplace," he said.

Rao said 2019-20 started with an overarching goal towards 'Year of Profitability and Creating Value', leaving the adversities of the previous financial year behind.

In the last financial year, PNB's operating profit increased year-on-year by 13.4 per cent to Rs 14,739 crore.

Yes Bank says Rs 15k cr capital from FPO to suffice for 2 years

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Private sector lender Yes Bank on Monday said the Rs 15,000 crore capital raising through FPO, the largest ever by any entity, will suffice the growth requirements for two years by taking capital buffers to over 5 percentage points over the regulatory obligation.

It is also looking at manpower rationalisation to save costs, and feels up to 1 percentage point of capital may be required to provision the possible reverses due to the COVID-19 situation, its chief



executive and managing director Prashant Kumar told reporters here.

The bank, which had to be bailed out by SBI in March, is aiming to raise the money by selling its shares at Rs 12-13 per piece - which is a discount of nearly 50 per cent to Friday's

close - to raise the capital. SBI, which holds 49 per cent of the bank at present, has committed to invest up to Rs 1,750 crore. Kumar explained the bank chose the FPO route because it was the only one offering the flexibility to offer shares at a reduced price.

Kumar said the corporate governance issues and the legacy bad assets have been identified and provided for in the last two quarters by the new management, but conceded that COVID-19 can eat up up to 1 percentage point of capital through provisioning.

Impact investing touches \$11 billion

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Impact investing has come a long way over the last 10 years in the country, making measurable contributions to the development sector - touching over 490 million lives with a cumulative investment of USD 11 billion, according to a study.

These contributions have been made possible by 600 impact enterprises, the study by Impact Investors Council and Asha Impact said.

As per the study, impact investing has seen strong growth with USD 10.8 billion of equity capital flowing into the sector over the past decade, clipping 26 per cent in each of



Impact investing has seen strong growth with USD 10.8 billion of equity capital flowing into the sector over the past decade

the first eight years and rapid growth over the past two years - helping as much as 490 million lead better lives.

Though the idea existed as a sector since early 2000s, it picked up pace only after 2005, when financial inclusion became a key word in the

social sector parlance.

The sector had a testing time during the microfinance crisis in 2010, but has recouped since then with funding growing 8 times in terms of annual deployment, the report said.

This also has had the source of funds getting diversified - from financials heavy to non-financials. "Financial services used to account for 76 per cent of investments in 2010, but has since come down to 43 per cent in 2019, and just 30 per cent of total deal volume over the decade.

Global shares gain on hopes for recovery

PNS ■ TOKYO

Global shares rose Monday, cheered by upbeat projections for a global economic rebound that were tempered by worries over expanding coronavirus outbreaks. France's CAC 40 rose 0.6 per cent in early trading to 5,000.05. Germany's DAX added 0.9 per cent to 12,742.34, while Britain's FTSE 100 climbed 0.7 per cent to 6,139.18. U.S. shares were set to drift higher, with Dow futures gaining 0.3 per cent to 26,005.0.

SOCIAL MEDIA TURNING EPICENTRE OF HATE?



example, in the case of late actor Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide — until and unless the word 'murder' or 'conspiracy' wasn't attached to it, it wouldn't have extended for too long. Trolls probably have low levels of empathy, guilt, and responsibilities. Maybe that's why they act like this behind a disguised identity," Mohsin explains. He adds that it can cause devastating mental health issues like sleep disruption and depression.

Is trolling cyberbullying? Rupesh tells us that there sure are similarities as it's a deliberate move and causes repetitive harm. Although, generally it's not a punishable offence, harassing behaviour is illegal. "We at Cyber Jagriti spread awareness on not responding to any trolls by conducting diverse workshops across the city of Hyderabad and also provide legal help. Also, we are very active in responding to cyber threats and request netizens to be aware of online trolling. We regularly receive many complaints about online safety. Our team first analyses the type of online crime it's and then deals with it."

How do stars deal with trolling and all the negativity on social media platforms? Are women more prone to it? Actress from the recent blockbuster hit *Bhanumathi and Ramakrishna*, Salony Luthra, tells us that apart from all the love and appreciation they receive, celebrities are also more susceptible to criticism. While some have the ability to ignore them, for few others it takes a toll on them and sometimes they hit out at their trolls too. "Twitter is becoming a not-so-friendly platform these days and women are the easy targets there. Can netizens be more responsible and sensitive? We are humans like anybody else. People posting horrible comments can really affect us leading to social anxiety and suicidal thoughts. As good digital citizens, we need to clamp down on this system because our mental health as important as our physical health matters," adds the actress.

To make women and children of the city feel safer online and to empower them about cybersecurity laws, the women safety wing of the Telangana police has come together for a unique initiative called 'Cybher' supported by tremendous organisations like UNICEF, Cyber Peace Foundation, etc.

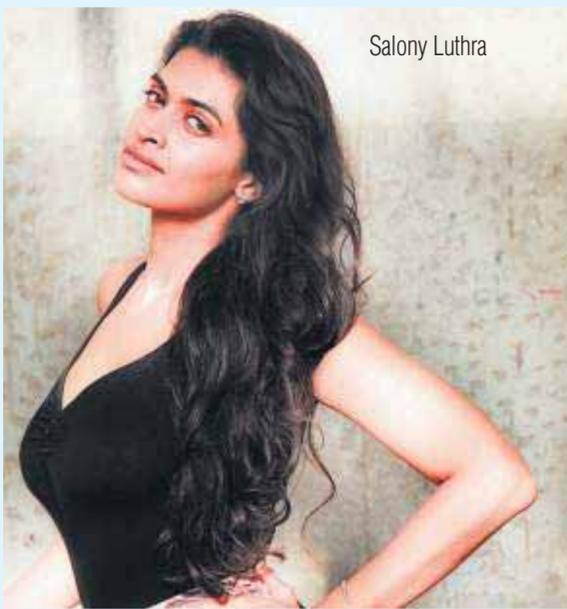
Remember the episode of the chat show *Koffee with Karan*, where Alia Bhatt said Prithviraj Chauhan was the President of India? Her answer flooded social media with countless memes and jokes. Know of actress Swara Bhasker? If there is anybody that tops the list of most trolled celebrities list, it is undoubtedly Swara Bhasker. But now the

internet is hitting an all-time low by asking VJ Benafsha Soonawala to commit suicide! Trolls have been getting on to celebs' nerves, they are vicious, inhumane, and cowards in disguise. Who is going to build a fine line between free speech and hate speech? We talk to the founder of Cyber Jagriti and Safety Foundation, a student of psychology and a Tollywood actress, to know more about social media becoming a platform of promoting hate speech across the world.

Rupesh Mittal, a cybercrime consultant, founder of the Cyber Jagriti and Safety Foundation and a Karmaveerchakra awardee tells us an internet troll is an individual who posts offensive messages on an online platform. It's their sadistic pleasure to be on the pathway of hurting somebody's sentiments in order to get provocative responses from the individuals. "There can be several reasons why trolling occurs. They probably can't stomach somebody succeeding or want to get attention or cause trouble in their lives," says Rupesh.

It might seem like there are no consequences due to the anonymity that the internet can provide, but there are consequences for the person you are targeting. A post-graduate student of psychology from the Osmania University of Hyderabad, Muddasir Mohsin, who also runs an online mental health service, tells us it can cause heightened levels of anxiety and lower self-esteem for the victim. It can also force them to question aspects of their appearance or highlight their insecurities. "Tweet by tweet, IT cells spread their propaganda these days. There are paid pages and websites hired by PRs to harass somebody online. All they want to do is manipulate public opinion, for

With people finding more free time during this lockdown, the number of cyber trolls has been going up with each passing day. But how much is too much and where do we draw the line between free speech and hate speech? *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL talks to a Tollywood celeb along with the founder of Cyber Jagriti and Safety Foundation, on how to deal with trolls and more...



Salony Luthra



Rupesh Mittal

HOW TO DEAL WITH TROLLS:

- ❑ Never forward a message attacking somebody else.
- ❑ Block the user.
- ❑ Keep a record of your inappropriate messages in a folder and track the details of the sender.
- ❑ Respond with facts or diffuse with humour.
- ❑ Don't delete your post.
- ❑ Build a friendly community.



Monsoon calls for precautions to avert serious ailments

The monsoon sure brought with it cool breeze, the beautiful smell of the rains, and so much more. But what it also can bring, are serious ailments. But with good care and precautions, it is possible to keep them at bay.

As the monsoons start, there is a sudden change in temperature — from hot summers to the cool and humid rainy season. Such climate is conducive for a rise in viral infections, which later can transform into a bacterial infection. Apart from the ongoing COVID 19, there is the danger of other common viral infections and dengue, malaria fevers too. Children and the elderly are more vulnerable during these conditions.

While the rainfall will make the conditions better for the parthenium grass to grow in open plots, and people who are allergic to

the spores of this grass will face problems like sneezing, headaches, and colds. If proper care is not taken in the initial stages, this can lead to more dangerous infections of the sinuses and pneumonia.

Thanks to the awareness raised due to the COVID attack, the common precautions like wearing a mask, sanitisation, and social distancing already being practised. Apart from this, taking a healthy diet, more vegan, and lots of warm fluids with lemon and honey, will also improve one's immunity.

Those who are already allergic to climate change and the parthenium spores should be careful while venturing out and take immediate medication if they catch a cold or cough in the initial phase.

Daily nasal douching with warm saline or Jalneti will help reduce viral load in the nose. Brahmari Pranayam and Simha Kriya would also help to improve the sinuses

and lung strength.

Apart from the above precautionary measures, if cold or cough persists, it is important to consult an ENT or a general physician and get treated accordingly. Infants need to be taken care of, as colds can cause immediate nose blocks and thereby lead to mouth breathing which in turn causes disturbed sleep and growth issues over a period of time.

ENT problems that are common during this season are allergic rhinitis and sinusitis, which lead to running nose, headaches, on occasion fevers, fungal infections of the ear and nose, sore throat, etc.

Some precautions to be taken to prevent such conditions are:

- ❑ Avoid proximity with people who are already infected with a cold and sore throat, keep the ears dry to avoid fungal and bacterial infections,

avoid wearing damp clothes, wet walls at home can breed fungus which can lead to health issues, get the walls treated to avoid such unpleasant conditions.

- ❑ Drink plenty of warm fluids, including immunity-boosting foods like fresh vegetables and fruits, yogurt, etc. get out into sunlight whenever possible, avoid smoking and alcohol.
- ❑ Sinusitis, ear discharge, sore throat should be attended to promptly with medication under ENT specialist supervision, as they are easy to cure with minimal medication in the initial stages.

'Prevention is better than cure' is the best precaution in the present scenario.

(The writer, Dr. D Vidyasagar, is a Consultant ENT surgeon, Shenoy Hospitals, East Marredpally, and Apollo Hospitals, Secunderabad.)

Daily nasal douching with warm saline or Jalneti will help reduce viral load in the nose. Brahmari Pranayam and Simha Kriya would also help to improve the sinuses and lung strength. ENT problems that are common during this season are allergic rhinitis and sinusitis, which lead to running nose, headaches, on occasion fevers, fungal infections of the ear and nose, sore throat, etc.

— DR. D VIDYASAGAR,



The monsoons brings with it a cravings for 'chai and samonsa', 'vada pav', deep fried Punugulu or South Indian favourite Murukku depending on which region you're in. There's nothing quite like Indian fast food to hit the spot. However with COVID-19 safety and hygiene standards, many of us our resigned to helping ourselves to not half as tasty, made-at-home variants. Tata Sky Cooking Expert, Chef Harpal Singh is set to change all that with a modern twist to street food treats; you don't miss the fun and at the same time surprise your taste buds

MONSOON TREATS

PIZZA SEV PURI

WHAT YOU NEED:

- Tomato sauce: 1 cup
- Onion chopped: 1/2 cup
- Assorted bell pepper: 1 tbsp each
- Red chilly flakes: 1 tsp
- Mixed herbs: 1 tsp
- Coriander leaves chopped: 1 tbsp
- Butter: 4 tbsp
- Cocktail pizza base: 12 no
- Cheese grated: 1 cup
- Green Chutney: 1/2 cup
- Sev: 1 cup
- Coriander Sprig for garnishing
- Salt to taste

HOW TO MAKE:

- In a bowl add tomato sauce, chopped onion, assorted bell peppers, chilly flakes and herbs, Mix it well.
- Add chopped coriander leaves and salt. Keep it aside.
- Heat a non-stick pan, add butter and lightly saute pizza bases press them gently, cook until light brown.
- Remove pizza base in plate spread salsa sauce on top, add chilly flakes, mixed herbs and cheese.
- Heat butter on same pan and place base on it. Cover with lid and cook on low flame till the cheese melts.
- Take out in serving plates add green chutney and sev on top of it.
- Garnish with sprig of coriander leaves, sprinkle some chilly flakes and serve.



CHEESY GRILLED BHUTTA

WHAT YOU NEED

- Fresh corn: 1
- Oil: 1 tbsp
- Tomato ketchup
- Crushed black pepper: 1 tsp
- Lemon juice
- Cheese slice: 4
- Butter (room temp.): 2 tbsp
- Mix herbs: 2 tsp
- Chilli flakes: 1 tsp

HOW TO MAKE:

- Cut the corn into equal size and cut each roundel into half.
- Heat oil in grill pan and place the corn over the pan and grilled them.
- When corn is grilled well add salt, brush tomato ketchup, sprinkle black pepper crush, 1 tsp of mix herbs, lemon juice. Cut cheese slice into half and place over the corn.
- Brush butter then sprinkle remaining mix herbs and chilli flakes.
- Remove in serving plates and serve hot.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

1	8	6	5	3	2			
			1					
5	9	2		8				
	2			6				
7							4	
	4					7		
	6	8	2	7				
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1	7	4	2	5	3			

Yesterday's solution

1	9	8	2	6	4	3	5	7
5	2	6	3	7	8	9	1	4
3	4	7	9	1	5	6	2	8
2	8	4	6	3	1	7	9	5
9	3	1	4	5	7	8	6	2
6	7	5	8	9	2	4	3	1
4	1	9	7	2	6	5	8	3
8	5	3	1	4	9	2	7	6
7	6	2	5	8	3	1	4	9

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

ACROSS

- 1 Got better after illness
- 6 A money-holder
- 7 The parts along the end or sides of something
- 9 A group of people in a court who decide if someone is guilty or not
- 10 Film theatre
- 12 Going to live elsewhere
- 14 Trip over
- 17 A tube used for drinking
- 18 Approximately
- 19 Extremely frightened

DOWN

- 2 Mistake
- 3 Follow an order



GINGER MEGGS



Most Read NEWS

UP cops come up with unique punishment

Dare to walk out in Uttar Pradesh without covering the face with a mask? Be prepared to write 'mask Lagana hain' not one, two, ten or a hundred times, but 500 times, as punishment. According to reports, the ingenious way to punish violators for not wearing masks has been designed by the police, district admin, and doctors. Once a person will be caught without donning a mask, he or she will be dragged to sit in what they're calling a 'mask ki class.' In the 'mask ki class,' the Firozabad district administration along with the Uttar Pradesh state police will hunt them and make them write the phrase 'mask must be worn' five hundred times in Hindi. The whole ordeal for the violator will be overseen by police, a district admin, and a doctor. "In this class, lessons will be imparted to those people who are found moving out without a mask," Senior Superintendent of Police Sachindra Patel said. "These people will not face any police action but will be made to sit in the class for 3-4 hours," he said about the campaign that will begin from Tilak Inter College under the supervision of Superintendent of Police and City Magistrate. People, in the class, will be shown footage educating them about the benefits of wearing face masks in public, the SSP added.



Sex workers demand to reopen brothels

Sex workers in Germany are demanding the right to get back to work as the country's brothels remain closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Approximately 400 prostitutes and brothel operators from across Germany demonstrated in the red light district of Hamburg, Germany news agency Deutsche Welle reported. Prostitution is legal and regulated in Germany but the country's brothels have been closed for almost four months due to the outbreak. Now, sex workers say they are being treated unfairly and are demanding the right to return to work, especially as other businesses where close contact is permitted, such as hair salons and tattoo parlors, have reopened. The protest was organized by the Association of Sex Workers with the group warning that the closure of licensed venues had forced some prostitutes onto the streets, putting them in danger both in terms of their health and personal safety. Ahead of the protest on Herberstrasse, a street in the district of St. Pauli in Hamburg and the only street in the city's "red light district" where sex workers occupy windows, similar to Amsterdam's red light district.



India's only golden tiger spotted in Assam

A picture of a Golden tiger spotted in Kaziranga, Assam, has left netizens amazed after it went viral on social media. It is the only golden tiger currently known to be alive in India. Shared by Indian Forest Officer Parveen Kaswan, the pictures of the Golden tiger, also known as 'Tabby tiger' or 'Strawberry tiger', were clicked by wildlife photographer Mayuresh Hendre. "Do you know in #India we have a Golden Tiger also. The only documentation of such big cat in 21st century on the planet," Kaswan tweeted while posting the viral pic. He further tweeted that the animal is very rare and the golden colour is due to a "recessive gene", which gets expressed due to extensive inbreeding. Unlike the Royal Bengal tiger, it has red and brown stripes and has a pale golden colour. Since being shared online, the picture of the golden tiger has gone viral on social media, leaving netizens awestruck.



Couple wears spacesuits to beach amid Covid-19

In a full-proof effort to beat the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, a couple in Brazil visited a beach in full astronaut suits. The duo -- Tercio Galdino and Aliceia Lima -- were spotted while they were strolling on the beach in Rio De Janeiro alongside Copacabana's famed stretch of sands. According to reports, 66-year old accountant Galdino bought the spacesuits and after that made the helmets for himself and his wife. The couple reportedly put smiles on people's faces during their 'Spacewalk'. There have been several similar incidents where people had dressed up as dinosaurs or other cartoon characters or animals in order to get out of their houses during the lockdown. Brazil's total coronavirus death toll stands at 72,100, while the total number of cases is at 1,864,681. It has the second-highest coronavirus death toll, it is surpassed only by the United States, which has registered over 135,000 COVID-19 fatalities. Brazil and the United States are also the top two countries in terms of the total number of registered coronavirus cases. Meanwhile, Michelle Bolsonaro -- the wife of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro who is sick with the new coronavirus -- said last week that she and her two daughters had tested negative for the virus.



Man City free to play Champions League

CAS lifts club's two-year ban from European competition, cuts fine to \$16m

AFP ■ LONDON

Manchester City's two-year UEFA ban from European football has been overturned by the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS), the Lausanne-based court said on Monday. The CAS ruled that the English Premier League runners-up did not breach financial fair play (FFP) rules by disguising equity funding as sponsorship, and also imposed a lower €10 million (\$15.7 million) fine for failing to co-operate with the continental football governing body. "The club welcomes the implications of today's ruling as a validation of the club's position and the body of evidence that it was able to present," City said in a statement. The decision means Pep Guardiola's team will compete in next season's Champions League, for which they have qualified by finishing second to Liverpool in the Premier League. They also lead Real Madrid 2-1 in this season's round of 16 after the away leg. City were accused of deliberately inflating the value of income from sponsors with links to the Abu Dhabi United Group, also owned by City owner Sheikh Mansour, to avoid falling foul of FFP regulations between 2012 and 2016. The case against City was reopened when German magazine Der Spiegel published a series of leaked e-mails in 2018. "Most of the alleged breaches reported by the (UEFA) adjudicatory chamber of the club financial control body were either not established or time-barred," CAS said in a statement. UEFA had ruled in February that



City had committed serious breaches of FFP regulations and failed to cooperate with its investigation, handing them a ban and a €30 million fine. City denied any wrongdoing and their appeal was heard over three days by the CAS last month. Without Champions League football, the side could miss out on at least £100 million (\$175.3 million) in prize money and broadcast revenue, as well as match day and other income. The FFP regulations are designed to stop clubs running up big losses through spending on players. They also ensure sponsorship deals are based on their real market value and are genuine commercial agreements — and not ways for owners to pump cash into a club to get around the rules. City cheered the decision that will have huge ramifications on the club's finances and potentially the future of Spanish manager Pep Guardiola and star players such as Kevin de Bruyne and Raheem Sterling. "While Manchester City and its legal advisers are yet to review the full ruling by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, the club welcomes the implications of today's ruling as a validation of the club's position and the body of evidence that it was able to present," City said in a statement. Since Sheikh Mansour's takeover 12 years ago, City's fortunes have been transformed from perennially living in the shadow of local rivals Manchester United to winning four Premier League titles in the past eight years among 11 major trophies. Last Saturday, they secured qualification for the Champions League for a 10th consecutive season with a 5-0 win at Brighton.

TOP-4 RACE INTENSIFIES

LONDON: Manchester City's success in overturning its Champions League ban on Monday has huge ramifications on the Premier League and the remaining two teams that will qualify for Europe's top club competition. Chelsea, Manchester United and Leicester — and maybe Wolverhampton Wanderers and Sheffield United, too — are now fighting for two qualifying spots instead of three with two weeks of the season remaining. The fight for a top-five finish has reverted back to needing to be in the top four to join champion Liverpool and City, already secured in second place, in earning tens of millions of

dollars in UEFA prize money next season. The most concerned team is likely to be Leicester. In the top four since September — and, in December, even looking like the most realistic title challenger to Liverpool — Leicester has imploded, collecting only two wins from its last 11 league games stretching back to the end of January. After losing to relegation-threatened Bournemouth 4-1 on Sunday, Leicester will find itself in fifth place if Man United beats Southampton on Monday. United appears much more likely to secure a top-four finish and

return to the Champions League after a season's absence. With four straight wins ahead of the Southampton game, United is the form team in the league and also has the most benign remaining schedule with upcoming matches against Crystal Palace and West Ham before what could be a winner-takes-all game game at Leicester on the final weekend of the season. Making it all the more intriguing is the fact that another final-day match is between Chelsea and Wolves. Chelsea is currently in third place, one point ahead of Leicester, but will drop into fourth if United beats Southampton. AP



Foxes collapse at Vitality

AP ■ BOURNEMOUTH

Dominic Solanke scored twice as Bournemouth's bid for Premier League survival was boosted by a 4-1 victory over Champions League-chasing Leicester, which was reduced to 10 men. They were the striker's first goals since joining from Liverpool in January 2019 after failing to score in his 38 previous league appearances. At Dean Court, Leicester scored after 23 minutes as Jamie Vardy bagged his 23rd league goal of the season to extend his lead in the Golden Boot race. But Bournemouth turned the game on Sunday in its favor during a two-minute spell which saw Leicester lose a player. In the 66th minute, Leicester keeper Kasper Schmeichel boot-ed a goal-kick into Wilfred Ndidi's back, forcing his teammate to trip Callum Wilson. Junior Stanislas stepped up to score the resulting penalty and 101 seconds later Dominic

Solanke's weak shot trickled under Schmeichel's woeful attempt to save. Leicester defender Caglar Soyuncu sent off for kicking Wilson as he attempted to retrieve the ball from the net after Solanke's goal. Bournemouth's luck was in and Stanislas's strike went in off Leicester's Jonny Evans for an 83rd-minute own goal before Solanke's composed finish made it four in the 87th minute. Bournemouth's first win in 10 games, a drought stretching back to February 1, moved them to within three points of 17th placed Watford, with three games left for all the teams in the relegation fight. Fourth-placed Leicester will drop to fifth if Manchester United beat Southampton on Monday, leaving their hopes of Champions League qualification in danger. "I didn't see that coming but we are not good enough to get too comfortable. We will finish where we deserve to," Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers said.



PSG welcome fans with 9-0 win

AFP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain routed second division Le Havre in a friendly on Sunday remarkable not for the 9-0 score, but because it drew the biggest crowd for a match in one of Europe's Big Five football nations since early March. The French Government relaxed the health protocols before the weekend to allow for a total attendance of 5,000, including players, journalists and staff, at games and while the match at Le Havre was not the first to be played, the others involved only lower-division clubs. For the game at Le Havre, the tickets, priced between 30 euros (\$34) and 60 euros, sold out in six minutes. "It is a victory for French football, sport in general," said outgoing Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu who was at the match. "I am delighted that football in France can resume in a popular way, with more people in the stadiums. It is the only country in western Europe to be able to do this." Unlike Germany, England,

Italy and Spain, France abandoned its league season in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, but when the other four countries resumed their leagues, they did so behind closed doors. Although social distancing rules were in place, fans took a few liberties once they were in the 25,000-capacity Stade Ocean on Sunday. On the field, Neymar and Mauro Icardi each scored twice and Kylian Mbappe once before PSG made 10 changes leading 5-0 at half time. Pablo Sarabia, with two, Idrissa Gueye and Arnaud Kalimuendo scored in the first 15 minutes of the second half to complete the rout as PSG started to warm up for a busy few weeks in late July and early August. PSG are due to play Saint-Etienne in the French Cup final on July 24 and Lyon in the French League Cup Final on July 31 before resuming their Champions League campaign away to Atalanta on August 12. Both French finals will be at the 80,000-seat Stade de France in Paris.

Sevilla almost book top 4 spot

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Sevilla all-but secured Champions League qualification by beating relegation battlers Real Mallorca 2-0 on Sunday in La Liga. Lucas Ocampos scored a first-half penalty before Youssef En-Nesyri added a second late on to move Sevilla nine points clear of fifth-placed Villarreal. With three games left and the superior head-to-head, Villarreal are not mathematically out of contention but they would have to take maximum points and see Sevilla lose both of their remaining matches. "Champions League qualification was our objective," said Sevilla's Fernando Reges. "We are very close and now we just have some small steps left to make it." Finishing in the top four would be an impressive achievement for Sevilla and their coach Julen Lopetegui, who took over last year following his nightmares in charge of Spain and Real Madrid. They could even yet finish third, given they sit level on points with Atletico Madrid. Defeat damages Real Mallorca's fading hopes of avoiding relegation. They remain three points behind Alaves, who have a superior record head-to-head and a game in hand against Getafe on Monday.



Milan keep European hopes alive

NAPLES: AC Milan kept their hopes of European football alive on Sunday with a 2-2 draw at Napoli that leaves them with a strong chance of reaching the Europa League.



Franck Kessie's penalty 17 minutes from time gave Milan a battling point in Naples after Giovanni Di Lorenzo and Dries Mertens had put the hosts deservedly ahead with an hour gone. The draw leaves Napoli in sixth place and the final Europa League spot, but as Gennaro Gattuso's side have already qualified for the competition's group stage by

winning the Italian Cup, seventh place currently offers a place into the qualifying rounds. Milan, who are two points and one place behind Napoli, are favourites to take the third spot in the Europa.

Pellegrini wants Betis fighting in Europe

MADRID: Manuel Pellegrini's main goal in his new coaching job with Real Betis is to make the Spanish club a regular in European competitions.



Pellegrini was officially introduced as Betis' new coach on Monday after signing a three-year deal that will begin next season. "This is a team that has to be fighting for European competitions," the Chilean coach said. "It needs it as an institution and it will be my main objective to help the club take that leap and achieve better results on the field." Pellegrini helped Villarreal thrive in Europe more than a decade ago, making it to the Champions League semifinals in 2006 and quarterfinals in 2009. He also led the club to a runner-up finish in the Spanish league in 2008. "If they told me before arriving at Villarreal that we would play in the semifinals and quarterfinals of the Champions League, or that we would finish second in La Liga,

people would have said that that was crazy," the 66-year-old Pellegrini said. Betis last played in the Champions League in 2005-06. It made it to the Europa League in 2013-14 and 2018-19. Pellegrini said he hoped to achieve with Betis the same success he had with his previous clubs in Spain. "I'm convinced that Betis has a squad with a lot of quality and that can achieve great things," Pellegrini said. "I will try to help with my experience to try to get the most out of the team." AP

U-17 WWC will be held behind closed doors in worst-case scenario: AIFF

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup will be held behind closed doors only in the worst-case scenario, All India Football Federation general secretary Kunal Das said on Monday amid a continued rise in the country's Covid-19 case count. Already postponed once, the tourney is to be held from February 17 to March 7 next year as per the revised schedule. "In the worst case scenario, we will have to do it behind closed doors and that will be a pity (especially after the grand success of the

I-LEAGUE MUST GO ON

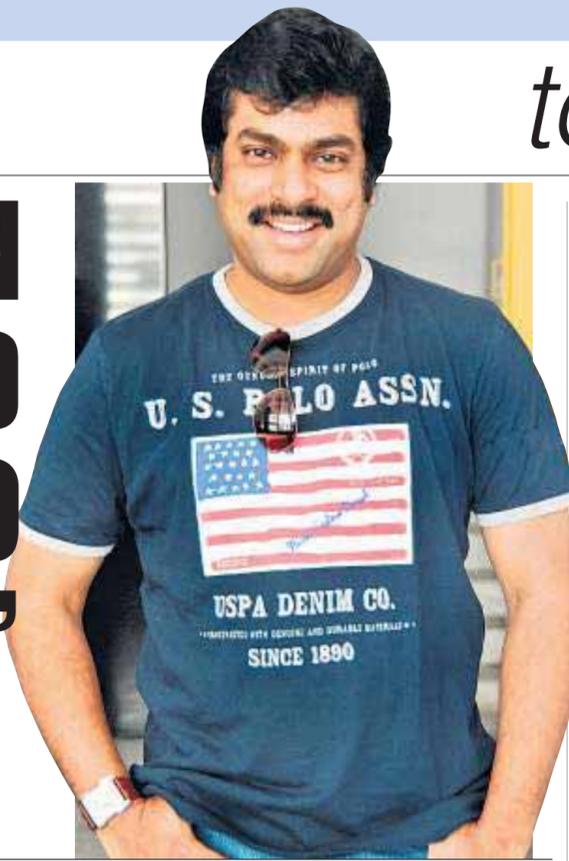
NEW DELHI: The All India Football Federation plans to go ahead with the 2020-21 I-League season even if the clubs' star foreign recruits are unable to make it due to the coronavirus-forced travel restrictions. International flights remain suspended since March

owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. "The league must go on even if without foreigners. But there are other people including the league committee chairman, Mr Subrata Dutta (who will also be need to be on same page)," AIFF general secretary Kunal Das said on Monday. PTI

men's U-17 World Cup in 2017), but human lives are of course most important," Das said. The pandemic has so far claimed more than 22K lives with the number of positive cases crossing 8.5 lakh. The camp for the tournament is likely to begin in August with Jharkhand emerging as the frontrunner to be the host. The state's chief minister Hemant Soren has taken it upon himself to play host.

'EVERY 30 MIN PRASANTH WOULD CAUTION UNIT TO REMAIN ALERT'

With major production houses and top stars refusing to shoot at this juncture, Harsha's decision to report to work came as a surprise, reports NAGARAJ GOUD



One of the prominent actors to have resumed his work with COVID-19 threat still looming large was Harsha Vardhan. He recently shot for portions of Prasanth Varma's still-untitled next on coronavirus in Hyderabad. With major production houses and top stars refusing to shoot at this juncture, Harsha's decision to report to work came as a surprise. He admits it was quite scary but also reminds us of the fact that people who are cooped at their homes are also getting infected with coronavirus. "Somewhere we have to move on. I believe the vac-

ciné will take another year or 18 months to hit the market. Asymptomatic cases are on the rise, so are people who are recovering. I was just taking a chance because the fatality rate is not high. A month before joining the shoot, I've started improving my immunity levels. I've been drinking a lot of fluids with jeera, ginger, and turmeric. Plus, I've been doing cardio and breathing exercises every day for the past 20 days," the actor tells us.

The makers of Harsha's film recently released a video wherein the limited crew has gone about their job in adherence with the guide-

lines listed out by the Telangana government. "As someone who saw other productions, the care that Prasanth Varma took was unbelievable. From purchasing high-end PPE kits to the crew to ensuring the disinfection of sets before we entered the sets, he made sure that the location was safe for filming. Then there were sanitizers, gloves, face shields and masks at one corner. Every half an hour, he would caution the entire unit to remain alert through his microphone. Until the team gets acquainted with the way presently shooting is going on, such check measures are mandatory," the actor opines,

adding: "The pandemic is a first of a kind problem. You might plan something but once you enter the field of action, the situation will be different. There is a semi-risk involved but Prasanth has been ensuring everyone's safety though."

After his shot gets the approval of the director, Harsha is retiring to his sanitised car. "I'm using the caravan only to change my attire, that's it. Otherwise, I'm mostly relaxing in the car when I'm not required for a shot. I'm carrying home food to the sets. Not just me, after every shot, I see actors immediately putting on their masks," he points out, adding

that with an eye on trying to remain vigilant and other on reeling out the required emotions of the scene, the experience has been challenging for him as an actor. "There's a sense of feeling that I'm not free as an actor like before, which is natural I guess. But I'm sure over time I'll get used to it."

In the film, he plays father to the male lead and while his screen time is limited, the role has its own importance, he maintains. "The film is a hilarious comedy entertainer and one of the best scripts I've heard in the recent past. Prasanth has incorporated a lot of day-to-day life incidents into the screenplay," he

shares. Harsha foresees the "present chaos to end by August-end after which people will proceed with their lives, while taking the necessary precautions." "As of now, I don't see anyone without masks on roads. The fear factor has driven people to take proper measures to stay away from the outbreak. It is good for a healthy society," he concludes, signing off.

KRACK is not going straight to digital: Producer

Buzz that the makers of Ravi Teja-starrer *Krack* are in talks with a leading streaming giant to release the film — bypassing cinema halls — has done the rounds for a major part on Monday. When *The Pioneer* reached out to the film's producer Tagore Madhu, who is shepherding it under Saraswathi Films Division, he refuted the reports as fake. "We don't know when shootings resume and *Krack* still needs around 15 days to be wrapped up. So the question of negotiating a deal with an OTT player is completely ruled out. We are keen on a theatrical release for sure though we don't know what the future holds for us," he said.



He further said that producers who have releases lined-up are under stress and such fake news only dis-

turbs them further. "There are other people like financiers, distributors and actors and we have to balance all of them before taking any major decision," he reminded.

An intense action thriller shot realistically, *Krack* sees Ravi Teja in the role of a cop, while Shruti Haasan is cast opposite him. Rounding off the supporting roles are Samuthirakani, Varalakshmi Sarath Kumar, Devi Prasad, Pujita Ponnada and Chirag Jani.

— NG

RAKUL PREET Singh is 'waiting for the world to be normal'

Bollywood actress Rakul Preet Singh has described what "waiting for the world to be normal" is like for her, through her expressive snapshot on Instagram. In the image, Rakul Preet is seen resting her head on the table with a faraway gaze. She describes the look with the words: "Waiting for the world to be normal be like..." The image currently has 778K likes.

Rakul Preet recently shared a glimpse from her outdoor session with her father. She posted a clip in which she can be seen playing badminton with her father in her residential society premises.

The actress arrived in Delhi from Mumbai last month. She even shared her experience of travelling amid the Covid pandemic, sharing a picture of her arrival at the airport. In the image, she is seen wearing a PPE suit, face shield, gloves and a mask.

Coming up for Rakul Preet is a rom-com co-starring Arjun Kapoor. She will also be seen in Kamal Haasan's ambitious upcoming film *Indian 2*, which co-stars Kajal Aggarwal and Siddharth.



Wedding bells for writer Prasanna



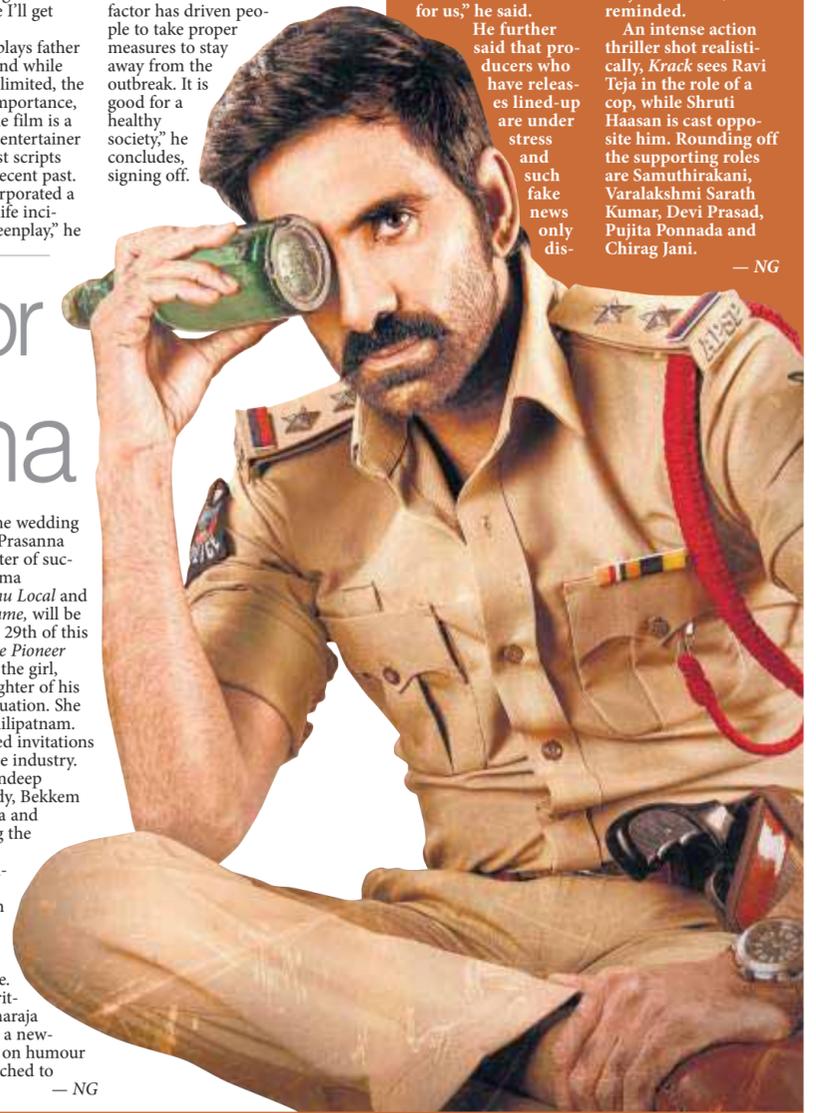
In continuation with the wedding season in Tollywood, Prasanna Kumar Bezwada, writer of successful films like *Cinema Choopista Maava*, *Nenu Local* and *Hello Guru Premakosame*, will be entering into marital bliss on the 29th of this month at Dwaraka Tirumala. *The Pioneer* has learnt. An arranged alliance, the girl, Mounika, happens to be the daughter of his relatives and has completed graduation. She hails from his native place, Machilipatnam.

The writer has already extended invitations to some noted personalities of the industry. We hear the likes of Dil Raju, Sundeep Kishan, Raj Tarun, Nandini Reddy, Bekkum Venugopal, Trinadh Rao Nakkina and *Jabardusth* gang will be attending the wedding.

The writer confirmed the development when we spoke to him, saying that he is in his home town right now, while his family is overseeing the preparations. "Mounika is a simple, sweet and innocent girl," he said with a smile.

On the work front, his next writing assignment is with mass Maharaja Raviteja. The film is touted to be a new-age commercial entertainer high on humour and emotions, with Nakkina attached to direct.

— NG



Sharwaa adopts a GHMC park

Actor Sharwanand, on Monday, took up the Green India challenge and planted a sapling in a park near his residence in Banjara Hills. The actor was accompanied by Rajya Sabha member J Santosh Kumar, GHMC Mayor Bonthu Rammohan, Khairatabad MLA Danam Nagender, among others. On the occasion, Sharwanand announced to adopt the GHMC park and see to it that all plants are safe. He also announced to contribute funds for the development of the park and build a walking track there.