

**ANALYSIS 7**  
BEWARE OF AN  
INJURED XI

**MONEY 8**  
TOP CEOs DISCUSS WAYS TO BOOST  
INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**SPORTS 11**  
ROOT RETURNS FOR  
OLD TRAFFORD TEST

VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY JULY 16, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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NANI IS PROUD  
OF HIT GOING TO  
B'WOOD: DIRECTOR  
R SAILESH  
Page 12

## AIR INDIA TO SEND STAFF ON COMPULSORY LEAVE WITHOUT PAY FOR UP TO 5 YEARS

In a move meant to reduce its number of employees, the board of Air India has allowed the airline's Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) to recommend that a non-performing staff member be compulsorily sent on leave without pay for a period of up to five years. Employees will be assessed by a board in the following categories: Suitability, efficiency, competence, quality of performance, health of the employee, instance of non-availability of the employee for duty in the past as a result of ill health or otherwise and redundancy. Air India CMD Rajiv Bansal can now send employees on leave without pay "for six months or for a period of two years extendable upto five years," an official order said.



## IIT-DELHI DEVELOPS WORLD'S CHEAPEST COVID-19 DIAGNOSTIC KIT FOR RS 399

Claimed to be the world's most affordable diagnostic kit for coronavirus, a low-cost test kit developed by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in New Delhi was launched on Wednesday. According to IIT officials, the base price of the RT-PCR assay developed by IIT Delhi is Rs 399. Even after adding the RNA isolation and laboratory charges, the cost per test will go upto Rs 650 and will be considerably cheaper compared to currently available kits in the market. It can deliver results within three hours. HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal "Nishank" launched the test kit named "Corosure" which will now be available for use at authorised testing labs.



## JIO GLASS MIXED REALITY HEADSET WITH WIRELESS AUDIO, 3D VIDEO CALLING ANNOUNCED

Jio Glass, a mixed reality headset, was announced at the annual Reliance AGM 2020 on Wednesday. The headset essentially pairs with your phone to let you conduct classes, make video calls, and host meetings in a 3D holographic environment. Jio Platforms' Tesseract subsidiary has designed the Jio Glass, and it is said to be compatible with 25 mixed reality apps already. The mixed reality headset has an ergonomic design for comfortable use and a camera up front. It has a slew of sensors built-in to allow users to engage in immersive content. The Jio Glass is lightweight and weighs only 75 grams.



## TOKYO DECLARES CORONAVIRUS RED ALERT, SAYS SITUATION 'RATHER SEVERE'

Tokyo raised its coronavirus alert to the highest "red" level on Wednesday, alarmed by a recent spike in daily new cases to record highs, with Governor Yuriko Koike describing the situation in the Japanese capital as "rather severe". The resurgence of the virus in Tokyo could add to the growing pressure on policymakers to shore up the world's No.3 economy, which analysts say is set to shrink at its fastest pace in decades this fiscal year due to the pandemic. The infection rate in Tokyo is at stage "red", the highest of four levels in the metropolis' system, Koike said, citing the analysis by health experts who cautioned earlier in the day that infections were going up quite a bit and "exceeding peaks".



Mantra to stay relevant is to skill, re-skill and upskill, says PM Modi

4

# AP Govt sets up panel on carving out new districts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to constitute a high-level committee, headed by the Chief Secretary, to study the modalities for carving out new districts in the state.

The state Council of Ministers, headed by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, that met here approved a proposal in this regard and asked the committee to submit its report as early as possible, Minister for Information and Public Relations Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) said. The new districts were intended to ensure ease of administration and accessibility to people, he said.

"The committee will study various aspects related to the formation of new districts and reduce (establishment) expenditure. Optimum utilisation of human resources and infrastructure will be the guiding principles in the formation of new districts," the Minister told a press conference after the Cabinet meeting.

The ruling YSR Congress, on the eve of the elections last year, promised to make each Lok Sabha constituency a district by dividing the existing 13 districts. According to the plan, the state will have 25 districts once the reorganisation is done.



## AP to set up Sand, Drought Mitigation corporations

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh government will set up a State Sand Corporation and Andhra Pradesh Rayalaseema Drought Mitigation Project Development Corporation besides extending YSR Cheyutha scheme to women pensioners.

Briefing the media here on Wednesday on the decisions taken by the State Cabinet that met here on Wednesday, Information and Public Relations Minister

Perni Venkataramaiah said that the Cabinet has passed a resolution to set up Sand Corporation to monitor, address all issues related to sand mining, transportation, and its sale. The Corporation will now come under the Mining Department. Earlier it was with AP Mineral Development Corporation.

The Cabinet also gave its consent for the formation of Andhra Pradesh Rayalaseema Drought Mitigation Project Development Corporation with an estimated budget of

Rs 40,000 crore. The project aims at addressing drought conditions in Rayalaseema region by taking up irrigation projects.

The Cabinet also approved YSR Cheyutha, a financial assistance initiative for BC, SC, ST and Minority women between 45-60 year age groups. Under this scheme, Rs 18,750 will be provided to the beneficiaries every year, which is about Rs 75,000 in the next four years.

# Covid-19 carnage in AP, 44 deaths in single day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A massive jump of more than 500 new cases over the previous day saw Andhra Pradesh report its highest single-day tally ever on Wednesday with an unprecedented 2,432 new cases detected in the 24 hours ending 9 am.

State health officials said that as few as three districts reported new cases in double digits, with the remaining nine districts returning Covid-19 counts running into triple digits. Guntur reported the highest tally of 468 while Kurnool followed with 403 cases. Similarly, Chittoor with 257 cases, East Godavari with

The state also reported the highest ever death toll in a single day, with 44 deaths reported from 9 of the 13 districts in the state. The overall death toll in Andhra Pradesh shot up to 452, state health officials said.

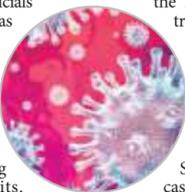
247 cases also ranked among the high incidence districts of the state.

Some of the other districts that reported high numbers over the previous 24 hours include West Godavari with 207 cases, Srikakulam with 178 cases, Anantapur with 162 cases, Visakhapatnam with 123 cases, Kadapa with 112 cases and Krishna district with 108 cases. With Wednesday's addition

of new cases, Andhra Pradesh's overall tally of Covid-19 cases has jumped to 35,451 cases detected till date.

The previous record for single-day tally was on Monday when 1,935 cases were reported.

On Wednesday, the state also reported the highest ever death toll in a single day, with 44 deaths reported from 9 of the 13 districts in the state. The overall death toll in Andhra Pradesh shot up to 452, state health officials said.



COVID-19 situation better in Delhi than June says Kejriwal

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## Health dept gets boost, to recruit 9,712 staff

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The State government will appoint 9,712 personnel in the Medical and Health Department, which includes doctors, nurses, technicians and other posts.

Of the total 9,712 posts, 5,701 are posts newly formed by the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government, and 4,011 are vacancies in the Department. The hiring of new staff is highly necessary now as the health staff are exhausted rendering service to Covid-19 patients. Moreover, the pandemic situation is aggravating with rapid increase in the number of cases.

The Directorate of Medical Education (DME) has also given nod to fill 5,701 posts under the department of family welfare and 804 posts of assistant professors, civil assistant surgeons and dental assis-



tant surgeons. The DME had also agreed for the recruitment of 2,186 jobs of staff nurses, pharmacists and lab technicians. The State will also recruit 420 teaching and 178 non-teaching staff on RGUKT (IIT) institutions in Srikakulam and Ongole.

Besides these, with an estimated budget of Rs 9 crore, a veterinary polytechnic college will come up at Kommamari of Kurnool district, with an intake of 30 students from 2020-21 academic year.

## Phase III human trials yield 'encouraging response'

PNS ■ LONDON

Mark your calendar today as it could turn out to be a watershed moment in the fight against Covid-19. According to reports, "positive news" on initial trials of the University of Oxford's potential Covid-19 vaccine (licensed to AstraZeneca) could be announced on Thursday.

Across the globe, researchers are working round the clock to find a vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 — the virus behind the pandemic. More than 155 vaccines are being developed against the coronavirus, of which 23 are in human trials. Vaccines typically require years of research and testing before it can be administered in the clinic.

# Sand Corporation to be 100% subsidiary of APMDC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal to incorporate the AP Sand Corporation Limited as a 100 per cent subsidiary to the AP Mineral Development Corporation, to take up all sand operations in the state.

The proposed entity will be responsible for the implementation of the New Sand Mining Policy-2019 that is aimed at addressing the issues of indiscriminate mining of sand, black marketing, hoarding, illegal cross-border transportation, besides ensuring supply of the material at a reasonable price.

A three-member committee of ministers, headed by Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath, will oversee the functioning of the Sand



Corporation and effective implementation of the New Sand Mining Policy, according to Information and Public Relations Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani).

The APMDC that has been entrusted with the task of managing the sand operations, would now be confined to its

core activities of mineral mining. Nani, who is also a member of the ministers' committee, said.

"Increased workload because of managing the sand operations has adversely impacted the core activities of APMDC.

## Rajasthan Cong seeks rebel MLAs' disqualification

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The Congress has sought the disqualification of Sachin Pilot and 18 other dissident MLAs from the Rajasthan state Assembly even as it repeated that the party has not closed its doors on him.

Rajasthan Assembly Speaker CP Joshi confirmed that disqualification notices have been sent out Tuesday on the basis of the complaint made by the party. The dissidents have to reply by Friday.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot also talked tough, accusing the former deputy chief minister of being directly involved in the alleged horse-trading with the opposition BJP to bring down his government.

# Girls outshine boys as 99.44% clear CBSE Class 10 exams

NAMRATA SRIVASTAVA ■ HYDERABAD

As many as 99.44 per cent of the 22,059 students who took the Class 10 exam in AP cleared it, announced the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday.

A whopping 99.71 per cent of the girls who took the

examination passed it, while 99.24 per cent of the boys cleared the test.

As many as 22,095 students had registered for the exam in AP, 22,059 took it, and 21,936 passed, the CBSE said.

The pass percentage in AP is higher than in neighbouring Telangana, where of the 28,362 students who took the test, 28,314 appeared and 28,090

passed. In Telangana, girls secured a 99.51 pass percentage while 98.97 of the boys cleared it. Overall, a total of 91.46 per cent of students passed the examination.

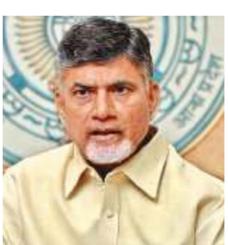
This year too, girls have outscored the boys with a pass percentage of 93.31 while the pass percentage for boys is 90.14 per cent over all.

# Keep off Gajapathi family matters, Sanchaita tells Naidu

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Rebutting the allegations of TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was meddling with the Simhachalam temple affairs, Sanchaita Gajapati Raju said the Gajapati family's rights as custodians of Simhachalam and MANSAS is fully protected by her appointment as Chairperson.

Referring to the Supreme Court verdict that upheld the



rights of Travancore royal family to manage the affairs of Sree

Referring to the Supreme Court verdict that upheld the rights of Travancore royal family to manage the affairs of Sree Padmanabhaswamy temple, Naidu had commented that the YSRCP government must take note of this development and stop interfering with the management of Simhachalam Board and MANSAS trust "to attain its evil goals"

Padmanabhaswamy temple, Naidu had commented that the YSRCP government must take note of this development and stop interfering with the management of Simhachalam

Board and MANSAS trust "to attain its evil goals".

"The Gajapati family's rights as custodians must be protected. Jaganmohan Reddy must not meddle with God

and family-run trusts to play dirty politics. The court's ruling protects the sanctity of prior agreements and long-running traditions of royal families in managing trusts," Naidu had said.

Responding to Naidu's comment on Facebook, Sanchaita said: "I, Sanchaita Gajapati, am the eldest surviving legal heir of my father Ananda Gajapati, who was eldest legal heir of my grandfather PVG Raju."

# Centre allows forces to spend up to Rs 300 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In view of the border row with China in eastern Ladakh, the Defence Ministry on Wednesday granted special powers to the three services for individual capital procurement programme worth Rs 300 crore to meet emergent operational requirements, officials said.

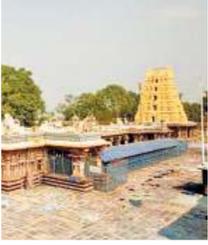
They said there was no cap on the number of procurement programmes and that each acquisition under the emer-

gency requirement category should not cost more than Rs 300 crore. The decision was taken at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. "The DAC delegated the powers for progressing urgent capital acquisition cases of up to Rs 300 crore to the armed forces to meet their emergent operational requirements," the defence ministry said in a statement.

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Ashadha & Krishna Paksha Panchangam  
Tithi: Ekadashi: 11:44 pm  
Nakshatram: Kritika: 06:53 pm  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 01:59 pm - 03:36 pm  
Yamagandam: 05:54 am - 07:31 am  
Varjyam: NIL  
Gulika: 09:08 am - 10:45 am  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritakalam: 04:16 pm - 06:00 pm  
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:56 am - 12:48 pm

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Cloudy  
Temp: 28/25  
Humidity: 89%  
Sunrise: 05:50 am  
Sunset: 06:53 pm  
Current Weather Conditions  
Updated July 15, 2020 5:00 PM



## Darshan in Srisailem temple suspended

PNS ■ SRISAILAM

Darshan in the Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy temple at Srisailem remained suspended for one week from Wednesday as two sanitation workers and three security personnel of the temple tested positive for Coronavirus, temple executive officer KS Rama Rao said in a statement on Wednesday. However, the daily rituals of the deities at the temple would go on as usual, the statement said.



## Telangana gets seven new Ekalavya schools

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bringing cheers to students belonging to Scheduled Tribe community, the Central government has sanctioned seven new Ekalavya Model Residential Schools to Telangana State, that would provide admission to about 840 students from the tribal community. They are in addition to the existing 16 EMRS functioning in the State, which have a total tribal students' strength of about 5,250. The State government is spending Rs 1.09 lakh on each student to provide education. The total expenditure on providing residential education to ST students is put at Rs 9.15 crore. Currently, there are 16 Ekalavya Model Residential Schools in the state with a total strength of 5,250 students. The state government incurs Rs 5,722.50 lakh annually for education of the students. The total number of such schools will increase to 23 with the Centre sanctioning seven more. Of the seven schools, two will be set up in Mahabubabad, one in Adilabad district, three in Kothagudem-Bhadradi district and one in Khammam district. The Minister said Chief Minister K Chandrababbar Rao has been striving for development of the State which was created after decades of struggle and stated that due to his intervention, the Central government sanctioned the new residential schools.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
<b>GOLD</b>	
₹ 51,180 (10 gm)	
₹ 10	↑
<b>SILVER</b>	
₹ 53,000 (1kg)	
₹ 900	↑

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹191
Without Skin	₹218
Broiler at Farm	₹132

EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	335
VIJAYAWADA	358
VISAKHAPATNAM	351
<b>RETAIL PRICE</b>	<b>₹3.75</b>

# Gym owners want govt to take weight off their shoulders

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Gymnasium owners in the Vizag city are feeling the heat due to closure of their fitness centres following the Coronavirus induced lockdown. Gyms are still not allowed to resume operations even as the country entered the 'Unlock 2', since neither the Central nor the state government unveiled a date for that step, leaving the fitness industry without a clear plan.

The sustained closure only deepens the terrible impact on 16 gyms in Vizag city, and the numerous across the state. "We were led to believe we would be opening very soon, of course with some guidelines for social distancing when the government has given permission to almost every sector," said Santosh, owner of a gym at Sankaram road. "But the rug was pulled out from under us" he added. Sampath, a fitness enthusiast



from MVP Colony says that the government's illogical and inconsistent decision making regarding which business sectors are deemed 'safe' and which are 'unsafe' has proven itself to be farce going by the spike in Covid-19 cases. Members of Visakha Gym Welfare Association met Vizag

MP MVV Sathyanarayana and sought his help for reopening of gyms along with financial schemes on the lines of other sectors for gym owners to mitigate their hardships. "Forced to stay closed over the last few months, gyms have been doing what they can to continue engaging their clients

through virtual services. "But unfortunately, I do not think it will be useful. "The cost of rent, the cost of equipment and other overheads are tough to meet. The loss of revenue will leave a lasting impact on us," said Ravi Roy, a gym owner.

Like scores of restaurateurs in the city, many gym owners had been busy carefully laying out plans to resume limited operations in the near future. Some gyms owners said they were gearing up to unplug major pieces of equipment and move them far apart to ensure safe social distancing.

Government should find a way to reopen with modified operations like allowing shifts. "It's funny. You can go get a juicy drink, but you can't work out at a health club," Santosh said. "Symbolically, the message that is being sent is health and wellness isn't essential. This is a bad message for anyone," he added.

# Son of slain Maoist surrenders

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A young active member of banned CPI (Maoists) militia wing and the son of a slain Maoist son surrendered before the Vizag Rural police on Wednesday.

The surrendered young militia member was identified as Gemmeli Keshava Rao (25). He is the son of slain Maoist leader Gemmeki Narayana Rao alias Jamri. Keshava Rao surrendered before Assistant Commissioner of Police (ASP) Chintapalle, V Vidhya Sagar Naidu at Chintapalle in Vizag Agency district on Wednesday.

It may be recalled that the elite anti-naxal force (Greyhound cops) of Andhra Pradesh gunned down Gemmeli Narayan Rao alias Jambri in an exchange of fire near Annavaram area under Mampa Police Station limits of Koyyuru mandal in Vizag Agency in February 2017. Jambri carried a reward of Rs 4 lakh on his head and he had joined in the outfit two decades ago and rose from militia member to DCM cadre. Jambri had been involved in



**The surrendered young militia member was identified as Gemmeli Keshava Rao (25). He is the son of slain Maoist leader Gemmeki Narayana Rao alias Jamri**

65 cases, including 15 murders, eight exchange of fire incidents, eight land mine blasts and three famine raids. He had played a key role in killing of 37 Greyhounds personnel in Balimela in AOB region in 2008.

Jambri's family members tried to push his son into the Maoist's movement despite the unwillingness of Keshava Rao.

ASP Chintapalle V Vidhya Sagar Naidu said that Keshava Rao is an active militia in Mettaguda and Veeravaram areas of Chintapalle police sub-division limits.

He had aided Maoists in

conducting their activities.

"Gemmeli Keshava Rao has been very active till the last few months. But the development activities by the government and community policing by Vizag rural police are the driving factors behind the surrender and change of mind," said the ASP.

The police officer advised Keshava Rao to lead a peaceful life with his family and not to involve himself in such anti-government activities in future.

The police department will bring it to the notice of relevant government departments so that he can avail government benefits as per eligibility, he said.

# Srisailem project receives heavy inflows from upstream

PNS ■ SUNNIPENTA CIRCLE

On account of heavy rains in upper reaches of Srisailem project, the project is receiving heavy inflows.

On Wednesday morning, the project received 49,895 cusecs of water.

In addition, the project has received 1,100 cusecs in inflows from Handri-Neeva project.

Against the full reservoir level of the project of 885 feet, water level measured in the project as 815.50 feet. Against the water storage capacity of 215 tmc ft of the project, the water level measured as on Wednesday was 37.6570 tmc ft.

Similarly, Jurla project in Telangana is also receiving inflows of 60,000 cusecs of flood water on account of heavy rains in the upper reaches of the project.



Water level in Jurla Project is measured as 318.440 meters as against the full-reservoir level of 318.515 meters.

The total water storage capacity of Jurla is 9,657 tmc ft. The quantity of water stored in the project is 9,5000 meters.

The Government of Karnataka lifted crest gates of Almat and Narayanapur to release water into the Jurla

project, downstream.

Inflows of Krishna river are reaching Jurla. Flood level in the project is gradually increasing. As a result, the officials lifted five crest gates of Jurla to release water from the project.

Inflows into the project are measured as 58,000 cusecs, while outflow is put at 52,750 cusecs.

# IMA says 99 doctors succumbed to Covid-19, issues 'red alert' for medicos

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 99 doctors in the country, a majority of them general practitioners, have succumbed to Covid-19, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) said on Wednesday, and declared a red alert for medicos and medical administrators asking them to raise their guard.

According to IMA National Covid registry data, of the total 1,302 doctors infected with Covid-19, 99 have succumbed to the disease. Of those dead, 73 were above the age of 50 years, 19 in the age-group of 35-50 and seven below 35 years, the data showed.

"IMA declares RED ALERT to doctors and medical administrators to raise their guard. If Covid-19 mortality has to be lessened, it has to start with doctors and hospitals," the doctors' body said in a state-



ment.

he IMA strongly advocated the leadership of doctors in adopting all scientific best practices.

This requires intense review and updating of all administrative set ups in the hospitals, including infection control protocols. Any gap in providing for the safety of doctors, nurses and staff have to be

plugged, it said in the statement.

A feedback system from the doctors, employees and public needs to be put in place. Cleaning and sanitising protocols should be meticulously adhered to, the IMA said.

"Analysis of data shows that while senior and young doctors are equally infected with Covid-19, mortality is higher

among elders. While this is on expected lines, there is scope for lessening deaths across the age spectrum. Meticulous adherence to norms and discipline inside hospitals will have a salutary effect," the statement said.

National President of IMA Dr Rajan Sharma said that while the medical profession remains the beacon of hope for the nation to lead the exit from the pandemic, Covid-19 death among doctors has become a matter of great concern.

"IMA strongly advocates the leadership of doctors in adopting all scientific best practices. Doctors need to take charge of the situation and ensure the safety of themselves, their families, their colleagues and staff."

Senior doctors who are decision makers for the institutions have enhanced responsibility of taking care of their flock, the IMA national president said.

# 'Political pressure' irks doctors in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As if serving in Covid-19 ward wasn't enough, the demands by the admitted patients have been causing additional pain to doctors. A doctor posted in Covid-19 ward on condition of anonymity said, "We treat all patients equally and give them required attention. But

some TRS leader and was demanding continuously. As doctors posted in Covid-19 ward, we don't have to just treat patients, but have to do lot of reporting and accountability work. We already have to deal with physical and mental stress, due to PPE and anxiety, now this recommendation stress is piling up on us".

Referring such patients to other government hospitals is not working out as they are already short staffed. The doctor added, "Someone should brief the politicians about patient care. We don't have a magic wand to reduce the infective period of a person. Some take 14 days, some take 28 days and some many take less to be cured of the infection". Doctors are too busy to worry on how these recommendations are going to impact them.

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# Virus takes a toll on bank staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Coronavirus has been affecting the banking operations especially in the Old City of Hyderabad with one branch or the other getting closed as its employees are testing positive for the virus. If any bank employee tests positive for the virus, the branch is being closed for three days. The branches are getting reopened only after fully sanitising it.

After easing the lockdown, the number of customers visiting the banks registered an increase. In Old City, one branch or the other is getting closed as some of the staff members getting tested positive for the virus. One of the bank officers wishing to remain anonymous expressed concern over the bank employees contracting the virus in spite of banks taking all precautions. During lockdown period, only part of the bank employees attended duty. Currently, all bank staff members are reporting for work. In some branches, there is no scope for observing social distance. Customers are visiting the bank



branches on one pretext or the other in spite of the banks advising them against visiting the branches unless it is so essential.

The customers have been advised to use digital banking services, yet they are visiting the bank branches. A public sector bank in Hyderabad has to shut some branches to sanitise them since 30 employees working in some of the branches contracted the virus. A public sector bank in Secunderabad was closed for three days as a senior officer of the bank tested positive for the virus. In Mofa Nagar too, a senior bank official tested positive for the virus leading

to its closure for few days. A private bank in SR Nagar had to be closed for three days as two of the staff members tested positive for the virus.

The employees working in branches, particularly rural branches, complain that they were not provided adequate facilities though they were asked to work in containment zones also. "There are no thermal scanners in our branch nor a security guard to control the visitors. Due to lack of space, it is very difficult to maintain physical distance," laments a bank employee, who did not want to be quoted.

# TS HC again extends stay on Secretariat demolition

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday extended the stay on the demolition of existing Secretariat buildings by another day. The court asked the Central government to spell out its stand if demolition work requires environmental clearance from the Ministry of Environment.

A division bench of Chief Justice Raghvendra Singh Chauhan and Justice B. Vijayasen Reddy, on Wednesday resumed the hearing on the petition challenging the demolition work.

Advocate General BS Prasad submitted to the court a copy of the resolution passed by the cabinet to demolish the existing build-



ings of the Secretariat to build a new complex. The petitioner's counsel argued that environmental clearance was not taken for the demolition work. The government, however, contended that there is no need for environmental clearance, and that the permission was taken from the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). The bench asked the Central government to inform it on Thursday whether demolition work requires environmental clearance.

# World population to shrink after 2050, fastest in these nations: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The world's population will likely shrink after 2050, according to an analysis, a potential threat to the global economy as declining numbers of working-age people hurt production and tax rolls.

It would be the first time in modern history for growth in the number of world inhabitants to halt, researchers said in The Lancet journal. Access to birth control and education for women will help drive fertility rates below the level needed to maintain current populations, the authors said. "This study provides govern-



ments of all countries an opportunity to start rethinking their policies on migration, workforces and economic

development to address the challenges presented by demographic change," said lead author Christopher Murray,

**Since 1950, the global population has increased between 1% and 2% each year. Growth will continue and likely peak in 2064 at around 9.7 billion, and then decline to about 8.8 billion by 2100 — about 2 billion lower than previous estimates, according to the report**

director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington School of Medicine, in a statement.

Since 1950, the global population has increased between 1% and 2% each year. Growth will continue and likely peak in

2064 at around 9.7 billion, and then decline to about 8.8 billion by 2100 — about 2 billion lower than previous estimates, according to the report. Asia and central and eastern Europe will see some of the fastest reductions, according to the analysis. Twenty-three coun-

tries will see populations shrink by more than half, including Japan, Thailand, Italy and Spain, the authors predicted.

The U.S. is forecast to have the fourth-largest working-age population in the world in 2100, DRWE India, Nigeria and China. Immigration is likely to sustain the country's workforce, with half a million more people estimated to immigrate to the U.S. than will emigrate out that year. Sub-Saharan Africa may become more powerful as its population rises, according to the analysis, and India and China were also seen gaining influence. The study predicted huge

shifts in global age structure, with people over 80 years old outnumbering children under five years of age by two to one.

A demographic crisis could have major consequences for the economy. Lower numbers of workers will result in economic decline and slower growth in standards of living, and place a burden on covering pensions and health-care, the authors said. "A very real danger exists that, in the face of declining population, some countries might consider policies that restrict access to reproductive health services, with potentially devastating consequences," said Murray.

# Split Araku LS, carve 26 districts, suggests Sreevani

Araku LS is spread across Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh may have 26 districts and not 25, if the Araku Lok Sabha constituency is bifurcated as suggested by a Minister in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Wednesday.

The Chief Minister gave the green signal to form a committee to look into reorganisation of existing 13 districts into 25. However, a proposal for the creation of a 26th district was also tabled in the meeting.

Araku Parliamentary constituency is spread across Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh. According to the 2011 census, out of the total 19,26,513 population, 91.59 per cent is rural and 8.41 per cent is urban.

Deputy Chief Minister P Pushpa Sreevani put forth a



point that Araku, a Parliamentary constituency now, has a huge geographical area and is spread across four districts. Responding to this,

the Chief Minister directed the authorities to study the possibility of carving Araku Parliamentary constituency into two districts.

The committee headed by the Chief Secretary comprises Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA), Secretary (services) of the

General Administration Department, Secretary of the Planning Department and an official from the Chief Minister's Office as members. Principal Secretary (finance) will be its convener.

Post the Cabinet meeting, Information and Public Relations Perni Nani briefing the media said the committee will look into various issues concerning the reorganisation of districts, including controlling the administrative expenditure.

He said small districts would bring in better administration and governance for people. The districts are huge in size and populated too, Perni Nani said.

The plan is to convert each Lok Sabha constituency into a district thereby creating 25 districts in AP which has 25 LS seats. Carving out new districts was also a pre-poll promise of the YSRCP besides its welfare schemes.

# TDP accuses YSRCP govt of looting NREGS fund

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Telugu Desam Party former Minister Devineni Uma Maheswara Rao on Wednesday accused the YSRCP government of looting the NREGS funds in rural areas without any sympathy for creating work opportunities for the poor families.

Devineni Uma deplored that in view of the heavy rains, many villages were surrounded by water but the ruling party leaders were not taking any steps for rescuing the marooned residents.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP leader said the YSRCP leaders were committing irregularities even in employment guarantee scheme implementation while the poor people were suffering due to lack of work in view of the Coronavirus-induced crisis. It was unfortunate that the required financial assistance was not being given to the poor workers, daily wage coolies and others, he alleged.

Devineni Uma recalled how the TDP regime had celebrated the birthday of KL Rao every year. Dr KL Rao had made outstanding contributions and stood



Devineni Uma recalled how the TDP regime had celebrated the birthday of KL Rao every year. Dr KL Rao had made outstanding contributions and stood a huge source of inspiration for the engineers.

A huge source of inspiration for the engineers.

"The farmers would forever remember the services provided by Sir Arthur Cotton, Mokshagundam Visveswarayya and Dr KL Rao," he said.

At a separate press conference, TDP MLC Buddha Venkanna alleged that many suspicions were arising going by the way the fire accidents were happening one by one in Visakhapatnam. He said that YSRCP MP Vijayasai Reddy was placing an

iron grip over the port city and he was being responsible for many scams there.

Venkanna said that the government was trying to cover up its failure in preventing the industrial mishaps by levelling baseless allegations against former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

"The Central government should intervene and take action against the management of industries which were responsible for the mishaps," he said.

# Dubai hospital waives Rs1 cr bill for TS Corona patient

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 42-year-old man from Jagtial district, who was admitted to Dubai Hospital in Dubai, UAE due to Coronavirus was waived off the bill of Rs 1.52 crore after 80 days of treatment on humanitarian grounds. He was also given a free ticket and Rs 10,000 cash and landed in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

Odnala Rajesh (42) of Venugumata village in Gollapalli mandal of Jagtial district was admitted to 'Dubai Hospital' in Dubai, UAE on April 23 due to illness and was tested positive for Coronavirus.

Rajesh who recovered after 80 days of treatment, was discharged by the hospital and handed over a bill of 7,62,555



Dirhams (Rs 1 crore 52 lakh) to him.

Gundelli Narasimha, president of the Gulf Workers Protection Society in Dubai, who took the worker to the hospital from the beginning and visited him regularly, brought the matter to the attention of

Sumanth Reddy an Indian Consulate volunteer in Dubai.

Volunteer Sumanth Reddy and Ashok Kotecha of BAPS Swaminarayan Trust requested Harjeet Singh, Consul (Labour) of Indian Consulate in Dubai to help the poor worker. Consulate Officer Harjeet Singh wrote a letter to Dubai Hospital management asking them to waive the bill on humanitarian grounds and they responded positively and waived the bill and discharged the patient.

Ashok Kotecha provided free flight tickets to the patient Odnala Rajesh and his escort Dyavara Kankiah and paid Rs10,000 for pocket expenses. Patient and escort was sent by Air India flight from Dubai to Hyderabad on Tuesday.

# Forces get special powers for...

Continued from Page 1

The decision, it said, will shrink the procurement timelines and ensure placement of orders within six months and commencement of deliveries within one year.

It said the special meeting of the DAC was convened considering the prevailing security environment along the northern borders and the need to strengthen the armed forces for the defence of the country's borders.

The three services have started buying a range of military equipment, weapons and platforms in the last few weeks in the midst of the tense border row with China in eastern Ladakh.

# Covid carnage in AP, 44 deaths in single day

Continued from Page 1

Wednesday's death toll beats the previous record of 43 deaths reported the preceding morning. Deaths were reported from 12 of the state's 13 districts. Anantapur and West Godavari districts recorded the highest number of nine deaths each, followed by Kurnool with five deaths.

On the other hand, Chittoor, East Godavari, and Visakhapatnam reported four deaths each, while Kadapa, Krishna and Prakasam reported two deaths each. At the bottom of the list were Nellore, Srikakulam, and Vizianagaram districts reporting one death each.

In all, 805 persons were discharged from hospitals and Covid treatment centres by Wednesday.

Andhra Pradesh currently has 16,621 active cases while 18,378 persons have been declared as cured and discharged till date.

A significant upsurge was reported during the previous 24 hours in the number of positive cases detected in returnees from other states to Andhra Pradesh.

On Wednesday, 20 new cases were detected from returnees to the state from other parts of the country. Of these, 12 persons had returned from the neighbouring Telugu state of

Telangana, while five persons were from Tamil Nadu, and three persons had returned from Karnataka.

In all, 2,444 persons have tested positive for Covid-19 among those who returned from other states. The active cases tally in this category is 427, while 2,017 persons have recovered till date.

Over the past 24 hours, no new cases were reported from persons with a travel history to foreign countries. The cumulative tally of Covid-19 patients in this category stands at 432, while 329 persons have been discharged after getting cured.

As of Tuesday, 103 cases are receiving treatment.

# Girls outshine boys as 99.44% clear CBSE Class 10 exams

Continued from Page 1

A total of 2.23 per cent of students, or 41,804 youngsters, scored more than 95 per cent marks in CBSE Class 10 exam this year.

Trivandrum region has again topped with 99.28 per cent, followed by Chennai with 98.95 per cent and Bengaluru with 98.23 per cent. The last among regions is Guwahati with 79.12 per cent.

Kendriya Vidyalaya emerged as the top performing schools in the exams, with a pass percentage of 99.23.

# Keep off Gajapathi family matters, Sanchaita tells Naidu

Continued from Page 1

She continued: "Hope you Nara Chandrababu Naidu garu believe in gender equality unlike your colleague Pusapati Ashok Gajapathi Raju who has wrongly arrogated to himself the entire Gajapathi family legacy and misled you to believing that I do not exist! I will appreciate it if you stay out of the Gajapathi family matters and not politicise it."

The row over MANSAS trust founded by the Vizianagaram Royal family erupted when the YSRCP government brought

Sanchaita, a lawyer, NGO activist and BJP women's wing leader, into the picture and made her the chairperson of the trust.

Sanchaita is the daughter of former MP P Ananda Gajapathi Raju, elder brother of senior TDP leader and ex-Union minister P Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

# Phase III human trials yield 'encouraging response'

Continued from Page 1

Given the urgency of a vaccine against Covid-19, experts estimate that a fast-tracked vaccine development process could see a successful candidate in market in about 12-18 months.

Amidst all this comes the heartening news that Oxford's potential vaccine is already in large-scale Phase III human trials to assess whether it can protect against Covid-19, though its developers have yet to report Phase I results, which would show whether it is safe and whether or not it induces an immune response.

The developers of the vaccine said this month they were "encouraged by the immune response" they had seen in trials



so far and were expecting to publish Phase I data by the end of July. The data are expected to be published by The Lancet medical journal.

AstraZeneca's experimental vaccine is probably the world's leading candidate and

most advanced in terms of development, the World Health Organization's chief scientist said in June. The company has signed agreements with governments around the globe to supply the vaccine, should it be cleared for use.

Although there was no immediate comment from the company on reports about the positive news due Thursday, a spokeswoman for Oxford University indicated in a blog post on Tuesday: "We are hearing there will be positive news soon (perhaps tomorrow) on initial trials of the Oxford COVID-19 vaccine that is backed by AstraZeneca."

This being so, researchers in the United States reported on Tuesday that Moderna Inc's experimental vaccine showed it was safe and provoked immune responses in all 45 healthy volunteers in an ongoing early-stage study. Moderna started its Phase II trial in May and expects to start a Phase III trial on July 27.

# 2 arrested in Amaravati capital land scam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In connection with the Amaravati capital land scam exposed by the YSRCP government, two persons were arrested on Wednesday.

The cops arrested Sudhir Babu, Tulluru retired tehsildar, who is facing charges of fabricating land records. Sudhir Babu was known to have close links with some Ministers during the TDP rule.

Gummadi Suresh hailing from Vijayawada was arrested on charges of illegally buying assigned lands cultivated by Dalits.



The Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the YSRCP government to probe the irregularities in Amaravati land scam had earlier arrested deputy collector Madhuri for allegedly registering government land in the name of private persons.

# Health dept gets boost, to recruit 9,712 staff

Continued from Page 1

A similar facility will be taken up at Anantapur later. The State government gave consent to withdraw cases filed against the teachers and government employees during the agitation for opposing Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) and the cases filed against those for attacking Guntur old police station will also be withdrawn.

# Sand Corporation to be 100%...

Continued from Page 1

Revenue augmentation from the existing Mangampet Barytes project, commencement of new mining projects like coal blocks, heavy mineral beach sands, silica sand and other organisational improvement initiatives have been hindered," official sources said. The APMDCL will get back to its original operations once the new Sand Corporation comes into place, the sources added.

# AP Govt sets up panel on carving out new districts

Continued from Page 1

However, there has been opposition within the YSRCP to the formation of new districts with a Lok Sabha constituency as the base.

Leaders from Srikakulam, including Assembly Speaker Tammineni Seetaram, voiced their opposition to the splitting of their district as it would lose three important Assembly segments.

They wanted the government to work out an alternative plan so that the existing geography of Srikakulam district is not disturbed even after the reorganisation.

Similarly, there is opposition over making Araku a new district as the existing Lok Sabha constituency is spread over four districts. There are several other Parliamentary constituencies that are spread over two districts, division of which could become a ticklish issue.

"We have discussed these issues in the Cabinet and decided to form a high-level committee of officials to amicably carry out the reorganisation exercise. The Chief Minister wanted the new

# AP to set up Sand, Drought Mitigation corporations

Continued from Page 1

The Minister stated that nearly 25 lakh women will benefit through this scheme, and from now on all women pensioners are covered under the scheme.

An additional burden of around Rs 6,163.59 crore to the government is estimated with the inclusion of women pensioners in the scheme. In a first of its kind decision, the State government is bringing in a Fish Feed Quality Control Act, to monitor and check the quality of feed being manufactured and provided in aquaculture. An ordinance to this effect will be issued. The initiative was taken to safeguard aquacul-

ture in the State, as over 60 per cent of the expenditure is spent on the feed alone.

Adding to this, over 40 feed analysis labs are going to be established across the State.

The Cabinet also gave its nod to GO MS 22 under the Nadu-Nedu initiative, which aims to revamp 44,509 government schools with better facilities.

The government had already spent Rs 920 crore towards this scheme and another Rs 250 crore was released on Wednesday.

In addition to these, with an investment of Rs 5 crore, a cattle grazing training centre was proposed in Pyapili Mandal of Kurnool district and in Anantapur district.

# Rajasthan Congress seeks rebel MLAs' disqualification

Continued from Page 1

He did not refer to Pilot by name but spoke about the deputy chief minister and the PCC president, both posts held by the leader before he was stripped of them on Tuesday as he tussled with the more senior Rajasthan leader for power.

But, amid this tough posturing, the Congress said the dissident MLAs can still return to the Congress fold.

Avinash Pande, the AICC in-charge of Rajasthan indicated this in a tweet in the morning and party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala followed that up while interacting with the media in the afternoon.

Pilot has said he is not joining the BJP but has not spelled out his next move.

"The party's doors have not closed for Pilot. May God give him good sense and he realises his mistake. I pray that he comes out of the BJP's illusory trap," Pande tweeted in Hindi. Senior leader Surjewala said all grievances will be heard and solutions found.

"Come back to your family,

sit with your family and place your view before the family, he said at Jaipur hotel where MLAs in the Gehlot camp are holed up.

He said if Pilot is not joining the BJP, he should not accept the hospitality of BJP-ruled Haryana, referring to reports that the MLAs close to the rebel leader are camping in two Gurgaon hotels.

The Congress has made clear that it is going for revamp of the organisation in the state.

On Tuesday, Avinash Pande announced that all cells and departments of the state Congress are dissolved so that they can be reconstituted under the leadership of the new PCC president. On Wednesday, he announced a similar disbanding of all district and block committees of the party.

In the harshest words spoken so far by any Congress leader against Pilot, Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday accused his sacked deputy of being directly involved in horse-trading with the BJP.

He claimed there is proof that money was being offered.

"Our deputy chief minister and PCC president himself was doing the deal and was giving statements that no horse-trading was taking place. What clarification are you giving when you yourself were involved?" he asked.

Speaking good English or Hindi, giving a good byte is not everything, he said. What matters, he added, is commitment to the party's programmes and policies.

The Rajasthan Assembly secretariat sent notices to 19 MLAs, following a complaint by Congress chief whip Mahesh Joshi who sought their disqualification from the House.

The party said the MLAs had defied a whip and skipped the Congress Legislature Party meetings on Monday and Tuesday. It also referred to their "hostile" media statements.

It wanted action under paragraph 2 (1) (a) of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which disqualifies MLAs if voluntarily give up the membership of the party which they represent in the House. The Congress letter said the

Supreme Court has unequivocally held that the provision comes into effect when the conduct of an MLA leads to this inference.

Among those sent notices are Vishendra Singh and Ramesh Meena, who were sacked along with Pilot from the state cabinet after their rebellion against Ashok Gehlot.

Others include Deepender Singh Shekhawat, Bhanwar Lal Sharma and Harish Chandra Meena, who had also given statements to the media challenging the Gehlot government.

Sachin Pilot has been upset since the Congress picked Gehlot for the chief minister's post after the 2018 assembly polls. His supporters had credited him for leading the Congress to victory as the state unit president. In the 200-member assembly, the Congress has 107 MLAs and the BJP 72.

In the past, the ruling party has claimed the support of 13 independents, two MLAs each from the CPM and the Bhartiya Tribal Party (BTP), and one from the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

# Mantra to stay relevant is to skill, re-skill and upskill, says PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The mantra to stay relevant in the rapidly changing business environment and market conditions is to "skill, re-skill and upskill", Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the youth on Wednesday, noting that the need for it has become more important in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing a virtual event to mark five years of the Skill India mission, he said skill is timeless and it keeps getting better with time and it makes you different from others.

He also said that in today's rapidly changing world, millions of skilled people are needed and there is a huge potential, especially in the health services.

The prime minister said merchant navy is another avenue which has a huge potential. He said if we work on increasing the skill in this field, then we can give lakhs of expert sailors to the



**"Skill is timeless, it keeps getting better with time. Skill is unique, it makes you different from others. Skill is a treasure that nobody can take away. And, skill is self-reliance, it not only makes one employable but also self-employable," he noted**

world, and can also strengthen the coastal economy of the country.

The coronavirus crisis has changed the nature of jobs as well as the world culture. The ever-changing new technology has also influenced it, he noted.

Keeping in mind the new work culture and the new nature of jobs, the country's youth are increasingly adopting new skills,

Modi said in his video address. "Several people ask me that in today's time, business and markets change so fast that they do not understand how to remain relevant. In this time of corona (virus), this question has become even more important.

"I have only one answer. The mantra to stay relevant is — skill, re-skill and upskill," the prime minister said.

Modi was of the view that skill is something which we gift to ourselves, which grows with experience.

"Skill is timeless, it keeps getting better with time. Skill is unique, it makes you different from others. Skill is a treasure that nobody can take away. And, skill is self-reliance, it not only makes one employable but also self-employable," he noted.

He observed that the Skill India Mission launched five years back on this day has led to creation of a vast infrastructure for skilling, reskilling and upskilling and enhancing opportunities to access employment both locally and globally.

It has led to hundreds of PM Kaushal Kendras being set up across the country and increase in the capacity of the ITI ecosystem.

Due to these concerted efforts, more than five crore youth have been skilled in the last five years.

Referring to the portal launched recently for mapping skilled employees and employers, he stated that this would help skilled workers, including migrant workers who have returned to their homes during the coronavirus-induced lockdown to access jobs easily and the employers to contact skilled employees at the click of a mouse.

## Priyanka hits out at UP govt over law and order situation in state

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday slammed the Yogi Adityanath government over the deteriorating law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh, citing a kidnapping case in Kanpur. In a Facebook post, she said a young man was kidnapped by miscreants in Kanpur and his family was asked for a ransom for his release.



"The family collected Rs 30 lakh by selling their house and wedding jewellery. At the behest of the police, the family handed over the bag full of money to the kidnappers and the police could neither catch the miscreants, nor their son could be freed," Priyanka Gandhi said.

"This is a case from Kanpur where such a big incident had taken place a few days ago. Now you can imagine the state of law

and order in UP from this," Priyanka Gandhi said, referring to the Vikas Dubey episode.

Dubey, a wanted criminal, was shot dead on Friday last by police, who claimed he was trying to flee after the car carrying him from Ujjain overturned on an isolated stretch of the highway on the outskirts of the city. Dubey was wanted in connection with the ambush in Kanpur's Bikru village past midnight on July 2, killing eight policemen who had come to arrest him.

### SHORT READS



#### UP farmer's son scores 98% in Class 12, to join top US university

**LAKHIMPUR KHERI (UP):** The son of a farmer in a remote Uttar Pradesh village has scored 98.2 per cent in his Class 12 examinations which has paved the way for his admission to a prestigious Ivy League University in the US on full scholarship. Anurag Tiwari, who belongs to Sarasan village in Lakhimpur district, said he has got selected to Cornell University where he would be pursuing higher studies in Economics. The 18-year-old humanities student scored 95 marks in Mathematics, 97 in English, 99 in Political Science, and a full 100 both in History and Economics, as per the exam results announced by the CBSE on Monday. The outstanding Class 12 results just paved the way for the "Cornell Dream" of the boy, who scored 1,370 marks in his Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), widely used for admissions to major colleges in the US, in December 2019. "Congratulations! The admission selection committee in the College of Arts and Sciences has approved your early decision application to Cornell University for the fall of 2020. I am honoured to share this wonderful news with you and to welcome you to the Cornell community," stated Jonathan R Burdick, Vice Provost for Enrollment, in a letter to Anurag in December.

## ADB appoints EC Ashok Lavasa as new V-P

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Multilateral funding agency Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday said it has appointed Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa as vice-president for private sector operations and public-private partnerships.



"He is currently one of the Election Commissioners of India and previously served in a range of senior posts including as Union Finance Secretary of India; Union Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change; and Union Secretary for the Ministry of Civil Aviation," ADB said in a statement.

Lavasa will succeed Diwakar Gupta, whose term will end on August 31. He has extensive experience in public-private partnerships and infrastructure development at the state and federal levels, with deep knowledge on public policy and the role of private sector, it said. The agency further said that Lavasa led the Indian delegation in the climate

change negotiations for the Paris Agreement and was instrumental in finalising India's nationally determined contributions, which included a major role of the private sector.

"At both policy and project levels, he made significant contributions to the inclusion of the private sector in many development programs in India for different sectors such as energy, agriculture, finance, and infrastructure. As Joint Secretary in the Department of Economic Affairs, he worked closely with many ADB projects that had private sector components," it said.

### MARATHA RESERVATION:

## SC to conduct day to day hearing from July 27 via VC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court said on Wednesday that from July 27 it would commence day to day hearing through video conferencing on a batch of pleas challenging Maharashtra law granting reservation to Marathas in education and jobs.

The top court, which refused to pass any interim stay order on the quota, said chances of physical court seem remote due to the persisting COVID-19 pandemic.

A bench of Justices L N Rao, Hemant Gupta and S Ravindra Bhatt asked the parties said that all parties should sit together and decide on modalities of hearing like who will take how much time and no one shall repeat the arguments.

During the hearing, senior advocate Shyam Divan appearing for some of the petitioners, said that this type of a case needs to be heard in a physical court.



"If we are constrained, then give us the earliest possible date. There is tremendous urgency in the matter. We may also need to revisit the concept of interlocutory relief," he said, adding that there is a whole group of post graduate students who have their careers at risk.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said that there is also an issue of 10 per cent reservation for Economically Weaker Section which too needs to be heard.

The bench said that if it needs to be heard, then it

would consider it. Divan pointed out that there is a huge chunk of 12 to 13 per cent reservation which has been taken away. He said that High Court is bound by the orders of the Supreme Court and nine-judge bench of the top court had already said that quota should not exceed 50 per cent.

The bench said it is listing the matter on July 27. Advocate Shivaji M Jadhav told the bench that virtual hearing is not possible looking at compilation of 1,000 of pages.



## CBSE class 10 results declared, 91.46% pass

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Girls outshone boys yet again in the class 10 exam, results of which were announced by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday, recording a pass percentage of 91.46. There has been a marginal increase of 0.36 per cent in the pass percentage as against last year. The board did not announce any merit list this year in view of the exceptional circumstances amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

While girls have achieved a pass percentage of 93.31, pass percentage of boys and transgen-

ders is 90.14 and 78.95 respectively. Over 1.84 lakh students scored above 90 per cent and more than 41,000 students scored above 95 per cent marks. Over 18 lakh students had appeared for the exam this year.

Trivandrum region recorded highest pass percentage of 99.28, while the pass percentage of Guwahati region was lowest at 79.12. While the class 12 exams were rescheduled to be held in July in all parts of the country, class 10 exams were rescheduled only in Delhi which was affected by riots in March. However, later all exams were cancelled following spike in Covid-19 cases.

### House collapses in Dehradun, three killed

**DEHRADUN:** Three people, including an eight-year-old girl, were killed in their sleep and two others injured when their house in Chukkhuwala area here collapsed in the early hours of Wednesday, police said. The house collapsed following heavy rain at around 1.30 am. Search and rescue teams have pulled two bodies out of the rubble of the house so far and rescued alive two others who have been hospitalised, they said. Two women were killed in the accident and one of them is said to have been pregnant.

## AICC leaders in-charge of States not doing their job: Veerappa Moily

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Senior Congress leader M Veerappa Moily indicated on Wednesday party general secretaries put in charge of States are not doing their job and called for revamp at the AICC level to strengthen the Sonia Gandhi-led outfit. Asked to comment on the political crisis in Rajasthan, the former Union Minister appeared to back Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and also hinted that rebel leader Sachin Pilot should have patiently waited for his turn.



The Congress yesterday sacked Pilot as the Deputy Chief Minister as well as Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) President. "These days many of the youngsters are encouraged in the Congress party. But at the same time there is a need for well-tested leadership because you can't just neglect the veterans also," Moily said.

Speaking in general terms, the former Karnataka Chief Minister said many of today's aspiring youth don't have patience at all and they need to have perseverance. Pilot may deserve Chief Ministership but he should have waited for his turn, working within the party, he said noting that the 42-year-old leader was made Lok Sabha member, Union Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and PCC President by the party

early in his political career. At the same time, Moily said many a time, AICC general secretaries in charge of States are not "vigilant" and don't understand the problems faced by local party units.

"It (the Rajasthan-type crisis) can be prevented. Some of the (partys) disasters could be prevented. Many of the times, they (general secretaries) don't bring it to the notice of the central leadership, and don't keep them informed about developments and take immediate corrective actions," he said.

"These days we are not doing this kind of exercise whether it's northeastern states, or Madhya Pradesh or Karnataka, or any of these states. Many a time, vigilance on the part of high-command is also lacking. As a result when everything happens (problem comes to a head) only then they become panicky, that's not the way," Moily said.

## Cong dissolves district, block committees in Raj

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress dissolved its all district and block committees in Rajasthan in a bid to revamp the state unit of the party. Announcing the decision, AICC general secretary in-charge for the Rajasthan Congress Avinash Pande said new committees will be formed soon. Sources said the decision has come in the wake of Sachin Pilot's sacking as the deputy chief minister and the state Congress chief. The move is considered a step forward in removing all Pilot's men holding party positions at the grassroots level. "The AICC has decided to dissolve all District Congress Committees and Block Congress Committees of Rajasthan Pradesh with immediate effect. The process of formation of new committees will begin soon," Pande said on Twitter.

## Not all pregnant women need to undergo Covid-19 test, AAP govt tells HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Not all pregnant women are required to undergo COVID-19 tests when they go to a hospital for obstetrical care (child birth), the AAP government told the Delhi High Court on Wednesday. The submission was made before a bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice Prateek Jalen by the Delhi government on affidavit which stated that only suspected cases of COVID-19 are tested for the viral infection.

However, obstetrical care cannot be delayed for want of testing, the Delhi government said, adding that not all symptomatic pregnant women would be tested.

Only those coming from hotspots or those who have had contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 are tested for the viral infection, the



government has said. Taking note of the affidavit, the court said it was not going to further monitor the case as a clear set of guidelines have been put in place by the government.

"Enough and adequate have been taken to expedite testing and in certain cases testing is also not required," the bench said.

It further asked the Delhi government to ensure that time

taken from when a healthcare provider decides to go for COVID-19 testing of a pregnant woman, the sample collection and the declaration of results, all together ought not to take more than 24 hours.

It also asked the government to disseminate the latest guidelines on testing of pregnant women to all of its and private hospitals in the national capital.

### Maha: Costume designer commits suicide in Mira Road

**THANE:** A 28-year-old costume designer allegedly committed suicide at his home in Mira Road in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Wednesday. Shaikh Salim Khan was found hanging from a ceiling fan in his ninth-floor apartment in a high-rise on the Monday night, assistant police inspector Pankaj Ghatkar of Kashmirira police station said. A suicide note was recovered from the scene, in which the deceased had stated that he was fed up with life and no one should be held responsible for his death, the official said. Khan worked as a costume designer at various film studios in Mumbai and his mother lived in a different apartment in the same high-rise, he said. A case of accidental death has been registered in this regard and further probe was underway, he added.

## Stand-up comedians post apology after old videos resurface

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stand-up comedians Aadar Malik, Sahil Shah and Azeem Banatwalla are the latest names to apologise for their years old and "out-of-context" videos and social media posts that have resurfaced online.

The comedians said they were sorry if they had offended or hurt anyone's religious sentiments and also requested that their families be spared of online vitriol.

The development came days after several comics such as Vir Das, Rohan Joshi and Kaneez Surka alleged that their personal contact information and addresses were leaked online, which led to vicious trolling.

## Sonu Sood turns author with a book on his work with migrants during Covid-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Actor Sonu Sood, who catapulted to the national spotlight for his work in helping migrants reach their homes amid the COVID-19 pandemic, will pen a book about his experience. His debut book, as-of-yet untitled, will reveal the emotional and often challenging journeys the actor undertook along with the people he helped. It will be released later this year, announced publishing house Penguin Random House India on Wednesday.



"... I want to thank God for making me a catalyst in helping the migrants. While my heart beats in Mumbai, after this movement I feel a part of me lives in the villages of UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttarakhand and various other states where I have now found new friends and

made deep connections. I have decided to put these experiences, stories that are embedded in my soul forever, in a book... I'm excited, nervous and overwhelmed, and I can't wait to connect with you through my book. I look forward to your support—and love you all," Sood said.

The 46-year-old actor launched an initiative to help reunite migrant workers who were stranded in Mumbai with their families in distant corners of the country. Sood and his team rolled out a toll-free number and a WhatsApp helpline to connect with the workers and then

arrange transportation for those desperate to reach their homes. Later, he arranged for food, buses, trains and even chartered flights for stranded migrants, some of whom were walking home after the lockdown was imposed earlier in March and left them jobless.

## 122 'criminals' killed in 6,126 encounters in UP; 13 cops lost lives

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As many as 122 alleged criminals were killed in over 6,000 encounters in Uttar Pradesh in the past three years, while 13 policemen also lost their lives during this period, a senior police official said. He also said over 2,000 criminals were injured in police action, while over 13,000 of them have been arrested.

"Thirteen policemen have been killed in action in as many as 6,126 encounters (in UP), while as many as 122 criminals have been gunned down," Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar told PTI while sharing details of police encounters from March 20, 2017, to July 10, 2020.

"As many as 13,361 criminals have been arrested, while 2,296

criminals were injured in police encounters," he said, adding 909 policemen were also injured in these incidents.

Referring to the Kanpur ambush in which eight policemen were killed, Kumar said, "Of the 21 named accused in the incident, six have been killed and four arrested so far. A hunt is on to nab the 11 other accused."

Eight police personnel, including a DSP, were gunned down by the henchmen of gangster Vikas Dubey in Bikru village of Kanpur on July 3.

Seven others, including a civilian, were injured in the attack after the police team entered the village past July 2 midnight to arrest the gangster.

Dubey was later killed in an encounter on July 10 after police claimed that he tried to escape from the spot in the Bhauti area

where the vehicle carrying him from Ujjain to Kanpur met with an accident. Kumar said overall there has been a decline in the crime rate in the state this year compared to the last year.

"A total of 579 instances of loot took place in the state from January 1, 2020, to June 15, 2020. This is 44.17 per cent less compared to the crimes committed in the same period in 2019," the ADG (Law and Order) said.

He said 33 incidents of dacoity were reported in the state this year so far. "It is 37.74 per cent less compared to the crimes committed in the same period in 2019."

Similarly, 2,604 instances of burglary have taken this year so far and is 30.97 per cent less compared to the crimes committed in the same period last year, Kumar added.

SHORT READS



**NSTI extension centre to come up in Ladakh: LG Mathur**

**LEH:** Ladakh Lt Governor R K Mathur on Wednesday said a National Skill Training Institute extension centre is set to come up here. Making the announcement on World Youth Skills Day, Mathur said the NSTI extension centre would impart quality training to the youths of Ladakh, thus empowering and equipping them with industry relevant skills to earn their livelihood. An initiative of the Directorate General of Training, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, the extension centre aims at capacity-building of the polytechnics and industrial training institutes by providing training to the trainers, an official spokesperson said. The NSTI centre would also introduce programmes such as refresher training, re-skilling or up skilling courses, craftsmen training schemes, instructor training schemes, apprenticeship training schemes and national skills qualification frameworks, he said.

**Bengal MLA's death: Mamata tells prez it's suicide not murder**

**KOLKATA:** A day after a BJP delegation met President Ram Nath Kovind seeking dismissal of the Mamata Banerjee government over the "political murder" of a party MLA, the West Bengal chief minister wrote a letter to him claiming the saffron party might have presented "distorted facts". She said the case has been handed over to the CID for proper investigation. A Trinamool Congress delegation led by Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien also called on the president at Rashtrapati Bhavan and apprised him of the details of the case. In the letter, Banerjee cited the preliminary probe by the state police and the postmortem report to claim Debendra Nath Roy's death "is a case of suspected suicide and does not appear to be a political case as being projected by the BJP".

**All Punjab ministers to undergo Covid-19 test**

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh has advised his cabinet colleagues to undergo test for coronavirus after one of the ministers tested positive for the infection. "All the cabinet ministers will give their samples for testing (coronavirus) today. Their results will come by today evening or tomorrow," Health Minister Balbir Singh Sidhu told reporters here on Wednesday. Officials said the chief minister has advised his ministers to get themselves tested as a precautionary measure. Punjab Rural Development and Panchayats Minister Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa on Tuesday had tested positive for the novel coronavirus. He is the first minister in the state to contract the infection.

INDIA'S CLEAR MESSAGE TO CHINA

**Follow all agreed protocols for border management**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian military conveyed a "very clear" message to the Chinese army during a nearly 15-hour-long talks that status quo ante must be restored in eastern Ladakh and it will have to follow all mutually agreed protocols for border management to bring back peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control, government sources said on Wednesday. During the course of the intense and complex negotiations between senior commanders of the two armies that ended at 2 am on Wednesday, the Indian delegation also apprised the Chinese PLA about the "red lines" and conveyed that the onus was largely on China to improve the overall situation in the region, the sources said.

The two sides agreed on certain modalities for rolling out the next phase of disengagement and are expected to get in touch with each other after discussing agreed points with the higher authorities of both sides, the sources said.



The fourth round of Lt General-level talks began around 11 AM on Tuesday at a designated meeting point in Chushul on the Indian side of the LAC, they said. There was no official word on the outcome of the talks.

The Indian delegation was led by Lt Gen Harinder Singh, the Commander of the Leh-based 14 Corps, while the Chinese side was headed by Major General Liu Lin, Commander of the South Xinjiang military region.

Army Chief Gen MM Naravane was apprised about the details of the negotiations following which he held discussions with senior military officers. He is scheduled to hold another meeting with a number of senior military officers later in the day.

Tuesday's discussions were the longest negotiations between the two armies after the tense standoff that began on May 5. The third round of Lt General-level talks on June 30 lasted 12 hours. During this round, both

**The two sides agreed on certain modalities for rolling out the next phase of disengagement and are expected to get in touch with each other after discussing agreed points with the higher authorities of both sides, the sources said**

sides agreed on an "expeditious, phased and step wise" de-escalation as a "priority" to end the standoff. The sources said the main focus of the latest round was on finalising a framework for a "time-bound and verifiable" disengagement process from all the friction points like Pangong Tso and Depsang and pulling back large numbers of troops and weapons from rear bases along the LAC as part of modalities for further de-escalation.

RAJASTHAN POLITICAL CRISIS

**Sachin Pilot says not joining BJP**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"I am not joining the BJP," Congress leader Sachin Pilot said on Wednesday, asserting that the speculation about his switching sides was being fuelled by certain leaders in Rajasthan to tarnish his image.

Pilot's remarks come a day after the Congress sacked him as Rajasthan's deputy chief minister and the party's state unit president. Two loyalists of Pilot were also dropped from the state Cabinet.

"I have worked very hard to bring the Congress party back in the government and defeat the BJP," he said.

In an apparent reference to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's camp, Pilot said some leaders in Rajasthan were trying to fuel speculation that he is joining the BJP and that he would like to categorically state that he was not doing so.

"Such a speculation is being fuelled to tarnish my image," he said. After being sacked, Pilot had tweeted in Hindi on Tuesday, "Truth can be rattled, not defeated."

Gehlot has accused his former deputy of playing into the hands



**"I have worked very hard to bring the Congress party back in the government and defeat the BJP," he said**

of the BJP Pilot had kept away from two CLP meetings held on Monday and Tuesday after which the action against him was taken.

Pilot has been upset since the Congress picked Gehlot as the chief minister after the 2018 assembly polls, while his own supporters insisted that he deserved credit for the party's victory as its state unit president.

The current crisis erupted last Friday when the Rajasthan

Police sent a notice to Pilot, asking him to record his statement over the alleged bid to bring down the government.

The same notice was sent to the chief minister and some other MLAs, but Pilot's supporters claimed that it was only meant to humiliate him.

The Special Operation Group (SOG) had sent out the notices after tapping a phone conversation between two men, who were allegedly discussing the fall of the Gehlot government.



**PM reviews development work at Kedarnath Dham**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday reviewed the ongoing development work at Kedarnath Dham in Uttarakhand with a focus on facilities for travellers, his office said.

Last month also the prime minister had reviewed the progress of the development work at the shrine.

The discussions centred around furthering the divini-

ty of Kedarnath temple and Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya's 'samadhi sthal', maintaining cleanliness and ensuring extensive development, the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement.

The review also focussed on ensuring that travellers get all facilities on the Gaurikund-Kedarnath route and arrangements be made to showcase the historical and cultural significance of the pilgrimage using technology, it added.

**COVID-19 situation better in Delhi than June says Kejriwal**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said the current COVID-19 situation in the national capital is better than what it was in June, but the war against the disease has not been won yet. He said had the Delhi government fought the virus alone, it would have "failed" and therefore his dispensation sought cooperation from the BJP-led Centre, NGOs, and other organisations. "Our first principle was that this fight cannot be won alone," Kejriwal said.

The chief minister said the AAP government will continue its preparations to deal with any spike in COVID-19 cases.

Addressing an online media briefing, the chief minister said according to the Centre's formu-



**"There may be a spike again in COVID-19 cases. We don't have to be complacent. We will not sit idle. We will have to be fully prepared," Kejriwal said**

la, Delhi was expected to have 2.25 lakh cases by July 15, but at present, there are only 1.15 lakh cases. As the COVID-19 cases had started rising in the first week of June, it was expected that there would be 1.34 lakh active cases by July 15, but till date, there are only 18,600 active cases in the city.

"We are in better situation today, as compared to June, but it does not mean we have won the war (against COVID-19). We have yet to go a long way. There may be a spike again in COVID-19 cases. We don't have to be complacent. We will not sit idle. We will have to be fully prepared," Kejriwal said.

**Pilot involved in horse trading, says Gehlot**

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday accused rebel Congress leader Sachin Pilot of involvement in horse trading with the BJP.

Pilot was removed from the posts of the Rajasthan deputy chief minister and the state Congress president on Tuesday amid a power tussle with Gehlot.

In an interaction with reporters here, the chief minister, however, did not mention Pilot by his name but said the "former Pradesh Congress Committee president" was himself "doing the deal".

Gehlot said he has the proof that horse trading was being committed to topple his government.



"Those who are giving clarifications were themselves involved in horse trading," Gehlot told reporters.

The CM said he (Pilot) would have performed quite good had he "struggled in his youth". Gehlot also hit out at the national media saying it is supporting those who are "involved in murdering democracy".

CYCLONE AID SCAM

**TMC expels party leaders; BJP, CPM talk tough**

PNS ■ KOLKATA

As protests continued in parts of West Bengal over alleged misappropriation of monetary compensation to the people affected by cyclone 'Amphan', the ruling TMC cracked a whip against corruption and expelled several party leaders and workers, while the BJP and CPI(M) said that they won't stand by those who have been proven guilty.

Although Trinamool Congress (TMC), which controls nearly 80 per cent of the state's panchayats, has been at the receiving end of the public ire, the opposition BJP and the CPI(M) have also faced protests in some areas over allegations of fraud related to the 'Amphan' aid delivery.

The protests have been taking place in various parts of East Midnapore, South and



North 24 Parganas, the worst-affected districts by the cyclone 'Amphan' which hit West Bengal on May 20, killing 96 people and leaving behind a trail of destruction.

"Whenever any complaint was received, we took action against the accused leaders and party workers. We have either suspended or asked them to return money. We have zero-tolerance towards corruption," a senior TMC

leader said. Several local level TMC leaders were recently expelled from the party for their alleged involvement in corruption and nepotism, he said.

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC president Mamata Banerjee recently said that her government was rectifying the "lapses" which might have occurred in its effort to pay the compensation to the cyclone-hit victims quickly.

**GoM recommends hike in sugar MSP to Rs 33/kg**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A group of ministers, headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, on Wednesday recommended increasing the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar by Rs 2 to 33 per kg to ensure mills clear the pending cane arrears of around Rs 20,000 crore at the earliest, sources said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal were present in the meeting. Sources said the GoM took stock of the pending sugarcane dues to be paid by sugar mills which stand at around Rs 20,000 crore so far in the current 2019-20 season (October-September) and ways to ensure mills clear this at the earliest.

**Dehing-Patkai national park should include Amazon of the East: activists**

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government's decision to upgrade the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary into a national park has enthused environmental conservationists and activists but with this long-standing demand to encompass the entire 500 sq km of the contiguous rainforests, known as Amazon of the East, within its ambit has gathered momentum.

Conservationists have been demanding that the government include the adjoining reserved forests connected with the existing wildlife sanctuary like Joypore reserved forests, Upper Dehing East Block and the Upper Dehing West Block to the proposed national park.

Prominent personalities of the state like actor Adil Hussain, singer Papon, musician Joi Barua, former Axom Xahitya



Xabha chief Parmananda Rajbongshi, author and journalist Anuradha Sarma Pujari and artist Dadul Chaliha have also been appealing to the government to include the reserve forests within the proposed park. Ethnic communities of the villages surrounding the reserve forests has also extended their unstinted support to this entire movement.

Last week, Assam Chief

Minister Sarbananda Sonowal issued a directive to upgrade the sanctuary into a national park.

The sanctuary encompasses only 111.11 sq km but the stretch of rainforests include 500 sq km of the Joypur, Upper Dehing and Dirok reserved forests, spread over the two districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh, said Soumyadeep Dutta, director of environmental organisation Nature's Beckon.

**Cong to move HC against Speaker's ruling rejecting to disqualify two MLAs**

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Congress will move Allahabad High Court to challenge Uttar Pradesh assembly Speaker Hriday Narayan Dikshit's decision rejecting its plea to disqualify the party's two "rebel" MLAs, Aditi Singh and Rakesh Singh.

"The legal cell of the party in Delhi is preparing the petition for moving the high court," Congress Legislature Party leader Aradhana Misra told PTI on Wednesday.

On Speaker's ruling that the Congress' plea seeking disqualification of its two MLAs "lacked substance and sufficient evidence", Misra said, "There is sufficient ground for the disqualification of these two MLAs and the party had presented it before the Speaker."

"The acts and conduct of these two MLAs show that they want to willingly give up the membership of the House. Their actions are tantamount



to voluntarily giving up their membership (of the Assembly) under the 10th Schedule of the Constitution," Misra said, adding they have been continuously indulging in anti-party activities.

Giving an example, she said Aditi Singh participated in the special Vidhan Sabha session on October 2 last year defying the party whip against it.

"She said she did not get the whip. Even so, when she reached the Vidhan Sabha she

was fully aware that the entire opposition had boycotted the session. She did not just take part in the proceedings for four hours but also spoke in the house praising the government," Misra said.

Aditi Singh later tweeted remarks which amounted to criticising the party, the CLP leader said.

About Harchandpur MLA Rakesh Singh, the CLP leader said he publically criticised the party on several occasions.

**Record number of samples tested for Covid-19: ICMR officials**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 3.2 lakh samples were tested for COVID-19 on Tuesday, the highest so far on a day, taking the cumulative number of tests conducted in the country till July 14 to 1,24,12,664, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) officials said.

According to the Union Health Ministry, the testing per million for India is consistently rising and has touched 8994.7 on Wednesday.

"A cumulative total of 1,24,12,664 samples have been tested up to July 14. A total of 3,20,161 samples were tested on Tuesday, the highest so far conducted in a day," Scientist and media coordinator at the ICMR, Dr Lokesh Sharma, said.

The per day testing capacity, which was around 1.5 lakh on May 25, is nearly four lakh per day now, Sharma informed.

India registered a record sin-



gle day jump of 29,429 COVID-19 cases pushing its tally to 9,36,181 on Wednesday, while the death toll climbed to 24,309 with 582 new fatalities, according to Health Ministry data.

The WHO in its Guidance Note on "Public Health Criteria to Adjust Public Health and Social Measures in the Context of COVID-19" has advised comprehensive surveillance and testing for suspected cases.

While explaining the concept

of comprehensive surveillance and testing of suspect cases, the WHO advised that a country needs to conduct 140 tests per day per million population, the ministry said.

As many as 22 states are doing more than 140 COVID-19 tests per day per million in line with comprehensive testing guidance note by the WHO, said the Health Ministry, while advising the remaining states and UTs to increase testing to match the

**India registered a record single day jump of 29,429 Covid-19 cases pushing its tally to 9,36,181 on Wednesday, while the death toll climbed to 24,309 with 582 new fatalities, according to Health Ministry data**

WHO advised levels, the ministry said. One of the factors strongly aiding the increasing numbers of COVID-19 tests in the country is the steadily growing network of labs for testing of COVID-19. With 865 labs in the government sector and 358 private labs, the total number of testing labs is 1223, as on date.

In addition to the gold standard for test, RT PCR, TrueNat and CBNAAT are also used to augment this facility, it said.

**Complaint in court against Ekta Kapoor over web show**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A criminal complaint has been filed against film and television producer Ekta Kapoor before a magistrate's court here for allegedly disrespecting Indian Army's uniform in one of her web series. The complaint was filed by former 'Bigg Boss' contestant Vikas Pathak, also known as Hindustani Bhau, before a magistrate's court in suburban Bandra on Tuesday.

The matter has been posted for hearing on August 24, Pathak's advocate Kashif Khan said. "My client had filed a complaint against Ekta Kapoor and others at a local police station, but no action has been taken till date, hence we moved a criminal complaint before the court," Khan said.

Besides Ekta Kapoor, the complaint also names her OTT platform ALT Balaji, Shobha Kapoor and Jeetendra Kapoor, he said.

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Digital reliance

Raising funds in the midst of a pandemic is no joke. Mukesh Ambani should be applauded but is his nervousness justified?



On the day Reliance Industries held its first virtual annual general meeting, India's largest and most valuable private enterprise announced that search giant Google has invested \$4.5 billion into Reliance's Jio platforms, the conglomerate's digital arm. This raises the amount that India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, has raised for Reliance Jio to close to \$20 billion, an impressive feat in the best of times. But given that the world is suffering a healthcare meltdown, thanks to the Coronavirus pandemic, this is an extraordinary feat. In all, Google plans to pump \$10 billion over the next five to seven years in the Indian market to help accelerate the adoption of digital technologies. A flurry of deals made in recent times has given the much-needed financial backing to Ambani's ambition to morph Reliance from an energy company to an e-commerce giant. Almost all the funds have been raised by American technology firms and financial institutions. Both Google and Facebook are part of the firm, much like its parent Reliance Industries. Jio is trying to become completely vertically integrated. It is doing it all — from creating 5G infrastructure at home to manufacturing smartphones for users, the creation of software services like Jio Meet as well as expanding Reliance's huge media play by owning a host of entertainment and news channels. The biggest single positive here is that Mukesh Ambani, like his father Dhirubhai Ambani before him, is a believer in India and the capabilities of this nation. He plans to build capacity within the country rather than import it. This was something made vitally important to every single Indian after the fire-breathing Chinese Dragon singed us last month. We can argue *ad nauseam* about how China might have lost the Indian market for a couple of generations but nothing speaks like action. While he might not look like it, Mukesh Ambani is a man of action. And for all this, he must be applauded.

However, and there's always a however, the way Reliance has garnered its funds and the fact that it is on the verge of becoming a monopolistic venture in telecommunications and technology services with only a couple of rivals — one of which is almost bankrupt — it does raise some concern. It remains to be seen how Ambani will deploy the funds raised in the Indian market. Will he buy out rivals in the e-commerce and groceries space? Or will every Indian have to move from one Reliance store to the next, albeit in the guise of other brands, thanks to Reliance retail owning the rights of several multinational brands in India? Or is there another way of looking at it? Should India nurture and raise national champions like Reliance Industries? The old guard of Indian companies could not scale enough or be scaled in different areas. As for Reliance, the pivot towards Jio and telecom has been a long time coming. The family feud meant that Mukesh Ambani had to wait for a decade and for his brother to mess up to get back into this space. He is not wasting any time now and his ambitions have scaled up from the time he launched Reliance Infocomm. With a clear roadmap for the future, his execution capabilities and striking a string of deals, Mukesh Ambani has proved just how an extremely competitive industry like telecom can yield striking returns. He is also securing the future for the Ambani clan for another half a century and possibly doing more to secure India's digital future away from the Chinese than any other individual.

## Trouble in Chabahar

Iran drops India from Chabahar port rail project as China seals a new economic and security deal worth \$400 billion



India's traditional relationship with Iran is finally being stretched by our strategic closeness to the US and is pushing that nation directly into the arms of China. And this might cost us a project that we had heavily invested in, the Chabahar port. For now, the Iranian Government has decided to drop India as a partner for the construction of a rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, along the border with Afghanistan, and go on its own. It will use its own engineers and not consult Indian expertise either. This, it claims, is because of India's tardy initiative and not moving any funds although an agreement was signed four years ago. India has been stalling under the shadow of US sanctions, which seek to penalise countries doing business with Iran. According to reports, Iran, which wants to complete the line by March 2022, will use \$400 million from the Iranian National Development Fund. And despite a pandemic-hit economy, it is going in for massive spends simply because China has signed a 25-year economic and security partnership with it worth \$400 billion. This entails Chinese entry in banking, telecommunications, ports, railways and other infrastructure projects. It fulfils China's neo-imperialist desires, colonising another economy in the process, and keeps its domestic industries running with cheaper Iranian oil for the next 25 years. India, by comparison, has stopped importing Iranian crude oil under US pressure. The agreement also proposes military cooperation, which could make China a key player in regional geopolitics and counter the US.

India has been completely caught off guard by this deal even as it tried various rounds of negotiations with the US to spare it from sanctions for conducting certain businesses with Iran. Though India got exemption for the Chabahar port and the rail link, equipment suppliers feared a hitback and slowed down progress. Besides, Iran was upset by India's decision to completely stop energy imports, quite a big basket of its earnings. Now China has assured it of its oil market, picking up supplies for 25 long years, taking away Iran's worries. Bilateral ties with Iran nosedived further with the naked display of majoritarian politics during the Delhi riots in February with its Foreign Minister Javad Zarif strongly condemning them. Now there is talk of a greater Chinese stake, the deal merely an access card to Chabahar's duty free zone, an oil refinery and the port itself. In fact, though Iran has denied it, there is speculation that it could lease out the entire port to its new benefactor. That would be a big blow to India, which had hoped to build an alternate trade route from Chabahar to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. But now with the Chinese reclaiming the vacuum, it will strengthen the China-Pakistan axis around the coast. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar port will strengthen that conduit. Iran says it has not abandoned India, but clearly it has decided to go with the biggest Asian power and the US' arch enemy on a need-based formula. We may think that we forced China's hand by retaliating in Galwan but all it did was ensure strategic calm when world opinion would have isolated it further had it escalated its aggression. As the only country whose growth projections are not negative post-pandemic, it can afford to buy out vulnerable nations. It has already invested in banks in Brazil. India may be its economic bulwark but China is quickly encircling it by winning over our old allies and neighbours. It is no less beligerent, just that it has now launched an economic warfare with India.

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# Save the common spirit

The Gurkhas cannot and should not be sacrificed at the altar of partisan politics or the smallness of spirit that besets present times because of Indo-Nepalese differences



BHOPINDER SINGH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invoked a "special relationship", based on shared culture, language and religion, with Nepal during his first official visit to Kathmandu in 2014. He had said, "This is the land of Sita and Janak; Nepal-India relations are as old as the Himalayas and the Ganga." Given his proclivity for abbreviations, Modi had coined HIT (Highways, I-Ways and Transways) as the transformational formula to strengthen age-old ties between the two nations. Much water has flown down the rivers Kosi, Gandaki and Karnali (the three big rivers that flow from Nepal to India) and Nepal has instead vested its trust in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to usher in the much-needed transformation.

Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's speech in New Delhi in 2018 was less flowery and presciently loaded. Repeatedly, he stressed on a "balanced outlook" in external relations, an unmistakable euphemism to "correct" the pro-India tilt. Nepal had just emerged from the perceived wounds of India's braggadocio during the 2015 earthquake relief operations and the supposed interferences in the framing of a new Constitution. Agitation over this issue had led to a crippling "blockade." In an age of social media, the hurt felt by a proud nation, which has never been ruled by outsiders, was palpable. Murmurs of India's "big brotherly" attitude being unacceptable gained credence in the streets of Nepal.

Oli had alluded to that overarching trust deficit and sinking sentiment. "Good neighbourliness demands harmonious co-existence forever. And trust is the key cementing factor. It derives its strength from the observance of such fundamental principles as equality, justice, mutual respect and benefit as well as non-interference," said Oli. He added that for impact, "it is natural to expect similar assurance from India." Clearly, the healing process never kicked off and today, ties between India and Nepal have reached an unprecedented low due to border violence, cartographical disputes and trust eroding measures like Nepal's decision to ban the Indian media.

Undoubtedly, there are layered complexities of missteps that were taken by both sides in equal measure. Both nations were driven by their own domestic political considerations, short-termism and geo-political churns that widened the faultlines, which always existed but never flared up to this extent. The crests and troughs of bilateral relations were always handled politically, without any unnecessary attribution to the societal-ethnicity of the people involved. Today, that venerated "Gurkha" stands to be dangerously demonised as collateral damage. The delinking of "politics" and "people" has not been the strength of the current dispensation. Deliberate contextualisation and binarisation of circumstances



may still yield electoral gratification but this will come at the cost of alienating almost all neighbouring countries, well beyond Pakistan and China.

The intermingling and intermeshing of the Indo-Nepalese people are not just historical, cultural, spiritual, religious or even transactional; it is unparalleled in terms of the faith, trust and reverence that is afforded on the "Gurkha" in the Indian consciousness. Nearly 40 dedicated Gurkha Regiment battalions with approximately 40,000 Indian and Nepali Gurkha soldiers defend India's sovereignty. Another one lakh veterans reside in Nepal and the annals of Indian Army's valour testify to the raw gallantry of the likes of Lt Col Dhan Singh Thapa, Param Vir Chakra (PVC), among others, who ironically fought the Chinese in the same area around the Pangong Lake.

His citation read, "Major Thapa got out of his trench and killed several enemies in hand-to-hand fighting before he was finally overpowered by Chinese soldiers." The proud Gurkha had stared death in the eye and returned. Indeed, he was born in Dharamshala as many other Gurkhas in the region of Darjeeling Hills or Dehradun but he was as synonymously a Gurkha and an Indian as Mahavir Chakra (MVC) awardees like Tika Bahadur

“THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HAS TO MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT NO UNTOWARD OR OVER-EXCITABLE TAIN IS IMPLIED ON THE LOYALTY, FIDELITY AND CHARACTER OF THE PEOPLE OF NEPAL. GOVERNMENTAL OR IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES HAVE TO BE HANDLED SEPARATELY”

Thapa, Pati Ram Gurung or a Prem Bahadur Gurung.

This unparalleled tradition and saga of sacrifice for India is reciprocated in a similar spirit by all those who chose to identify themselves as Gurkhas. In a deeply moving sight, a 11-year-old girl shouted the Gurkha war-cry on her father's cremation "Tiger 9 GR Ko! Ho Ki Hoina?" (Col MN Rai, the Tiger of 9 Gurkha Regiment, he was or wasn't he?) and it was responded by a resounding "Ho Ho Ho" (he was, he was, he was). The daughter and the nation mourned his loss and yet another name got etched to the list of the illustrious Gurkha glories. The inexplicable bond of the Indo-Nepalese reality underwrote that sacred spirit.

The "Gurkha" cannot and should not be sacrificed at the altar of partisan politics or the smallness of spirit that besets the times that be. Sadly, the oversimplistic narrative of the day can easily affix the slant of "anti-national" on anyone owing to their ethnicities or religion as the basest instincts are easily aroused, tolerated and stoked by the powers-that-be.

Equally, the Nepalese dispensation cannot forget history and independent India's contributions or the essential implications that are imminent in choosing a China over India as its "bargaining tool." The people-to-people connect with

some other neighbouring countries has already been ruptured and irreversibly damaged with the context of politico-religiosity. This has done an extreme disservice to some of our own, who axiomatically got associated as "anti-nationals" owing to their co-religiosity. Ironically, such an ethnic pejoration onto the identity of the "Gurkha" would be a unique failure. This despite the supposed commonalities of the two realms.

Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw identified himself as a proud Gurkha as does the current Chief of Defence Staff or the Chief of Indian Army Staff prior to him. In a reciprocal dignity, the chiefs of both armies also bestow Honorary "Generalship" of their Armies, mutually. The national leadership has to make a concerted effort to ensure that no untoward or over-excitement is implied on the loyalty, fidelity and character of the people of Nepal. Governmental or ideological differences have to be handled separately without galvanising societal emotions as it did with other neighbouring countries. India must always protect its sovereign interests firmly. It must also recognise the dignity of the "other", especially one who has bled for India unflinchingly.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands)

## SOUNDBITE

India's global strategy is in tatters. We are losing power and respect everywhere and the Government of India has no idea what to do.



Congress leader —Rahul Gandhi

Covid is not going away anytime soon, so it's imperative that we adjust our expectations of what's considered 'normal' to include these basic but crucial precautions.



Actor —Anil Kapoor

I'm not interested right now in talking to China. We made a great trade deal. But as soon as the deal was done, the ink wasn't even dry and they hit us with the plague.



US President —Donald Trump

My favourite batting partner is Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) but it's rare that I get a chance to bat with him. If he's (Dhoni) out there batting with you, things remain sorted.



Cricketer —Rishabh Pant

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Rediscover agri economy

Sir — It should not have taken a pandemic for this nation to rediscover that we are essentially an agrarian economy. Decades of *ad hoc* and knee-jerk policies on agro production, storage capacity, distribution and exports were translating into excess grain reserves since 1995. The pity of it all, grains were wasted in shoddy warehouse facilities. Further, an unimaginative distribution and pricing set-up denied their reach to the deserving poor.

On April 1, 2020, stocks in the central pool stood at 73.85 MT, the highest ever, against a reserve requirement of just 21.04 MT. This should help feed the common man for months now. Pulled up by COVID-19, we are sure to sustain a new-found respect for this foundational sector of our economy. Reserve levels will be scaled up. More modern and efficient storage capacities and attendant infrastructure and employment-centric initiatives will be on the cards. Significantly, procurement during this harvest season was prompt and harvesting was imaginatively done by States despite the non-availability of labour. Bureaucracy

### Pilot's revolt should pave way for Congress 2.0

This refers to the editorial, "Pilot sacked" (July 15). The revolt of Sachin Pilot, who was dismissed from every office he held in Rajasthan, is a golden opportunity for the rejuvenation of a secular front against the ruling BJP. This should include immediate holding of long overdue internal elections for a new Congress president outside the Gandhi fold, followed by a radical overhaul of the party. Alternatively, he could float a regional party, which along with other breakaway factions of the Congress, namely, the Trinamool Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party and YRS Congress could merge into a Congress 2.0. This grouping, covering a third of the country's electorate, would embolden more capable Congressmen to join the ranks and render the Gandhi-led Congress 1.0 version obsolete.

Thankfully, Pilot has chosen not to follow the footsteps of Jyotiraditya Scindia to join the BJP. Had this been the case, it would have earned Congress leader Rahul Gandhi more sympathy and would have come to boost his image as a champion of the secular ideology



that he certainly does not deserve. Moreover, even from Pilot's personal standpoint, the grass is not greener on the other side. Rajasthan is a BJP bastion and he must have realised that there are a host of well-entrenched leaders already ahead of him in the queue.

SB Bhalerao Mumbai

must ensure that this singular efficiency in decision-making and in owning up to a problem becomes the new norm to give a fillip to rural stakeholders.

Once the thrust reverts to the agro sector, the economy must shift to the rural epicentre, buttressed by auxiliary industries such as food processing. Post the pandemic, reverse migration of a

huge number of non-resident Indians is imminent and an expanded rural economy alone can accommodate the surge. The pandemic has given us a sharp cue for the dispersal of wealth and consumption into rural heartlands as an enduring policy of inclusive development.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

### Absurd claim

Sir — Nepal Prime Minister KP Oli has thrown yet another bouncer by claiming that "real Aayodhya" is in Nepal and not in India. He also claimed that India had created a "fake Aayodhya."

Of late, Oli has been in the news for all the wrong reasons.

He issued a "new" map of Nepal, claiming Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiadhura as its territory. Oli's communist Government in Nepal is also playing into the hands of China, which has reportedly taken away 33 hectares of land from it. But all of this has not bothered Oli, who is also facing growing discontent back home for "junking India" and "joining China." One just hopes that temporary developments and flash-points do not hamper the unique relations both nations share.

KV Seetharamaiah Hassan

### Mutual benefit

Sir — The Google initiative to pump ₹75,000 crore for digital India initiative will benefit India in the long-term. For Google, too, this is an effort to tap the huge opportunity in a country whose mass market has only just begun to go online. This step will also fill the void created by the banning of Chinese applications.

Sudhir Via email

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

**FIRST COLUMN**

## Balance ecology and economy

The rapid clearances of projects in order to promote industries are proving to be a death knell for the environment



KOTA SRIRAJ

The Coronavirus pandemic has not only killed lakhs of people worldwide, it has sickened the global economy, too, as nations have been forced to shut down their industries and businesses in order to stem the spread of the contagion. India, with its 9,39,192 Coronavirus cases and 24,327 casualties is no exception to this need to hunker down. And the country, which had begun to open up in a phased manner after an extended, hard lockdown, is being forced to impose brief shutdowns again. Naturally, this COVID-19 chokehold over the economy has put developmental projects, industry, trade and business in a coma and impacted thousands of lives and livelihoods.

The worst affected of the lot have been the migrant workers of the nation, who are rightly considered the silent contributors to development. The labour community, who at the best of times is neither appreciated enough nor remunerated fairly, continued to suffer even more badly during the COVID-19 lockdown. This was tragically epitomised by the horrid accident in Aurangabad where unemployed, exhausted and broke labourers walking back home were mowed down by a train after they went off to sleep on the tracks. The incident had sparked off a nationwide outrage and sense of grief for the sufferings of the workers in the informal economy.

Now, with the country slowly opening up, despite the Coronavirus cases skyrocketing, the very same labourers are being coaxed to come back from their villages and get the wheels of the economy moving again. That brings us to the fact that no matter what happens, even during a pandemic, an economy cannot be stopped in its tracks, it has to keep ticking. The economy is given precedence over everything, and this includes the environment, which is the proverbial poor cousin.

But in this bid to restart the economy, India is probably committing the same mistake all over again by making trade, business and industry a priority and putting the environment and ecological concerns on the back-burner. Unfortunately, this lopsided agenda of promoting economic development at the cost of the environment has heightened the risk of more pandemics such as the COVID-19 occurring frequently in future. In a stark but positive contrast, this aspect has been understood by the western world whose nations are quickly scrambling to cover their ecological deficiencies and environmental weak spots by ensuring that their economic development projects have a robust environmental compassion built in.

So, given these circumstances, it is natural to expect the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to get into an overdrive and release a slew of measures that would herald the safeguarding of the environment in the current, COVID-19-stressed conditions. But this is not the case. Curiously, the Minister in charge for MoEFCC also happens to be in charge of the portfolio for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises. In any other environmentally-conscious nation, this would have been perceived as a conflict of interest. But not in India. This anomaly notwithstanding, the MoEFCC recently went on a project clearance spree in 11 States.

These rapid clearances of projects in order to promote industries are proving to be a death knell for the environment. The MoEFCC, for instance, cleared a railway line in Telangana that cuts through 168 hectares of a prime forest, which also happens to be a tiger reserve. In this case, the Government could have considered an elevated track to spare the trees but was obviously not done. The Etah Hydroproject in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley is yet another example of sheer indifference towards the environment. The project entails the diversion of 1,150 hectares of forest land that will cause the felling of a whopping 2,70,000 trees.

This kind of ruin of nature cannot be justified at all, no matter what the gains are. Numerous representations from environmental activists and scientists have been able to stall the final approval of the project, but it is surprising how the project was conceived in the first place, given the scale of environmental destruction. In the midst of baffling examples such as these is yet another instance of environmental neglect. This is the proposed hydel project in Uttarakhand that involves compromising 768 acres of forest land.

The Government must realise that the environment cannot be pawned off for industrial gains. Repeated announcements of projects that threaten the environment will keep inviting representations from the environmental and scientific community to roll back these projects. Parallely, the nation will slowly but surely understand the apathy of the Government towards the environment and this will be the end of the trust people have in the Government. This kind of knee-jerk conception and approval of projects with utter disregard for the environment is detrimental to national interests and cannot be allowed to proliferate.

As a first step to stem this, the Government must ensure that the environment and heavy industries ministries are not represented by the same person. This will ensure that there is no conflict of interest and decisions taken in one Ministry will not result in collateral damage for the other. The current trying times are a great opportunity for India to reaffirm its commitment towards the environment and this must be shown through actions rather than words. This can be done only by effectively balancing the ecology with the economy.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

**POINTCOUNTERPOINT**

TILL NOW WE HAVE REMAINED UNDER THE BELIEF THAT RAM, THE MAN SITA MARRIED, WAS AN INDIAN... HE WAS NOT, HE WAS A NEPALI.  
 —NEPAL PRIME MINISTER  
 KP SHARMA OLI



EVEN IN INDIA LEFT PARTIES PLAYED WITH PEOPLE'S FAITH. THE COMMUNISTS IN NEPAL WILL BE REJECTED BY THE MASSES LIKE THEY HAVE BEEN HERE.  
 —BJP NATIONAL SPOKESPERSON  
 BIZAY SONKAR SHASTRI

# Beware of an injured Xi

If Jinping is able to overcome the domestic challenges he faces now, he would emerge a dictator. India, therefore, has to be prepared for a probability of re-occurrence of aggression on its borders



ANIL GUPTA

President Xi Jinping's ambition to make China an undisputed global superpower has changed the entire geo-political dynamics. The phenomenal rise of Xi has made China more aggressive. He has emerged as the most powerful leader of China after Mao Zedong. Born in a politically-influential family in 1953, he witnessed the Mao era closely and saw the ruthless face of Zedong when his father was purged and jailed during the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. Though his father was rehabilitated after the death of Mao, these events left a long-lasting impression on his mind which got further hardened during Xi's initial struggle within the Communist Party which he joined in 1974. He spent decades working his way up the party and Government ranks but his consolidation of power since becoming General Secretary, the head of the party, in 2012 has been unprecedented. In 2013, he also became the President of the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC), thus assuming charge of all the three most-coveted posts in the party and Government. He represents the new generation of Chinese because he is the first General Secretary born after the establishment of the PRC. Xi today is the President of PRC without term limits. Incidentally, he now has 12 posts that give him control and oversight over most areas of Government, the economy and military. Xi, therefore, is the most authoritarian world leader today, who is ruthless with any form of opposition to him at home and visualises himself as a potential supreme leader of the world.

It goes to the credit of Xi that during his tenure China has grown economically and militarily. China surpassed Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world and global manufacturing hub. He effected a large-scale purge in the military brass to end corruption in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This was followed by structural reforms to make PLA a lean and modern fighting force with emphasis on mastering the three domains of cyber world, space and information.

Xi proved to be a leader who can rise to challenges. But his bitter experience during the Cultural Revolution has made him an authoritarian man who does not trust anyone. He abhors challenge to his authority or to his "Chinese Dream" of national rejuvenation. Thus, he has crushed dissent in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet. In pursuance of his Middle Kingdom ambition, he has refused to accept international laws and treaties and persisted with expansionist designs in the South China Sea (SCS), East China Sea (ECS) while continuing with salami-slicing in the neighbourhood to include India, Nepal and Bhutan. His ambition to be a global leader has led to a no holds barred conflict with the sole superpower, the US. Xi is convinced that the main rival of China is the US and all others are mere pushovers and that has determined his behaviour and actions as far as the disputes in the SCS, the Sino-India border and disputes with South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are concerned.

All was going well for Xi till the outbreak of the Coronavirus. The ongoing trade war with the US was also tilted in his favour till the pandemic spread across the world with its roots in China. All of a sudden Xi was being attacked globally as well as domestically. The strong Chinese economy began to show signs of crumbling. The demand for closing factories in China and relocating them grew louder by the day. India was being considered a probable alternative. The US seized the opportunity and led the global offensive against China, accusing Xi of deliberately delaying the information regarding the outbreak. The global economy was in the doldrums with nations resorting to prolonged lockdowns and most countries blaming China for the contagion.

Xi's dream of the 21st century belonging to China began to crumble gradually. His plan of end-

**ECONOMIC STRANGULATION OF CHINA SHOULD CONTINUE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENCOURAGING FRIENDLY NATIONS TO DO THE SAME. ON THE DIPLOMATIC FRONT, APART FROM CONSOLIDATING CHINESE ISOLATION DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, INDIA SHOULD ALSO CONSIDER DENOUNCING BEIJING'S ONE NATION POLICY AND LEVERAGE NUMEROUS FAULT LINES IN CHINA BY EXPOSING ITS HIGH-HANDEDNESS IN GRABBING THE TERRITORIES IN ITS PERIPHERY. FREE TIBET MOVEMENT SHOULD BE GIVEN AN IMPETUS IN INDIA. THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENTS IN HONG KONG AND TAIWAN NEED STRONGER INDIAN SUPPORT**



ing poverty in China by 2020 suffered the biggest setback and it emerged as his toughest year. Xi's unchallenged status at home came under threat and in order to divert attention he began to pursue an aggressive policy to portray Chinese supremacy. He let loose his "wolf warrior" diplomats to counter the global diplomatic and political onslaught. Simultaneously, he began to flex muscles in the SCS and ECS. He started the process of gaining complete control over Hong Kong, denouncing the "One Nation Two Systems" promise. The regime change in Taiwan, too, annoyed Xi. He began to behave like a medieval king eager to extend frontiers and win glory.

Challenging India in the trans-Himalayan icy battlefield was meant to teach New Delhi a lesson for challenging the Chinese ownership of Aksai Chin. China was convinced that New Delhi would not challenge its occupation of Aksai Chin till the Indian Home Minister roared in the Parliament that his reference to Ladakh included Gilgit-Baltistan and Aksai Chin. It rattled Beijing more than Pakistan because it could afford to lose neither of the two.

Despite China's denial, the world community noted with concern the sinking of Vietnamese fishing boats in the SCS, the unilateral decision to name new Chinese districts in the area, sanctions against Australia, browbeating of Japan in the ECS, unilateral actions in Hong Kong, Ladakh incursions, manipulation of Nepal, claims on the Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary in Eastern Bhutan and on the Siberian town of Vladivostok.

Buoied by the passive response of other nations, Xi ventured to provoke India at Galwan Heights expecting meek submission. But the brawl at those icy heights on the night of June 15 not only took the Chinese by surprise but also put the fear of God in its soldiers about the fighting prowess of Indian soldiers. The Chinese plan to teach India a lesson not only backfired but the Galwan face-off proved to be a turning point, which may well turn out to be a reason for renewed vengeance. The global community acknowledged India standing up to the bully and paying him back in the same coin. India followed it up with an econom-

ic offensive as well. The changed scenario had a ripple effect. China's victims realised that the dragon could be held off. ASEAN nations for the first time spoke in unison, asking China to follow international laws on maritime boundaries. Japan reacted offensively by deploying near the disputed islands, Bhutan vehemently asserted its claim over Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary and refused to be cowed down, Russia agreed to fast track arms supplies to India, the US moved three aircraft carriers in the SCS, Australia refused to take Chinese students and broke trade ties with it.

The Chinese economy, too, suffered a big blow, putting greater pressure on Xi. Following the Indian ban of 59 Chinese apps, cancellation of contracts signed with Chinese companies in the telecom, construction and MSME sectors and the growing demand for boycott of Chinese goods, other nations, too, began to ban Chinese technology firms. Chinese giant Huawei has been the biggest sufferer. Similarly, the dream project of Xi, the Belt Road Initiative (BRI), has come under severe strain with many countries either abandoning various projects or demanding a review of their loan agreements.

The list of Xi's woes is growing by the day. China had become an economic superpower by the time Xi took power but his critics now blame him for leading the country to ruin due to his aggressive, expansionist policies and ambition.

After aggressive posturing following the Galwan face-off, China has now agreed to a negotiated settlement on the border so that he doesn't lose the war against the international community as well. India and China agreed that differences should not become disputes after a telephonic discussion between the Indian National Security Advisor and the Chinese Foreign Minister.

Though China has agreed to a phased disengagement and de-escalation, there is a big trust deficit between the two armies now. The overwhelming opinion in India is that disengagement is not enough in order to end tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). They advocate no de-escalation until full return of status quo. While Xi would fight his own battle for survival, we have to ensure that it is not yet another

Chinese trap.

History tells us that China is untrustworthy. Be it 1962, Sumdromg Chu, Depsang or Doklam. This time, too, we are not yet sure if the Chinese move is a tactical retreat in order to achieve its bigger strategic aim. Hence, India should not be lulled into complacency. History tells us that our political leadership has failed to understand the insurance provided to a nation's growth economically and diplomatically by strong security forces. Hence, payment of annual premium to ensure that the insurance does not lapse is mandatory. The nation has to be prepared to ward off physical threats to its borders and also those in the cyber world, space and the information highways.

India must not let its guard down on the borders along the Line of Control (LoC) and the LAC. At the same time all actions taken to supplement the armoury of the three services should not be halted but put on fast track to ensure that if the dragon dares to threaten us again, it is taught a lesson forever. If needed, we should be prepared to stay put even during the harsh winters, for which logistics and catering preparations have to begin forthwith.

Economic strangulation of China should continue while at the same time encouraging friendly nations to do the same. On the diplomatic front, apart from consolidating Chinese isolation due to the pandemic, India should also consider denouncing Beijing's One Nation Policy and leverage numerous fault lines in China by exposing its high-handedness in grabbing the territories in its periphery. Free Tibet movement should be given an impetus in India. The democratic movements in Hong Kong and Taiwan need stronger Indian support.

If Xi is able to overcome the domestic challenges he faces now, he would emerge a dictator. India, therefore, has to be prepared for a probability of reoccurrence of Chinese aggression on its borders. We have to emerge as China's equal. Beijing will try its level best to lull us into complacency, it would be suicidal if we fall into China's trap again.

(The author is a Jammu-based veteran, political commentator and security analyst)

# Minimally invasive surgery best in Corona era

Such procedures improve short-term outcomes in heart patients and are associated with a faster recovery in comparison with the traditional approach



KM CHERIAN

The nation has been in lockdown mode for more than four months now and has only just started opening up. Hospitals, research and development (R&D) institutions are trying their best to bring out a vaccine for the Coronavirus. In fact, human trials for the vaccine have begun in India. We have seen many reports that have said that there has been a decline in the number of people opting for surgeries, especially low

and medium-risk patients. A lot of patients, who had surgeries scheduled, have postponed them and are avoiding hospital visits for routine checkups as they fear being exposed to the Coronavirus. There have been reports of people losing their lives due to a heart attack or stroke. Even though they had prior symptoms of heart disease, they did not venture out due to the fear of COVID-19.

It is extremely important for cardiac patients and people with heart conditions to take care of their health in such testing times, especially as there are a lot of restrictions on access to various facilities.

Exercising, maintaining a proper diet and taking the prescribed cardiac medication or anti-diabetes medicine are all very important for

patients, since these are the co-morbid conditions which make the COVID-19 infection serious as the cardiac/diabetes patients are already immuno-compromised. With that said, it is also impossible for high-risk patients with severe heart conditions to not opt for surgeries. When it is absolutely essential depending on the conditions, patients might have to undergo surgery.

The need to safeguard themselves and their patients has prompted most surgeons to develop their own protocols to tide over the pandemic situation. The decision for surgical care should be based on the doctor's own surgical and clinical judgment and assessment of resource availability. Patients should get the surgical care based on practice of evidence-based medicine. A non-operative line of

management is advised when it is clinically appropriate for patients, specially looking at risk and benefits of surgery.

Heart surgeries are arduous and long procedures that take a toll on patients physically and mentally. Open-heart surgeries are back-breaking expensive and procedures last for days. Since the surgical team has to be careful not to get infection, all the precautionary measures that are being practised are also the most rigorous for the surgical team. Apart from that, in the COVID-19 era, there is a dire need for minimum contact which is only possible through minimally-invasive surgical techniques.

Minimally invasive surgery improves short-term outcomes in patients and it is associated with a faster recovery in comparison with the traditional

approach. If a patient needs valve replacement, then a trans catheter aortic valve replacement is an alternative, but the long-lasting results of these valves are still questionable. There is a certain amount of industry drive to make these procedures popular without really knowing the long-term results. I am sure that there are cardiologists who will object to this contention. But this remark is only because of the fact that I am one of the few surgeons in this country who has been replacing valves (single, double or triple since 1975) and hence I have experienced the long-term results of conventional valve replacement.

Currently these valves are highly expensive in India, going up to ₹22.5 lakh, owing to which this technology is not available for common Indians. Even the cost of convention-

al valve replacement, that is between ₹2.5 to ₹3 lakh, is not affordable for the common man. The solution for this dilemma is indigenisation. Some hospitals in the country have been in the forefront of bringing about indigenisation in Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) along with the National Aeronautical Laboratory and Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, using Nitinol stents. The valve material used is bovine jugular veins which is after all a waste. This could be a classic example of "waste to wealth, but unfortunately, there has been no support from any Central Government agencies such as the Department of Biotechnology, the Department of Science and Technology or any regulatory bodies.

Children with congenital heart

disease or structural heart disease undergo multiple heart surgeries in their lifetime. Of course, closing a hole in the heart through the Transcatheter route is available. Most of these patients who have these "corrections" can go home within 24 hours.

This reduces their risk of catching infection, which is vital in the COVID-19 era. This also means more beds will be available for elective patients who need such therapy, which does not need long-term hospitalisation. It is not the technology alone but the logistics, the patient's comfort and affordability of the procedure that are also important.

(The writer is a Padma Sri awardee and cardiothoracic surgeon credited with India's first bypass. He is Chairman and CEO of Frontier Lifeline Hospital)

CAPSULE



**Bandhan profit falls 31.6 pc to Rs 550cr in April-June**

**KOLKATA:** Bandhan Bank on Wednesday reported a 31.6-per cent on-year decline in net profit to Rs 550 crore during the April-June quarter. The lender's bottomline in the corresponding period a year ago was Rs 804 crore. A Bandhan Bank statement said it has taken accelerated additional provision on standard assets amounting to Rs 750 crore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Operating profit during the quarter grew by 16.8 per cent to Rs 1,584 crore as against Rs 1,356 crore a year ago. The lender's deposits grew by 6.18 per cent quarter-on-quarter, the statement added.

**Rupee jumps 27 paise to close at 75.15 against USD**

**MUMBAI:** The rupee appreciated 27 paise to settle at 75.15 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday tracking weakness in the greenback and gains in the domestic equity market. Forex traders said investor sentiment strengthened after the human clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccine were initiated in India. The rupee opened at 75.35 against the US dollar, then gained further ground and finally settled at 75.15 against the US dollar, up 27 paise over its previous close. It had settled at 75.42 against the greenback on Tuesday. During the four-hour trading session, the domestic unit witnessed an intra-day high of 75.14 and a low of 75.36 against the US dollar.

**Arisaig Fund trims stake in Future Consumer by 2 pc**

**NEW DELHI:** Arisaig India Fund Ltd has cut its stake in Future Consumer by 2 per cent by selling 3.84 crore shares in the open market. According to a BSE filing, Arisaig India Fund offloaded 3.84 crore shares, or 2 per cent stake, on July 13. Based on the weighted average price of the stock at Rs 11.63 per scrip on July 13, Arisaig India Fund's stake sale would be for an estimated value of Rs 44.65 crore. Arisaig India Fund decreased its shareholding in the company from 5.16 per cent to 3.16 per cent. Last week, Future Consumer Ltd reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 175.46 crore for the quarter ended March 2020.



**Titan expects businesses to be hit 'very substantially'**

**NEW DELHI:** Watch and jewellery maker Titan Company is expecting its businesses to be hit 'very substantially' in the current financial year due to disruptions caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The company said its focus during 2020-21 will be on cash flows and optimising spends to ensure liquidity. The lockdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to hit the company's businesses very substantially in the financial year 2020-21.

**'Deal with Saudi Aramco not progressed as per timelines'**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Asia's richest man Mukesh Ambani on Wednesday said his group's planned stake sale in oil-to-chemical business to Saudi Aramco for an asking of USD 15 billion has not progressed as per original timelines due to COVID-19.

"We value our two-decade relationship with Aramco and are committed to a long-term partnership," Ambani said at Reliance Industries' annual general meeting. He, however, did not say if the deal was on track or give a new timeline for its completion.

"Deal with Saudi Aramco hasn't progressed per original timeline due to unforeseen situation in the energy market and COVID-19 situation," he said.

Reliance will be spinning off the oil-to-chemical (O2C) business into a separate subsidiary "to facilitate multiple partnership opportunities," he said.

"We expect to complete this process by early 2021," he said.

Ambani in August last year had announced talks for sale of 20 per cent stake in the O2C business, which comprises of RIL's twin oil refineries at Jamnagar in Gujarat and petrochemical assets, to the world's largest oil exporter, Saudi Aramco.

"Reliance is working to complete the contours of a strategic partnership with Saudi Aramco," Ambani said.

The partnership with Aramco would give Jamnagar refineries "access to a wide portfolio of value-accretive crude grades and enhanced feedstock security for higher oil-to-chemicals conversion," he had said in the annual report. With a stake, Aramco would not just have a share in one of the world's best refineries and the largest integrated petrochemical complex but also access to one of the fastest-growing markets — a ready-made market for 5 lakh barrels per day of its Arabian crude and offering a potentially bigger downstream role in future.



**Jio developing homegrown 5G telecom solution**

**R**ichest Indian Mukesh Ambani on Wednesday announced his group's digital arm Jio developing a homegrown 5G telecom solution.

"Jio has designed and developed a complete 5G solution from scratch. It will be ready for trials as soon as 5G spectrum is available and can be ready for field deployment next year," Ambani said at Reliance Industries' annual general meeting.

Jio's global-scale 4G and fibre network is powered by several core software technologies and components. "It is this capability and know-how that positions Jio on the cutting edge of another exciting frontier — 5G," he said.

Jio Platforms, with over 20 startup partners, has built world-class capabilities in technologies such as 4G, 5G, Cloud computing, Devices and OS, Big Data, AI, AR/VR, Blockchain, he said.

"Using these technologies, we can create compelling solutions across multiple industry verticals like media, financial services, new commerce, education, healthcare, agri, smart cities & smart mobility," he said, adding Jio Platforms is conceived with vision of developing original, captive intellectual property, using which we can demonstrate transformative power of technology across multiple ecosystems — first in India, and then rest of world.

**JioMeet sees 5 million downloads**

**R**ichest Indian Mukesh Ambani on Wednesday said India's first cloud-based video conferencing app JioMeet has seen 5 million downloads within days of its launch.

Reliance Industries earlier this week launched JioMeet video conferencing app with unlimited free calling, which is being seen as rate war on rival Zoom. JioMeet video conferencing app is available across



Android, iOS, Windows, macOS and web.

Addressing the company's 43rd annual general meeting, Ambani said JioMeet has seen 5 million downloads by users

**'Group received strong interest from strategic investors'**

**R**ichest Indian Mukesh Ambani on Wednesday said his group's retail venture has received strong interest from strategic and financial investors.

"We will induct global partners and investors in Reliance Retail in the next few quarters," he said at Reliance Industries annual general meeting.

Reliance Retail has already started pilots of its e-commerce venture. "We have successfully piloted JioMart grocery model with kirana partners. The beta version of JioMart grocery platform is being piloted in 200 cities. Daily orders have crossed 2.5 lakh, and the number is growing each day," Ambani said.

Connecting farmers and delivering their fresh produce directly to homes is a key part of the firm's grocery strategy. "This will significantly improve farmer income and incentivise higher productivity," he said.

More than two-thirds of Reliance Retail's nearly 12,000 stores are operated in Tier II, Tier III and Tier IV towns. "It sources over 80 per cent of fruits and vegetable directly from farmers," he said.

**IDBI Bank plans to raise Rs 11,000 cr equity capital**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private lender IDBI Bank will raise up to Rs 11,000 crore equity capital through various modes, including a qualified institutional placement (QIP), in about a year to strengthen its capital base, the bank said on Wednesday.

The lender will seek approval from shareholders for the proposal in the upcoming annual general meeting (AGM) on August 17, 2020, the bank said in a regulatory filing.

IDBI Bank is required to maintain its Tier I capital in accordance with the relevant regulatory guidelines issued from time to time. In view of ongoing implementation of Basel III norms and consequential capital charge, there is a need to increase the capital to further strengthen the Capital Adequacy Ratio, it said.

IDBI Bank said it will seek consent of shareholders in the AGM to offer, issue and allot such number of equity shares of the face value of Rs 10 each and aggregating up to Rs 11,000 crore, in one or more tranches.

**IDBI strives to come out of RBI PCA framework: MD**

**I**DBI Bank would endeavour to come out of the RBI's restrictive Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework as early as possible during the current fiscal by improving its financial health, a top bank official has said.

The Reserve Bank in May 2017 had placed the IDBI Bank in the PCA framework because of the deterioration in the financial health of the bank.

The PCA framework imposes various operational restrictions on a bank to

ensure that the lender remains solvent.

One of the thrust areas of the bank's strategic endeavours has been to expeditiously exit the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework, imposed on it since May 2017, by dint of its performance, IDBI Bank managing director and CEO Rakesh Sharma said in a letter to the shareholders.

"Your Bank is cautiously optimistic of an early exit from the PCA framework in FY2020-21 as it builds on the gains made in FY2019-20 so that your Bank can optimise stakeholder value by undertaking the entire gamut of banking activities," he said in the letter, as per the bank's annual report.



The issuance of shares will be including but not limited to one or more of the existing shareholders/members, employees of the bank, QIBs by way of public issue, rights

issue or private placement, it added.

The AGM will be held through audio/video means in view of the pandemic, the bank said.

**Honda drives in all new City in India priced at Rs 10.9 lakh**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese auto major Honda on Wednesday launched the new version of its mid-sized sedan City in India priced between Rs 10.9 lakh-Rs 14.65 lakh (ex-showroom).

The fifth generation version of the popular model, which in its current form is longer and wider than the fourth generation City, comes with BS-VI compliant petrol and diesel powertrains.

The 1.5-litre petrol versions with manual transmission are priced at Rs 10.9 lakh, Rs 12.26 lakh, and Rs 13.15 lakh, while the 1.5-litre diesel trims are tagged at Rs 12.40, Rs 13.76 lakh, and Rs 14.65 lakh. The 1.5-litre petrol automatic trims on the other hand are priced at Rs 12.20 lakh, Rs 13.56 lakh and, Rs 14.45 lakh.

The model, which will compete with the likes of Hyundai Verna, Maruti Suzuki Ciaz and Skoda Rapid, now features



smart devices ecosystem including Alexa remote capability and 32 connected features as standard feature across all variants with a five-year free subscription.

The company said it will also continue to sell the BS-VI compliant fourth generation City along with the new version. "City is synonymous with Honda brand in India. It is the most important model for us," Honda Motor India Ltd (HCIL) President and CEO Gaku Nakanishi said.

**NID students can apply for work permits in Germany now**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Students of National Institutes of Design (NID) will be able to apply easily for work permits in Germany now as its centres have been included in the European country's Anabin database, the commerce and industry ministry said on Wednesday.

It said Germany has opened a Central Office for Foreign Education. As part of their service, they maintain a database called Anabin that lists foreign degrees and higher education qualifications in relation to German diplomas and degrees.

Recognition of foreign university-level qualifications in Germany is often an essential prerequisite for securing a German Work Visa, Job Seekers Visa or German Blue Card. It said often the success of visa application is dependent on the proof that the university-level qualification acquired outside Germany is considered on par with equivalent German qualification.

**Google picks 7.7 pc stake in Jio for Rs 33,373 cr**

**G**oogle has agreed to invest Rs 33,373 crore to buy a 7.7 per cent stake in Reliance Industries' technology venture, adding to a slew of investments since April that has crossed Rs 1.52 lakh crore.

California-based Alphabet Inc joins Facebook Inc, which opened the investment cycle in Jio Platforms by picking 9.99

per cent stake for Rs 43,573.62 crore, as well as chipmaker Intel Corp and Qualcomm Inc.

"We are delighted to welcome Google as a strategic investor in Jio Platforms. We have signed a binding partnership

and an investment agreement under which Google will invest Rs 33,373 crores for a 7.7 per cent stake in Jio Platforms," RIL Chairman Mukesh Ambani said at the company's annual general meeting. With Google coming on



board, Reliance has completed its target of capital raising for Jio Platforms, he said.

With this deal, Reliance has sold 32.84 per cent stake in Jio Platforms Ltd - the unit that houses India's youngest but largest telecom firm Jio Infocomm and apps. In total, Jio has raised Rs 1,52,055.45 crore.

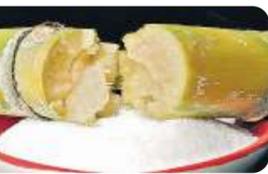
**GoM recommends hike in sugar MSP to Rs 33 per kg**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A group of ministers, headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, on Wednesday recommended increasing the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar by Rs 2 to 33 per kg to ensure mills clear the pending cane arrears of around Rs 20,000 crore at the earliest, sources said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal were present in the meeting.

Sources said the GoM took stock of the pending sugarcane dues to be paid by sugar mills



which stand at around Rs 20,000 crore so far in the current 2019-20 season (October-September) and ways to ensure mills clear this at the earliest.

One of the proposals discussed was to increase the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar.

The GoM directed the Food Ministry to move a Cabinet note with a proposal to hike the MSP of sugar as recommended by the Niti Aayog, the

sources said. The government will consider other options if an increase in MSP of sugar does not help in reducing substantial cane arrears to farmers, the sources added.

A task force constituted by Niti Aayog on sugarcane and sugar industry had also recommended a one-time increase of Rs 2 per kg in MSP of sugar.

Last year, the government had increased the price at which mills sell sugar to bulk buyers by Rs 2/kg to Rs 31/kg.

The minimum selling price of sugar is fixed taking into account the components of FRP and minimum conversion cost of the most efficient mills.

**ADB appoints EC Ashok Lavasa as new vice-president**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Multilateral funding agency Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday said it has appointed Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa as vice-president for private sector operations and public-private partnerships.

"He is currently one of the Election Commissioners of India and previously served in a range of senior posts including as Union Finance Secretary of India; Union Secretary for the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change; and Union Secretary for the Ministry of Civil Aviation," ADB said in a statement. Lavasa will succeed Diwakar Gupta, whose term will end on August 31.

**HyperVerge enters V-KYC with SBI Card as marquee customer**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bangalore, July 15, 2020: HyperVerge announces the adoption of its AI assisted Video-KYC system by the country's only listed pure play credit card company - SBI Card. Customers can apply for an SBI Credit Card from their homes using their mobile phone or laptop and complete the KYC process via an end to end encrypted secure video call.

Earlier this year, RBI permitted regulated entities (RE) - banks, credit card companies, NBFCs and wallets - to use Video-KYC as a replacement for in-person-verification. The per-KYC cost comes down for the financial institution, and the experience for the customer is much better than earlier.



Video KYC process, the SBI Card agent captures the customer's location, asks for a random verification code and takes a picture of the customer's PAN and customer's face. The process is so simple that it can take as less as 2 minutes and an agent can complete upto 200 video KYCs.

HyperVerge AI, which is the X-factor in HyperVerge Video KYC solution, does many intelligent steps in real-time to assist the company officer performing the Video KYC. It digitises the data on the PAN card on the go and verifies it with PAN data from NSDL.

Then, it matches the face of the customer to the face on the PAN Card and Aadhaar provided by the customer to the system.

**Top CEOs discuss ways to boost investment opportunities**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top CEOs of India and the US on Tuesday discussed ways to boost bilateral investments in sectors such as healthcare, aerospace, defence, infrastructure, ICT, and financial services, according to a commerce ministry statement.

The discussion took place during the India-US CEO Forum through a telephonic conference. The forum was co-chaired by Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran and James Taiclet, President and Chief Executive Officer,



Lockheed Martin.

Chandrasekaran highlighted the need for a 'free trade agreement' as a natural progression

**Last month, US Prez issued a proclamation to block the entry of foreign workers for the rest of the year on H-1B visas for skilled employees, and L visas for managers and specialized workers being transferred within a company**

and urged the US government to recognize the contribution of India's human capital to the US economy, and the need for unhindered cross-border mobility of such talent, it said on Wednesday.

Last month, US President Donald Trump issued a presi-

dential proclamation to block the entry of foreign workers for the rest of the year on H-1B visas for skilled employees, and L visas for managers and specialized workers being transferred within a company.

On the other hand, Taiclet highlighted the areas of unre-

stricted foreign ownership in certain sectors, policy stability, predictability, timely dispute resolution, protection of intellectual property and continuing investment in infrastructure as some of the key focus areas. He also hoped that the cooperation between the two countries during the COVID-19 pandemic would continue in areas of building infrastructure, increasing bilateral investments, and generating jobs.

This is the fifth time the forum has been convened since its reconstitution in December 2014 by India and the US.

**JLR unveils MY 21 Range Rover, Sport models**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Tata Motors' luxury car subsidiary Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) on Wednesday said it has unveiled its MY (Model Year) 21 Range Rover and Range Rover Sport models, including cars with new mild hybrid electric vehicle engine.

The 2021 MY offering also includes 50th-anniversary special editions and India-specific cars. For India, MY 21 Range Rover will be available

in standard wheel base (SWB), long wheel base (LWB) and special editions; and will be offered with a choice of either a 3-litre MHEV petrol or 3-litre new mild hybrid electric vehicle (MHEV) diesel engine, the company said in a release.

The MY 21 Range Rover Sport will be available in six derivatives and will be offered with 2-litre petrol and 5-litre supercharged petrol as well as 3-litre diesel engine options, it said.

## MUSICIANS TOUCHING LIVES BEYOND SOUL

While we're at a stage in the history where mankind has realised it's only them that's there for each other, we have people from the Music community joining hands to promote donations, raise awareness on various issues, and more. *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA talks to people from the community to learn more

With uncertainty wreaking havoc in the lives of several people across the globe, medical and monetary needs have become tough to meet. Several organisations, people, and volunteers have come forward to commit themselves to whoever they can be of any help. One such group of people happen to be musicians and singers who have come together to hold online concerts to raise awareness about organ donations. It takes lives to save lives, they say. Timely help with organ donations can save millions of lives every year. Brought together on one platform by MOHAN Foundation (Multi Organ Harvesting Aid Network), talented and popular singers and musicians will be lending their hands towards the cause of creating awareness and mobilising aid for organ donation. MOHAN works to create an ecosystem to enable an increase in organ donations. 'Mission to Reach Millions,' their new initiative, aims to create awareness about the importance of donating organs by reach millions of people with the cause of organ donation.



held on July 18 by Aishwarya Srinivas, where the songstress will deliver a tribute to the doyennes of Carnatic music — M.S.Subbulakshmi, DK Pattammal, and ML Vasanthakumari.

"The concerts aim to bring joy into people's lives in these difficult COVID times while encouraging them to think about organ donation. This resonates with our cause as every organ donation brings joy into the lives of those awaiting life-saving transplants and their families. Organ Donors and their families turn their sorrow into someone's joy and their

"Organ donation truly is a celebration of life — a celebration for those who are waiting for a second chance at life through transplantation but most importantly, a celebration of the spirit of giving. Our campaign is an initiative to celebrate this very spirit of giving," says Lalitha Raghuram, Country Director, MOHAN Foundation.

They've already hosted three online concerts — 'Singing for Hope' with S. Aishwarya and S. Soundarya, 'Singing for Joy' with popular yesteryear playback singer Usha Uthup, and 'Baithak to Bollywood' by the faculty of Shankar Mahadevan Academy (SMA) in the months of May and June. Their next live concert 'Singing for Positivity', will be

despair into someone's hope by giving the greatest gift of all — the gift of life," Lalitha Raghuram tells us. Apart from online concerts, MOHAN Foundation is also crowdfunding using an online

campaign with Milaap.org to raise funds and awareness regarding organ donation, where they have already mobilised Rs 7.8 lakh with the help of over 400 donors from around the world.

While MOHAN aims at raising awareness about organ donations, another group of musicians from the city came together to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who have been struggling to make ends meet due to the COVID crisis. "Music doesn't pay much, and conditions are worse for budding musicians who lost out on gigs due to the lockdown. That's when my friend-bandmate Pranati Khanna, and I decided to help such artistes who found it hard to pay for their essential needs, rent, bills, etc.," informs Edward Jonathan, guitarist with the Hyderabad-based rock band Spell Check.

The duo sent out messages to other musicians across the country, their friends and family via social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and ended up helping musicians in not just Hyderabad but also Bangalore, Chennai, and Kolkata.

"We told people if they're a budding musician who needs help, are living alone and have no source of income or know of anybody who is, they could contact us. We then put out information about these people and asked for donations and raised funds. Each of them needed help for over the months of May and June, of over 6,000-8,000 rupees, to cover expenses. After a while, most beneficiaries found a way to sustain themselves after June, as situations have improved since May," explains Jonathan.

Music sure does more than just bring joy to the soul as these musicians have proved to be able to go beyond touching souls by touched lives too.



EDWARD JONATHAN, GUITARIST

Music doesn't pay much, and conditions are worse for budding musicians who lost out on gigs due to the lockdown. That's when my friend-bandmate Pranati Khanna, and I decided to help such artistes who found it hard to pay for their essential needs, rent, bills, etc.,



## All you need to know about plasma therapy

The Coronavirus is rapidly spreading across the globe and researchers and scientists are looking for more and more ways to fight the pandemic. Earlier vaccine for COVID-19 seemed like the only escape. Doctors have now explored something called "plasma therapy" as a preventive measure and deemed it helpful. So COVID-19 patients can now donate their plasma 14 days after their recovery that has the potential to save another life. Wondering what it is and how it works? Here's Dr. Bhaskar Rao from the Telangana Super Speciality Hospitals (TSHA) speaking to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL on various questions related to plasma donation and its benefits

**R**ecovery in this therapy is more rapid than any drug or ventilator. I would request patients who've conquered COVID-19 to come forward and donate their plasmas for the needy. Since vital drugs like Remdesivir and Tocilizum aren't available in the market, this therapy, if given in time, brings effective results, informs Dr Bhaskar Rao, TSHA.

### SO WHAT IS PLASMA THERAPY?

The therapy aims at using antibodies from the blood of a recovered COVID-19 patient to treat those critically infected by the virus. Plasma is a blood component that contains virus-fighting antibodies. It is like blood donation but the same plasma gets separated from the blood and the remaining blood will be transferred back to your body resulting in zero blood loss. The procedure is completely harmless and the donor does not experience any pain. A newly explored therapy will not cost you more than 20,000rs in comparison to COVID medicines that cost one approximately Rs 2 lakh.

### WHEN WAS PLASMA THERAPY FIRST INDUCED?

Dr Sarath Chandra Mouli, Rheumatologist from KIMS states that this therapy has been used since the 1800s. The first trial was done in 1892 for treating Diphtheria. In the 1920s, it



was used to treat Scarlet fever. During the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918, plasma donation was used as a potential therapy with mixed results.

### WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF PLASMA DONATION?

It contributes to saving the lives of those depending on life-saving therapies derived from human plasma to treat the virus. It's a new and an experimental therapy but it's proving to be a powerful weapon in preventing the virus' attack. When a patient recovers from the coronavirus infection, antibodies help another patient fight the Corona infection when infused into their body. Plasma can be donated only by a patient who has recovered from COVID-19. For patients whose swab test for COVID-19 is not

done, the history of at least mild symptoms and a history of contact with swab positive cases is important. Before accepting a person for plasma donation, the hospital checks the fitness and suitability of every prospective donor.

### WHAT'S THE EFFECTIVE RATE OF THIS THERAPY?

The efficiency of plasma therapy is that the antibodies from convalescent plasma might suppress viremia. Patients treated with plasma have a shorter hospital stay and lower mortality than those who were not treated with convalescent plasma. "As per IMCR guidelines, we have to use corticosteroids, anticytokine, and convalescent plasma to avoid later damages to the body if any," tells Dr Sarath of TSHA tells us.

### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CONVALESCENT PLASMA THERAPY?

Uses your own blood, works with natural healing, and no required downtime.

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO DONATE PLASMA?

People who have fully recovered from COVID-19 for at least two weeks are encouraged to consider donating plasma. Individuals must have had a prior diagnosis of COVID-19 documented by a laboratory test and meet other donor criteria.

### HOW CAN I DONATE PLASMA?

Paramedics are sent home to test whether you are an eligible donor or not. A technician will prepare your arm with antiseptic, insert the needle, and begin the donation process. Blood

will be drawn, the plasma will be separated from your blood, and red blood cells will be returned to your body through a process called plasmapheresis. Your first donation will take approximately 2 hours.

### HOW TERRIBLE CAN THE CORONAVIRUS GET?

Coronavirus cases in India appear to be low now but India's population density increases the risk of local transmission. Selective testing and reports of patients escaping medical facilities are causes for concern. The Telangana government is taking appropriate steps to encourage social distancing by shutting down schools, theatres, and by preventing mass gatherings. The GHMC recently distributed home isolation kits to people who are in the home-quarantine process. Nearly 180 patients from KIMS hospital

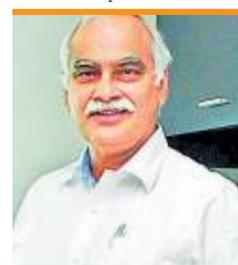
have recovered from home quarantine. Individuals above 60 years with comorbid conditions need to maintain extra precaution.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN PRECAUTIONS TO MAINTAIN TO KEEP THE VIRUS AT BAY?

Clean your hands often, maintain a safe distance, wear a mask, don't touch your face, and stay home if you feel unwell.

### SHOULD YOU BUY A COVID-9 HEALTH PLAN?

The rising cost of Coronavirus treatment in private hospitals is becoming exorbitant. IRDA released new guidelines that allow both life and health insurers to offer short-term special plans for COVID-19 coverage. This health plan is expected to provide you with much-needed support. These policies address the high cost of PPEs because PPE kits and other consumables are not covered under most health insurance products. These are short-term plans with terms ranging from three months to 11 months which will not offer renewability. There are two types of COVID-19 special plans, one is based on indemnity that pays the actual amount spent on the diagnosis of COVID-19 and subsequent requirement of hospitalisation.



DR BOLLINENI BHASKAR RAO (Managing Director of KIMS & president of TSHA)



DR SARATH CHANDRA MOULI, Rheumatologist, KIMS

# what's brewing?

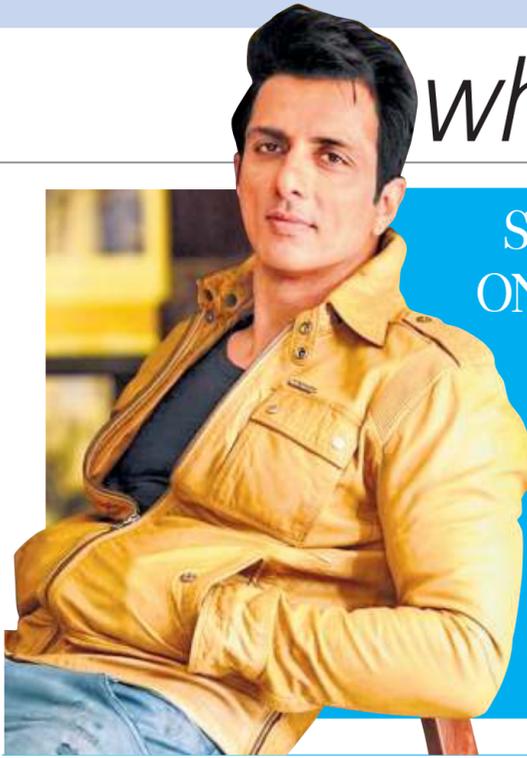
## Raveena shoots at home amid Covid-19 pandemic

Actress Raveena Tandon recently did some work from home. She shot for an advertisement at her residence here.

The shoot happened with all the necessary precautions and minimum crew members. There were just two crew members present at her house amid the ongoing Covid pandemic.

"The working scenario has changed but as we say, change is the only constant. With the new normal and limited crew members, it took us lesser time to complete. Only two members were allowed in the house, one being the cameraman and the other was the sound recordist. They wore PPE kits and all their equipment was disinfected before they entered the house. I followed the social distancing norm with the crew members and I feel after this shoot, I am ready for the new normal," Raveena shared her experience of shooting post lockdown.

On the big screen, Raveena will be soon seen in *KGF: Chapter 2*. The movie is a follow-up of the Kannada blockbuster *KGF: Chapter 1*, starring Kannada superstar Yash.



## SONU SOOD TO WRITE BOOK ON EXPERIENCE OF HELPING MIGRANT WORKERS

Actor Sonu Sood is now all set to come up with a book recounting his experience of helping migrant workers reach their hometowns during the Covid lockdown.

"The past three and a half months have been a kind of a life-changing experience for me, living with the migrants for 16 to 18 hours a day and sharing their pain. When I go to see them off as they begin their

journey back home, my heart is filled with joy and relief. Seeing the smiles on their faces, the tears of happiness in their eyes has been the most special experience of my life, and I pledged that I'll keep on working to send them back to their homes until the last migrant reaches his village, to his loved ones," Sonu declared.

"I believe I came to this city for this — it was my purpose. I want to thank god for making me a cata-

lyst in helping the migrants. While my heart beats in Mumbai, after this movement I feel a part of me lives in the villages of UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Uttarakhand and various other states, where I have now found new friends and made deep connections. I have decided to put these experiences, stories that are embedded in my soul forever, in a book," he said, about the book that is to be published by Penguin Random House India.

## 'Hanna' creator David Farr: Women bring difference to politics of the set

British writer-producer David Farr is narrating the story of *Hanna* through a female gaze, and says women leading the show behind the camera not just influences the narrative, but bring a big difference to the politics of the set as well.

The web series *Hanna* spins a new world from the story of Joe Wright's acclaimed 2011 film of the same name. Farr, who co-wrote the original feature film, is driving the narrative of the show.

"Although the film was about Hanna, and she was the central character, that (male perspective) was still a very strong thing. It does feel like a male view, and the film was directed by a man," Farr told IANS when asked about embracing the female grace.

He continued, "We have made a big choice all through the seasons to have female directors for large numbers of the episodes. It's definitely more than half and I think it makes a big difference. It makes a big difference to the politics of the set. And it was the single easiest and clearest decision we made. We didn't choose people just because

they were women but we made a conscious choice that they are really good, amazing talents. It does bring a different eye and a different voice. It just becomes a creative thing and fun. It's not that you don't have to be earnest about it, it's just that you release different voices. And that's my simple thing that you just got to release voices of diverse kinds at a high-level. Because if you do that, everything changes. And I think we are a part of that process, which I'm proud of."

Farr, also known for adding his creative vision to series *The Night Manager*, noted that working with talented women has been an eye-opening and learning experience for him.

"In the first season (of *Hanna*), I wrote almost every episode myself except one. In the second season, I gave over half the episodes to four other writers and three of them were women. And they sketched out the story about Hanna, and this extraordinary group of young women that she meets who are all destined to become assassins. What they brought was such a kind of more personal take on, you know, what it is to be a woman in the world," said the writer.

"I can't feel that. I've got two



daughters, who are now 20 and 18. So I guess I've experienced that secondhand through that. But they felt it in a visceral sense. The way choices are somehow made for you, the way conversations are somehow taken over by men put bluntly, or power struc-

tures. And so that was something that they brought to it in a way that was very specific. And I felt I learned a great deal from them as writers. So, they're bringing a lot to the table and I felt there was a lot to learn from them."

With a cast led by Esme,

Mireille Enos, and Joel Kinnaman, the first season of Amazon Prime Video show *Hanna* narrated the story of a young girl named Hanna, who has lived in a forest and has gained extraordinary physical abilities. It is about her experience with modern reality. It explored the dynamics of a father-daughter bond, emotional issues of a family while highlighting the dilemma of how teenagers grow in the modern world and do they ever fit in. The eight-episode second season follows the journey of Hanna as she evades the pursuit of a "sinister government agency," and embarks on a journey of self-discovery.

Reflecting back on the thought behind creating the show, Farr said: "The reason I first came up with *Hanna* idea was I had two daughters, who were very young when I was writing the film. And all they were allowed to watch was *Mary Poppins* and *Sound of Music*. And meanwhile, if you're a boy, you seem to be able to watch westerns and you could watch gangsters. You could see boys doing everything. And you could see it didn't seem it was available to young women.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



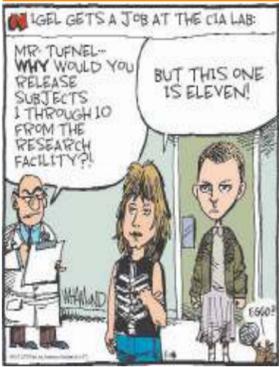
#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



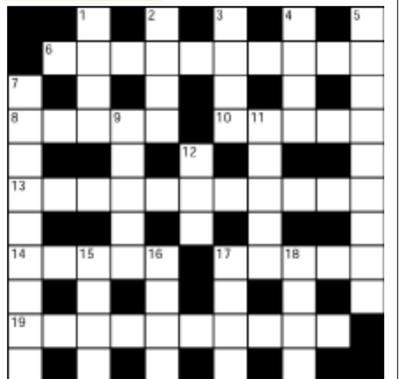
#### REALITY CHECK



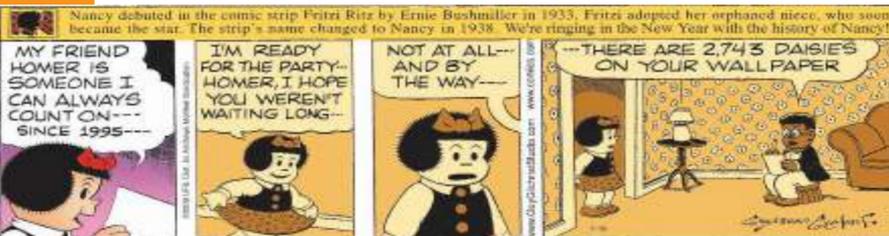
#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

- A tower that warns ships of danger
- Carrying a weapon
- A black and white animal that lives in China
- A green jumping insect
- A long gun held against the shoulder
- Start
- Below

#### DOWN

- Use this in a camera
- A garden building for tools
- Large boat
- Destroy with fire
- Mending
- Likely to kill or harm you

- A support for an artist's painting
- A type of fruit
- Bashful
- Lose colour
- Rest your glasses on these
- Meat from a cow
- A kind of door in a fence



Most Read NEWS

Railways creates post-Covid coach

The railways is preparing to provide better hygiene and sanitation standards in train coaches as it plans to install foot-operated soap dispensers, copper-coated handrails, fixtures with titanium dioxide (TiO2) coating that kills viruses and plasma air equipment inside air conditioning (AC) ducts to sterilise and make the interiors particulate matter-resistant. The national carrier's production unit, Rail Coach Factory in Kapurthala, has built the first prototype. The railways plans to retrofit all its existing coaches with these amenities, officials aware of the matter said. "Post Covid Coach will have hands-free amenities like foot operated water tap and soap dispenser, foot operated lavatory door (outside), foot operated flush valve, foot operated latches in lavatory door, outside washbasin with foot operated water tap and soap dispenser and forearm operated handle on compartment doors," the railway ministry said in its design note for the coaches. The first two coaches built at the unit have fixtures coated with TiO2 and the provision for plasma air equipment in AC ducts to sterilise interiors using ionised air. "This plasma air equipment will sterilise the air and surfaces inside the AC coach using ionised air to make the coach Covid-19 and particulate matter resistant."



Photographer saves man presumed dead

In a bizarre incident, a Kerala photographer ended up saving a man's life who was presumed to be dead, when he went to click the pictures of the corpse's body. The incident happened on Sunday when Tomy Thomas, an Ernakulam-based photographer, was called by cops to click images of a deceased person as part of preparing the inquest report. Also Read - Kashmir Photographer Masrat Zahra Wins IWFM's 'Courage In Photojournalism Award'. However, something strange happened when Tomy was about to take photographs. He heard a low sound emanating from the body and realised that he is not dead after all. Shocked and startled, he instantly informed the police who inspected the body. "Since the light in the room was not adequate to click photos, I leaned over the man to turn on the light switch which was on the wall right next to where he was lying. It was then that I heard a feeble voice," Tomy said. "A shiver ran down my spine as it hit me that the man was actually alive," he added. Once the cops found that the man is alive and breathing, he was sent to the intensive care unit of a hospital where he is currently receiving treatment. Notably, the man named Sivadasan had hit his head and fallen to the floor, following which onlookers found him in an unconscious state and thought that he is dead.



Odisha migrant worker turns rapper

Duleshwar Tandi aka Rapper Dule Rocker is making waves on social media with searing lockdown raps. The lyrics talk about the plight of migrant workers during Covid-19 crisis. The 27-year-old is a Dalit migrant worker from Odisha's Kalahandi district. He became a rapper to narrate the ordeal of migrants walking home during the lockdown. With no musical instrument, no background score or any decorated stage behind him, Duleshwar sings in his muddy hut and records it on his mobile phone. His rap songs are creating a huge impact. The lines depict the bitter truth of lockdown times. Duleshwar had shifted to Raipur in 2013 as a migrant worker after completing his BSc degree (Chemistry) from a government college in Kalahandi. He also worked as a waiter in Raipur Hotel. On some occasions, he washed plates and cleaned tables. Duleshwar returned to his village, Borda, on March 23, one day before the national lockdown. The next day, Odisha government announced lockdown across 70 per cent of the state. "As I saw news reports of the novel coronavirus cases growing in China, US and European countries, I sensed, situation may get worse here. After the state government announced the lockdown in major districts, I made up my mind and decided to come back," he told India Today over phone.



Andean condor can fly for 100 miles without flapping

A study sheds light on just how efficiently the world's largest soaring bird rides air currents to stay aloft for hours without flapping its wings. The Andean condor has a 3-metre (10ft) wingspan and weighs up to 15kg (33lbs), making it the world's heaviest soaring bird. For the first time, a team of scientists strapped recording equipment they called "daily diaries" to eight condors in Patagonia to record each wingbeat over more than 250 hours of flight time. Incredibly, the birds spent just 1% of their time aloft flapping their wings, mostly during takeoff. One bird flew more than five hours, covering more than 100 miles (160km), without flapping its wings. "Condors are expert pilots but we just had not expected they would be quite so expert," said Prof Emily Shepard, a study co-author and biologist at Swansea University in Wales. "The finding that they basically almost never beat their wings and just soar in mind-blowing," said David Lentink, an expert in bird flight at Stanford University, who was not involved in the research. To birds, the sky is not empty but a landscape of invisible features: wind gusts, currents of warm rising air and streams of air pushed upward by ground features such as mountains.



ADVANTAGE CHELSEA

Giroud helps Frank's side edge out Norwich & inch closer to top-four finish

AFP ■ LONDON

Frank Lampard admitted Chelsea are struggling with nerves as they chase a place in the Champions League next season after Olivier Giroud scored the only goal in a 1-0 win over already relegated Norwich at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday. Victory opens up a four-point lead for third-placed Chelsea over Leicester and Manchester United, who both have a game in hand later this week. But Lampard knows there is still plenty of work to do with a trip to champions Liverpool and sixth-placed Wolves visiting Stamford Bridge on the last day of the season to come in Chelsea's final two league games of the season.



Chelsea's Olivier Giroud celebrates after scoring goal



"The game was OK but results are critical. We could have won by more, we could have been a bit better with our quality" — FRANK LAMPARD

for next season with the signings of Timo Werner and Hakim Ziyech. But Giroud has more than justified the decision to also extend his contract by a year during football's shutdown as Chelsea's most potent striker since the restart. "He's a big character for us and scoring important goals," added Lampard. Giroud saw a number of chances come and go in the first half as an attempted lob over Tim Krul fell gently into the Dutch 'keeper's arms before he sliced well over the bar when unmarked inside the area. Christian Pulisic forced Krul into his best save of the first-half with a powerful drive that was just too close to the former Newcastle stopper. Just as Norwich looked set to hold out until the break Giroud shrugged off Timm Klose to connect with Pulisic's cross for his fifth goal in eight games. "I missed some I don't miss usually," said Giroud. "I lost a bit of confidence but my desire to score was bigger, so I just tried

PL transfer window to run for 10 weeks

LONDON: Premier League clubs have agreed a 10-week summer transfer window, which will open on July 27. Subject to the approval of football's world governing body FIFA, the window will open the day after the 2019/20 league season finishes and end on October 5, the date UEFA had recommended for the closure of registration periods across Europe. The Premier League said that following consultation with the English Football

League, a domestic-only window will also be added from October 5 and close on October 16. Transfers between Premier League clubs will not be able to occur during this period, but top-flight sides can trade with EFL clubs and loan or sign players permanently. The EFL confirmed its window would open on the same day as the Premier League's but clubs would have an extra two weeks for domestic-only business. AFP



Atalanta's Mario Pasalic celebrates after scoring a goal against Brescia

Great entertainers Pasalic nets hat-trick as free-scoring Atalanta thump Brescia to go second

AFP ■ BERGAMO

Mario Pasalic scored a hat-trick as Atalanta brushed aside struggling local rivals Brescia 6-2 to move second in Serie A on Tuesday. Gian Piero Gasperini's side extended their unbeaten league run to 13 games to move six points behind leaders Juventus who visit eighth-placed Sassuolo on Wednesday. Inter Milan and Lazio are two points behind Atalanta before they play against SPAL

and Udinese respectively later this week. Gasperini's side have scored 93 league goals so far this season — 26 more than eight-time reigning champions Juventus. "We don't do it to humiliate the opponent, but we try to play our game," said Gasperini. "Already last year we were the best attack in the league, this year we have surpassed ourselves, scoring many goals with many different players."

Madrid get chance to clinch league title

AP ■ MADRID

The Spanish league trophy will be sitting by the field at the Alfredo Di Stefano Stadium on Thursday, with Real Madrid a win away from lifting it for the first time in three years. Madrid will have its first chance to clinch the title when it hosts Villarreal at home following a long season that was in jeopardy because of the coronavirus pandemic. It enters the second-to-last round with a four-point lead over Barcelona, which faces Osasuna at the Camp Nou at the same time. Madrid needs two points from its last two matches to secure its 34th league title — and first since 2017. It can also lift the trophy with a loss if Barcelona fails to defeat Osasuna. It would be Madrid's first league title since Cristiano Ronaldo left to join Juventus two seasons ago, and the first since coach Zinedine Zidane returned from a short break. Barcelona won the last two league titles and was at the top this season when the coronavirus pandemic struck, but

Madrid has been perfect since the break, winning nine straight. "When we returned from the confinement after being stuck at home for almost three months, I could see that the players wanted to achieve something big," Zidane said on Wednesday. "I could see it during the training sessions, I could see it in how they were practising." Madrid had lost three of its last four matches before the league was halted in March. Barcelona seemed in control but endured an up-and-down run after the break, drawing three matches and losing its advantage at the top. Coach Quique Setien, under pressure because of the team's results and lackluster performances, knows his club faces a tough task trying to overcome Madrid's advantage. Barcelona has won eight of the last 11 league titles, with Zidane lifting the trophy in 2017 and 2020. Madrid will face a Villarreal team that is sitting fifth in the standings and fighting for a Europa League berth.



India's home series vs Eng set to be postponed

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket team's six-match limited-overs home series against England scheduled in September is all set to be postponed along with New Zealand A's visit of the country next month due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The BCCI is yet to make any formal announcement in this regard but it is expected that it will happen soon. "England were supposed to play six games (three ODIs and three T20Is) during late September. Obviously in the current circumstances England won't be travelling to India," a senior BCCI official said. India's Future Tours and Program (FTP) calendar will be among the main topics of discussion during the BCCI Apex Council meeting on Friday. "But I guess a formal announcement will happen once the FTP issue is discussed as it's part of the agenda during Friday's Apex Council meeting. New Zealand A had a tour of India scheduled in August and even that's also unlikely to go ahead," the official said. According to reports in the British media, the white ball tour may now happen in September, next year. PTI

No July 19 resumption of hockey camps as Bengaluru goes into lockdown

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The national camps for Indian men's and women's hockey teams will not resume as planned on July 19 at Bengaluru SAI Centre with the rising Covid-19 case count forcing the city into a complete seven-day lockdown. The grave situation in the southern metropolis has left the Sports Authority of India (SAI) with no choice but to defer its plans. Enjoying a break at their respective native places after being confined to their rooms at the SAI Centre for two months due to the nationwide lockdown, the players had been expected to return to base by July 19. A SAI source in Bengaluru, however, confirmed to PTI that there is no way the national camps can resume on the earlier earmarked date under the current circumstances. "We didn't get any such instruction till now about resumption of hockey camps. On June 18, we were just being asked to allow the players to leave for their homes but no intimation has been given to us on resumption of camps," the source said. "Frankly speaking, it is impossible to resume camps now because Bengaluru is under complete lockdown till July 22. The cases are increasing everyday and there is a possibility that the lockdown would be extended till the end of this month." Although the SAI headquarters here is yet to take a formal decision on the matter, Hockey India's de-recognition by the Sports Ministry, along with 53 other National Sports Federations (NSFs), as per the Delhi High Court's order, has made the situation complex. "We can't make any comment on national camps or anything as we are de-recognised by the ministry now," a HI official said.

Big Bash to start amid India tour

MELBOURNE: The 10th season of the Big Bash League (BBL) will coincide with the much-anticipated India's tour of Australia, the host board announced on Wednesday unveiling a 61-match schedule for the country's premier T20 event. According to the schedule released by Cricket Australia (CA), the BBL will begin on December 3 with a clash between Strikers and Renegades at the Adelaide Oval, shortly after the end of day one of the opening Test between India and Australia in Brisbane. The final has



will be set for February 6 next year. The 59-game Women's BBL will be played from October 17

until November 29. "While the Covid-19 pandemic may yet force alterations to the summer of cricket, today's announcement confirms the commitment to a full 61-game schedule, including the return of the five-team finals format," the CA said. As per the schedule, the BBL will run for eight nights before taking a five-day break for Australia's day-night Test with India to be held from Dec 11-15 at Adelaide Oval. PTI

SINGLES

**BENFICA KEEP SLIM TITLE HOPES ALIVE**  
LISBON: Benfica kept their slim hopes of winning the Portuguese title alive as a first-half goal from midfielder Chiquinho and a late second from Haris Seferovic gave them a hard-fought 2-0 home win over Vitoria de Guimaraes. The victory leaves Benfica on 71 points after 32 games, five behind leaders Porto. Having beaten Benfica twice this season, Porto will secure 29th league title if they can manage at least a draw with Sporting.

**MORTAZA RECOVERS FROM COVID-19**  
DHAKA: Former Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Mortaza has recovered from Covid-19 after treatment at home for the dreaded virus since June 20. Mortaza announced the negative result of his test on his Facebook page. His wife Sumona Haque is yet to recover from the disease. Two other players — Nafees Iqbal and Nazmul Islam — have also recovered after undergoing treatment at home.

**TAMIM, MAHMUDULLAH TURN DOWN CPL OFFERS**  
DHAKA: Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal and T20I skipper Mahmudullah Riyad on Wednesday confirmed they have opted against taking part in this year's CPL. Citing concerns related to coronavirus pandemic, Mahmudullah turned down the offer to feature in the league. While Tamim declined the offer to remain available for Dhaka Premier League, in case it resumes in August.

**AKINFENWA INVITED TO LIVERPOOL TITLE PARADE**  
LIVERPOOL: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said he has invited Adebayo Akinfenwa to their Premier League title parade shortly after sending the forward a congratulatory message for sealing promotion to the Championship. After Wanderers beat Oxford United in the League One playoff final to secure their place in the English second-tier for the first time, Akinfenwa had joked that Klopp could "hit me up on WhatsApp". The German manager had responded with a video message and said that Akinfenwa would also be part of their title celebration when it happens.

**DAKAR YOUTH OLYMPICS POSTPONED TO 2026**  
LAUSANNE: The International Olympic Committee has postponed the 2022 Dakar Youth Olympics for four years due to the coronavirus pandemic. IOC President Thomas Bach said the delay was discussed two days ago in a telephone conversation with Senegal President Macky Sall. The Youth Summer Games would be the first Olympics organized in Africa.

**6 PEOPLE RETURNED COVID-19 POSITIVE: CSA**  
JOHANNESBURG: Cricket South Africa (CSA) on Wednesday said six people have returned positive for the dreaded coronavirus but none of them are cricketers following approximately 50 tests conducted ahead of the 3TeamCricket match on Saturday. CSA however did not reveal who were the six positive people from among those tested for the dreaded disease.

**PCB LOOK TO START DOMESTIC SEASON IN OCT**  
KARACHI: The Pakistan Cricket Board is planning to start its delayed domestic cricket season from early October at select venues across the country. "The idea is to have a reduced domestic season at less venues to limit the travel and moving about off players, coaches and officials," a source said. He said a final decision on the domestic cricket schedule would be taken in early September so there is time for preparations.

**HUMPY, HARIKA ADVANCE TO LAST EIGHT**  
CHENNAI: India's Koneru Humpy and D Harika advanced to the quarterfinals of the fourth and final leg of Women Speed Chess Championships on Wednesday. Agencies

Root returns for Old Trafford Test

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Fresh from becoming a father of two, Joe Root will be reinstated as England captain on Thursday with his team in very familiar territory. With Root absent so he could be with his wife for the birth of their second child, England lost the first Test against the West Indies last week in what was the first international cricket match since the sport's shutdown. With the series against the West Indies being only three Tests, England has to bounce back immediately and Root's return is clearly a positive. The captain will take the place of Joe Denly, who made 18 and 29 in his two innings at the Rose Bowl and was fighting

with Zak Crawley to keep his spot for the second Test at Old Trafford. Crawley had England's highest single score with 76 in the second innings. There is likely to be a change in the bowling attack, too, with Stuart Broad pushing for a recall after being dropped for the first Test — and then speaking publicly about his disappointment during the match. Root said any decision would be taken after he took a look at the Old Trafford pitch again later Wednesday. There has been rain in Manchester and Root

described the wicket as having a "nice brownish colour." Continuity has been key for England when it comes to selection in recent years, which may prove a blessing for Jos Buttler. The wicketkeeper-batsman — a limited-overs specialist — has a Test average of 23.22 since the start of 2019, and only one century in 75 innings, but is set to keep his place. The West Indies are holders of the Wisden Trophy after beating England in a home series last year,

so will retain it with a draw in the first of back-to-back Tests in Manchester. And they are looking to seal a first Test series victory in England in 32 years. Not since 1992-93 — when the likes of Brian Lara, Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose were in their pomp — have the West Indies won an overseas Test series consisting of more than two matches against major opposition. "I haven't mentioned anything about history to the guys," West Indies captain Jason Holder said. "It's hard for us to get caught up in the peripheral stuff. "Winning the first Test match is just one piece of the puzzle. We've got two other games to play and we don't get ahead of ourselves."

Extended preparations played key part in win: Simmons

MANCHESTER: Windies coach Phil Simmons believes that the extended preparations after early arrival due to Covid-19 protocols have actually played a key part in his side's four-wicket win in the first Test. West Indies, who arrived in England on June 9 and trained in a bio-secure environment after that, beat the home side by four wickets on the final day of the first Test. "I think that has been the biggest influence on the performance. The fact that we've been here for that period of time, we've had quality bowling in the nets because we've had nearly 11 seamers here, you can't put a price on that," he said on the eve of the second Test. "I don't like to go back into my (playing) days, but we would come to England and play something like three or four proper warm-up games before the first Test, and we would also have

three-day or four-day games in between the Test matches. So I think that period of training goes a long way to how we performed in that first Test." While praising the resolve of his players in the first Test, he warned the West Indies cricketers to guard against complacency. "For me it was a great win because I think that it signified a lot of hard work being done by the players over the last four or five weeks. It was a top-class Test match, with good cricket played by both teams, and even coming down to the last hour, it could have gone either way. "But you guard against complacency by just trying to do the same things you did before the first Test. Right now that Test match is history. We've got to be thinking about what we do from Thursday to Monday," the 57-year-old former all-rounder said. PTI



# Nani is proud of *HIT* going to B'wood: Director Sailesh

As a storyteller I couldn't have asked for a better actor than Rajkumar Rao to spearhead this film, the director tells NAGARAJ GOUD

**T**he Pioneer has already informed you (May 26) that producer Dil Raju, who distributed *HIT* in Telugu, was planning to remake it in Hindi. The project was made official on Wednesday, with versatile Hindi actor Rajkumar Rao attached to star and original director Dr Sailesh Kolanu sitting in the director's saddle. Raju will be producing it along with Kuldeep Rathore. It will flag-off next year. Excited to have joined the project, Rajkumar Rao said, "When I saw *HIT*, I instantly connected to it. It's an engaging story, relevant in today's environment. As an actor I am always on the lookout to play characters I haven't explored and a role in *HIT* gives me a chance to do that. I'm looking forward to taking



this journey with Sailesh and Mr Dil Raju." Speaking to *The Pioneer*



exclusively, Sailesh said Rajkumar Rao was a unanimous choice for the lead role. "After I was signed on for the remake, Raju sir and I were discussing who would be the best bet to spearhead it. One of the first names that came for discussion was Rao because of his previous rich body of work. Raju sir later asked Rao to watch the film, which he did. The actor rang me subsequently and there were questions about perceptions and what he liked the most. He also learned how I would be taking it forward as a franchise," the director said.

He noted that he is glad to have an actor of Rajkumar's pedigree on board. "I really love his acting and I've been following his work since

Shaitan. As a storyteller I couldn't have asked for a better actor than him. The biggest greed for any storyteller is not money but getting to work with amazing actors and seeing their work reach a large number of people. That is precisely why I signed up for the remake," he stated.

The remake will tell the story of a cop who — while battling with his own traumatic past — is to solve a missing case. According to Sailesh, the Hindi script work has commenced. "As we will be reaching a wider audience with the remake, I'm tweaking the script here and there. I will write the preliminary version and then take it to a dialogue writer. I haven't decided on where to set the

story because of the existing conditions due to COVID-19 outbreak. I have time because I first need to wrap up *HIT 2* in Telugu before I embark on remaking *HIT* in Hindi. I will travel to north India next year and decide on the setting," he pointed out and smilingly added that as he has roamed across the streets of Ameerpet, SR Nagar and Old City during college, Hindi isn't much of a problem.

*HIT* was produced by Nani and Prashanti Tipirneni in Telugu. Talking about Nani's reaction to the remake, Sailesh shared, "He always wanted good things to happen to me. The film is his product at the end of the day and he is proud of it going to Hindi."

## OTT have started a healthy trend in terms of content and cinema: NITHYA MENON

**S**outh-Hindi actress Nithya Menon, who made her digital debut with the web series *Breathe: Into The Shadows*, believes that OTT platforms will not replace theatrical experience. "I don't think anything can replace the whole experience of going to a theatre and seeing a movie on a big

screen. That is a different experience. But the OTT platforms that are opening up now have started a healthy trend in terms of content and cinema."

"Sometimes, there is a certain stagnancy, everybody walks on the same path, and a lot of things become cliches. OTT is opening up new opportunities for everybody. As an actor, I am very hopeful."

(It is a medium) Even for writers and directors who want to explore diverse content."

She feels that everyone should make niche content so that there is something for everybody to watch. "There should be something for everyone, so that is what OTT is doing. I feel that's a very healthy environment," she said.

She has a huge plan that involves writing a script, too. "I had always wanted to sit and write a script. Otherwise I don't get the energy to do it. I gave it a start, but I didn't put any deadline, so it was like if I felt like writing, I would write, if I didn't, I wouldn't. I didn't finish the whole thing. I think I have a few more months," she said.



## SANTOSH SOBHAN AND SANJAY RAO IN MERLAPAKA GANDHI'S STORY



**P**roduction house UV Creations, which strikes a fine balance between big and small-budgeted cinema, has roped in Santosh Sobhan and Sanjay Rao, Brahmaji's son, for a new film. Their in-house director Merlapaka Gandhi has penned the film's script, while one of his long-time associates will be making his directorial debut with it. With the film being an adult comedy, we hear UV will cease from taking the production credits. It is believed they've already booked a beach-side resort in the outskirts of Visakhapatnam to shoot it. Being made as a web film, it will most likely drop on aha, as UV and Geetha Arts have collaborated for multiple production ventures in the past.



## COVID-19 related appeals by Rajamouli and Koratala Siva

**F**ilmmaker SS Rajamouli on Tuesday appealed to the cured COVID-19 patients to step forward and donate their plasma to treat those infected with the coronavirus.

"If you have recovered from #COVID\_19, come forward to help someone in need! There is no shame in getting #COVID. Please don't let social stigma prevent you from saving lives! You can register as a donor here: <http://givered.in> ((sic));" the Baahubali filmmaker tweeted along with a link.

Plasma therapy is considered effective for people struggling to cope with coronavirus. It involves injection of blood-component plasma extracted from a cured patient to a positive coronavirus case. The plasma extracted from a cured patient is considered to be having virus fighting antibodies. It strengthens the immunity of the person getting the plasma.

Likewise, Rajamouli's colleague Koratala Siva has requested coronavirus positive patients to be responsible in cautioning their closed ones. "It's my earnest request to all

those infected, let's act responsible and inform our close ones and all those who've met recently so they can get tested too. Need of the hour. Time to be more civilised. More than the virus, it's the fact that a few infected individuals are keeping it a secret that makes this an even more scarier experience (sic);" the director posted in a series of tweets.



## Sarath Kumar to make his OTT debut for aha

**P**rominent Tamil actor Sarath Kumar is the latest big name from South to have taken the OTT plunge. On his birthday Tuesday, his wife Radikaa Sarath Kumar took to Twitter to announce his digital debut. He will feature in the upcoming screen adaptation of Archana Sarat's novel *Birds of Prey — The Hunt Begins*. "Sarath Kumar sir was not only kind

and humble enough to launch the book of a debut author but he has also taken it to the screen," Archana posted following the announcement. While we still don't whether it is being made as a series or a film, we did learn from multiple sources that Telugu streamer aha will be producing it and it will be shot in Telugu. Goutham Vasudev Menon's former associate Pradeep Nayyar will

direct it. The project will be a psychological crime thriller that deals with the theme of child abuse and how it affects the children, with Sarath playing a powerful role.

Sarath, who is a big name in Tamil, also acted a good number of films in Telugu. Prominent of which include *Bunny*, *Jaya Janaki Nayaka* and *Naa Peru Surya-Naa Illu India*.