

OPINION 6

PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

MONEY 8

GOOGLE REMOVES PAYTM APP FROM PLAY STORE

SPORTS 11

ALL SET FOR IPL SHOW

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 19, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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AFTER COUNTRYSIDE, TUCK JAGADISH MOVES TO HYD

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RAPID 90-MINUTE COVID-19 TEST SHOWN TO BE HIGHLY ACCURATE

Researchers have created a 90-minute high speed Covid-19 test which does not require a laboratory and can be performed in cartridges smaller than a mobile phone with high accuracy. The study, published in the journal The Lancet Microbe, revealed that the Lab-in-Cartridge rapid testing device, which can be performed at a patient's bedside, was shown to have over 94% sensitivity and 100% specificity. It means that it had a high level of accuracy and produced very few false negatives and no false positives. To perform the test, a paediatric-sized nose swab from a patient is inserted into the device, which then looks for traces of genetic material belonging to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid.



NOT CONTEMPT, BUT "UNNECESSARY": HC ON ACTOR SURIYA'S NEET REMARK

Film star Suriya Sivakumar will not face a contempt case over his comments on the Madras High Court linked to the alleged suicide of three medical aspirants. The Madras High Court today called the actor's comments 'unnecessary and unwarranted' but ruled that there would be no contempt proceedings. "The utterances by the cine actor are unnecessary and unwarranted for being ignorant of the manner in which the entire judiciary of this state has served the interest of its citizens he state has been serving during this pandemic ...," the court said. High Court judge SM Balasubramaniam had said the actor was in contempt of court over his comments on four candidates of NEET who died by suicide recently in Tamil Nadu.



UK WARNS OF POSSIBLE SECOND LOCKDOWN AS CORONA CASES INCREASE

Britain's government Friday warned it could re-impose a national lockdown across England to counter the coronavirus pandemic, noting rates of hospitalisation are doubling every eight days. "We want to avoid a national lockdown, but we're prepared to do it if we need to," Health Secretary Matt Hancock told BBC television. "We're prepared to do what it takes both to protect lives and to protect livelihoods," he said, warning of more local measures to come after restrictions were placed on swathes of northeast England from Friday. Britain has been the worst-hit country in Europe by the pandemic, with the government registering nearly 42,000 deaths from Covid.



NASA PLANS PLANETARY MISSION TO VENUS AFTER EVIDENCE OF POSSIBLE LIFE

NASA is considering approving by next April up to two planetary science missions from four proposals under review, including one to Venus that scientists involved in the project said could help determine whether or not that planet harbors life. An international research team on Monday described evidence of potential microbes residing in the harshly acidic Venusian clouds: traces of phosphine, a gas that on Earth is produced by bacteria inhabiting oxygen-free environments. It provided strong potential evidence of life beyond Earth. The US space agency in February shortlisted four proposed missions that are now being reviewed by a NASA panel, two of which would involve robotic probes to Venus.



How Covid unleashed micro-governance

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Coronavirus claimed lifie of 41 docs in AP, 11 in TS: IMA

Centre says it has no data on fatalities; IMA releases list of medical martyrs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Infuriated at the Union Health Ministry's statement in Parliament that it did not maintain records of the number of doctors who succumbed to Covid-19, the Indian Medical Association on Friday released names of the frontline doctors who died of the virus.

As many as 41 doctors, mostly general practitioners working in both government and private hospitals, lost their life to the coronavirus in AP, according to IMA.

The association has demanded that the deceased doctors be acknowledged and treated as martyrs. Their families and children deserve solace from the national government, it said.

At least 12 out of these 41 doctors were below 60 years. The youngest martyr was a 27-

3 VACCINE CANDIDATES IN ADVANCED STAGE OF CLINICAL TRIALS: CENTRE

New Delhi:

Three of the nearly 30 coronavirus vaccine candidates in the country are in advanced stages of clinical trials, while four are in pre-clinical development stage, Science and Technology Ministry Harsh Vardhan said on Friday. A high-level expert group is looking into matters related to vaccine distribution and immunisation, he said.

"Nationally, nearly 30 vaccine candidates are under development, by both industry and academia. These vaccines are in different stages of pre-

clinical and clinical development of which three candidates are in advanced stage of Phase I/II/III trials and four are in advanced pre-clinical development stage," Vardhan said in a written response to a question in the Lok Sabha. The distribution and immunisation of the coronavirus vaccine are subject to availability, the minister said. "Once available, the coronavirus vaccine distribution follows the same route as for the current practice of vaccines distribution under Universal Immunisation Program (UIP)," he added.

year-old PG student from Vijayawada, and the eldest was a 78-year-old doctor, also from Vijayawada.

As per the data released by the IMA, Tamil Nadu where 63 doctors succumbed to the infection, Karnataka with 42

and Andhra Pradesh with 41 are among the three states with most deaths of doctors. A total of 382 doctors have died due to Covid-19-related complications in 23 states and Union Territories, the IMA said. While IMA considered Dr G Naresh Kumar as resident of Andhra Pradesh, he was a doctor in Kothagudem of Telangana state.

This essentially meant that 41 doctors in AP and 11 in Telangana have succumbed to the coronavirus. Four of the deceased doctors in Telangana were below 60 years of age. The youngest doctor to succumb to the virus was 37-year-old Dr Naresh Kumar from Kothagudem. Telangana stands in 11th position when it comes to number of doctors who succumbed to coronavirus.

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Shopian encounter: Army finds 'prima facie' evidence against its troops

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

The Army has found "prima facie" evidence its troops "exceeded" powers under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act during an encounter in Kashmir's Shopian district in which three men were killed in July this year and has initiated disciplinary proceedings, officials said on Friday.

On July 18, the Army claimed three militants were killed in Amshipura village in the higher reaches of south Kashmir's Shopian district.



Committed to ethical conduct during anti-militancy operations, the Army initiated an inquiry after social media reports indicated the three men were from Rajouri district

in Jammu and had gone missing at Amshipura, said Col Rajesh Kalia, the defence spokesperson in Srinagar. The probe was completed in a record four weeks.

The families of the three men from Rajouri who worked as labourers in Shopian had also filed a police complaint.

In a brief statement, the Army said the Shopian operation contravened the dos and don'ts of the Chief of Army Staff approved by the Supreme Court.

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Farm Bills will bring 'freedom', Oppn misleading farmers: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a forceful defence of the farm sector reform Bills, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that they have brought "freedom" to farmers and given them a "protection shield", as he accused the opposition of standing with middlemen and "misleading" peasants by "lying" to them.

With opposition parties dubbing the three Bills, passed by Lok Sabha and now to be tabled in Rajya Sabha, as "anti-farmers" and the BJP ally Shiromani Akali Dal quitting his government to protest them, Modi refuted their criticism, describing these proposed laws as "historic" and stating that they will unshackle farmers by allowing them to sell their produce anywhere at a better price.

Speaking at the virtual launch of several rail projects in Bihar, Modi chose to speak at length on these Bills, which have sparked protests by farmers in states like Punjab and Haryana, and sought to assuage concerns of the farming community by assuring them the government procurement of their produce will continue and so will the minimum support price (MSP). "This misinformation is now being spread that the government will not give MSP benefits to farmers. Manufactured claims are being made the government will no longer purchase wheat, rice and other grains. This is a blatant lie aimed at deceiving farmers," Modi said.

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Bill to cut MPs' salaries gets nod, opposition wants MPLADS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament on Friday passed a bill to reduce salaries of MPs by 30 per cent for one year to augment financial resources required to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, with members supporting the move but demanding restoration of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS).

Rajya Sabha passed the bill on Friday, while Lok Sabha had cleared it on Tuesday.

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Adityanath govt mulls ordinance against 'love jihad'

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AP levies Re 1 road development cess on fuel to net Rs 500 crore

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday promulgated an ordinance providing for levy of a Road Development Cess of Re 1 each per litre on petrol and high-speed diesel that would net around Rs 500 crore annually.

The ordinance, cleared by Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, amended the AP Value Added Tax Act, 2005.

The State Cabinet, at its meeting on September 3, had approved the decision to

impose the Road Development Cess.

Considering the necessity of allocating dedicated funds for the development of roads in the state, the government decided to levy the Road Development Cess, in addition to the existing levies on petrol and diesel, in public interest.

Proceeds of the cess will be around Rs 500 crore per annum, Special Chief Secretary (Revenue) Rajat Bhargava said.

The cess amount would be transferred to the Andhra Pradesh Road Development

Corporation for exclusive use in developing road infrastructure, he said.

This is the second time in two months that the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government has increased the tax on automobile fuel.

On July 20 this year, the government revised the tax structure on petrol and diesel, thereby increasing their price by Rs 1.24 and Rs 0.93 per litre respectively, to mop up an additional revenue of about Rs 600 crore per annum.

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RTC to ply city buses in Vijayawada, Vizag from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In view of the examinations being conducted for village and ward secretariats posts, the APSRTC would ply buses from Saturday in Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam, according to T Krishna Babu, principal secretary, Transport.

Krishna Babu said that the city buses would be run as per the Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Centre.

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KCR's Front plan gets 6 regional party boost

L VENKAT RAM REDDY ■ HYDERABAD

In these trying times, TRS president K Chandrababhan Rao has a reason to smile.

KCR has a reason to smile as he has got the support of at least six regional parties in Parliament in his fight against the Centre's two options given to the States on GST compensation payout, rekindling hopes in him that his plans to revive the Federal Front would be easier to implement this time around than in 2018. This is



perhaps the first time in recent memory that so many regional parties have joined hands against the Centre on one particular issue.

KCR has a reason to smile as these six regional parties par-

ticipated in a protest led by the TRS in Parliament premises on Thursday. These regional parties included the Trinamool Congress that rules West Bengal, the DMK that is in the Opposition in Tamil Nadu, the Shiv Sena and NCP that are part of the ruling combine in Maharashtra, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi and the Opposition Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

KCR has a reason to smile, having witnessed the changing political equations on Thursday, when a major

regional party from Punjab — the Akali Dal — came out of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet fuelling speculations that the party would also exit from the NDA.

However, the protest also brought to light how two major regional parties in the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, the ruling YSRCP and main Opposition TDP, are averse to joining hands with KCR as both stayed away from TRS-organised dharna.

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'Unaware', men tend to ignore prostate issues

Increased frequency of urine, sleepless nights due to full bladder are also some symptoms

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

India has one of the world's largest and fastest growing populations of ageing men.

While there is concern over ailments like type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol, the huge burden of morbidity imposed by a condition called benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH — suffered by many and ignored by many other men.

Urologists in Andhra Pradesh are creating awareness this September — the month being observed as the Prostate Health Awareness Month —

about this medical condition. Men usually tend to ignore their health and this awareness campaign is aimed at providing easily accessible prostate health information via www.whatarelief.in — a digital asset created for patient awareness and education.

Data mined from research done in India shows that almost 65 percent men aged 40 and above suffer from these annoying symptoms. However, very few of them consult doctors.

According to Dr Ravindra Varma, Urologist, AINU Hospital "Most of these patients 'normalise' their symp-



toms, as an inevitable consequence of ageing often quoting examples of their father, uncles, elder brothers and other male friends, relatives and acquaintances or attribute it solely to external factors like cold weather and their drinking

too much water. They continue to suffer symptoms in silence and develop various strategies to cope with them until they markedly worsen, and complications develop. Only then do they approach a doctor."

BPH is an age-related enlargement of the prostate which creates an obstruction to the outflow path of urine, producing troublesome symptoms that leads to increased daytime frequency of urination, getting up frequently from sleep at night to pass urine, straining to improve weak stream of urine and feeling incompletely satisfied even after having just passed urine.

Dr Varma continued: "The patients suffering from BPH are always on the lookout for washrooms wherever they go — a behaviour called toilet mapping, passing urine every time they go outdoors or retire to bed, cutting down on fluid intake more than needed and ultimately, not venturing out of doors or on long trips at all — even for socialising, work or either pleasure.

If untreated, other problems like recurrent acute urinary retention (sudden painful inability to pass urine), recurrent urinary infections, formation of stones and even damage to and failure of kidneys.

Rebel MP Raju changes name of YSRCP office

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Dissident YSRCP MP from Narasapuram constituency K Raghurama Krishnam Raju is apparently leaving no stone unturned to draw the attention of the party high command.

The MP has been passing various comments against the party and the high command, be it in the state or Delhi.

On Friday, Raju changed the name of his party office at his native place Bhimaravaram from the "YSR Congress Narasapuram MP office" to "Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party office".

However, the party office

still retained huge pictures of YS Rajasekhara Reddy, YS Vijayalakshmi and also its president YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

The pictures that were conspicuous by their absence were that of YSRCP parliamentary party leader V Vijaysai Reddy and Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Trust Board chairman YV Subba Reddy. When last checked, these pictures had their place of pride in the office.

It may be mentioned here that Raju has accused Vijayasai Reddy of conspiring against him.

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TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Ashwin (Adhik) & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi : Dwitaya: 09:09 am, Tritiya: 05:38 am (Next Day)

Nakshatram: Chitra: 01:20 am (Next Day)

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

Rahukalam: 09:08 am — 10:39 am

Yamagandam: 01:39 pm — 03:10 pm

Varjyam: 11:11 am — 12:36 pm

Gulika: 06:08 am — 07:38 am

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 07:41 pm — 09:05 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:45 am — 12:33 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 34/26
Humidity: 76%
Sunrise: 06:04 am
Sunset: 06:14 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated September 18, 2020 5:00 PM



Covid-19 has brought into focus the role of Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) in managing the pandemic in India.

Wherever permitted, they have admirably enforced local lockdowns, mask-wearing in public places, and social distancing. This provides strong anecdotal evidence for the ideas developed by Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom.

In her research in South Asia, Ostrom found that there are two types of rules operating in society - top-down rules in form mainly crafted by governments, and informal rules in use followed by the local people. It is the rules in use that explain the performance of the RWAs.

In order to make the working of micro-governance units (including RWAs) more well-ordered, the rules in use should be identified and codified as rules in form. Some

How Covid unleashed micro-governance

of the components to be included in the systemisation of rules in use are discussed below.

OVERSIGHT

Two key functions that matter to local people are sanitation and street light maintenance. Sanitation would include worker attendance, street sweeping, trash collection and bin cleaning. The streetlight rectification report would also be reviewed every month. The RWAs would record their comments in a score card containing responses on a binary scale — satisfactory or unsatisfactory — and this would become the basis for monthly salary payment of workers and supervisors.

Similarly, day-to-day administration of market and sports complexes' maintenance

The RWAs would also identify beneficiaries for their eligibility. These would complement the traditional household surveys. A meeting of all residents would be held where the names of beneficiaries were read and the number supporting, opposing and having no opinion would be recorded in a matrix

nance would be entrusted to a group consisting of RWAs, plus authorised lessees and regular users of sports complexes, respectively.

Furthermore, the RWAs would be competent to inspect all public works at least once before completion of 50 per cent of the work, in value, and again after completion of works.

EMPOWERMENT

The RWAs would also identify beneficiaries for their eligibility. These would

complement the traditional household surveys. A meeting of all residents would be held where the names of beneficiaries were read and the number supporting, opposing and having no opinion would be recorded in a matrix. This is expected to bring about a paradigm shift in the selection of the poor.

The underlying idea is that we trust the local people and if they feel that a family requires help, perhaps



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

that is the best decision.

One area of concern of all residents is the changes in land use and building regulations in residential areas (including Master Plan). The planned change would only be carried out if more than, say, 80 percent agree with the

change. Connected to this is the hazard posed by unauthorised construction in residential areas. The progress of building construction could be placed on the RWA social media platforms by the local town planning officers of the municipality.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Active participation is to translate differences to consensus, and "deliberative polling" offers one way to go about it. Active participation would consist of three stages: Stage 1 is an approximate statement of position by various stakeholders followed by a free-format debate. Stage 2 consists of defining issues, as precisely as possible. Stage 3 consists of voting on them. Admittedly, there could be side pay-

ments in exchange for votes. There are several ways of curbing such happenings. One way is public disclosure of each vote with each person explaining why she took the particular position.

One major issue is to give 'voice' to the silent, particularly if there are local inequalities in power, opportunity and resources. One way of getting around this could be to ensure that any resolution would fail if more than 20 percent of the members oppose it in deliberative polling. This would ensure that the less-endowed get a voice during decision-making.

FUNDS

The RWAs should be given some funds, such as 20 percent of the total fund spent in the RWA area (sub-

ject to a minimum guaranteed amount). The RWAs would prepare a list of all works, prioritise them, and the engineers would execute the works. Such financial decentralisation would lead to "real" empowerment of citizens.

This is a list of some transformations that have the potential to lead to a major transformation in governance, because people tend to take an interest in affairs when their demands and preferences count. The duality created by rules in form and rules in use would be bridged by the monitoring and supervision opportunities given to citizens, and is expected to lead to a more self-regulated society.

(Author has a PhD from USA and a DLitt from Kanchi University. The article is based on his research and practice and views are personal)

IPL 2020

Lights, camera, cricket!

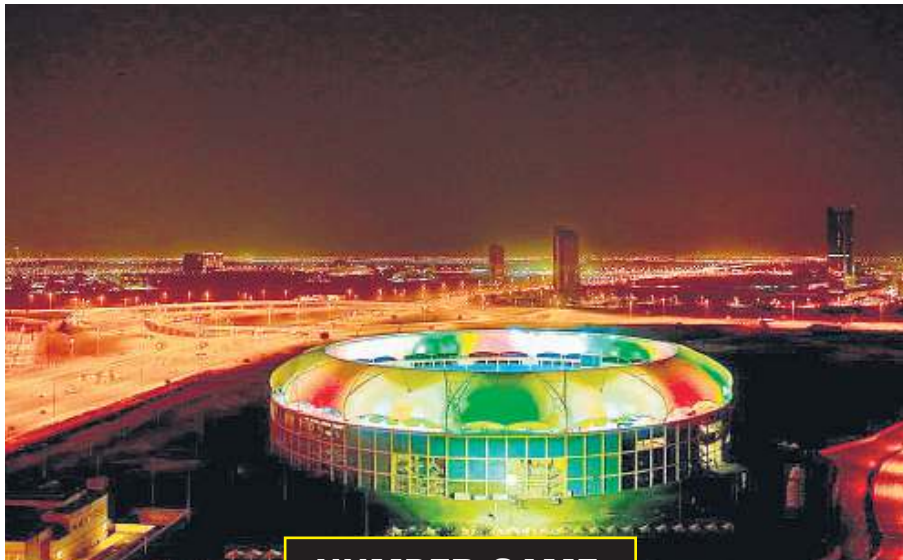
Glitzy IPL marks start of Indian sporting events in Covid times

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's poker face, Virat Kohli's raw emotions and Rohit Sharma's effortless handling of his 'Galacticos' will be back to charm cricket fans across the globe with the Indian Premier League starting on Saturday, promising to be a happy distraction in a world scarred by COVID-19. Rohit's defending champions Mumbai Indians will be locking horns with Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings in what is likely to be a fittingly exciting opening showdown.

The tournament, which has been shifted to the UAE due to five million plus COVID cases in India, is a 'TV-only event', expected to be lapped up by all and sundry who crave for cricket and Bollywood in equal measure during prime time. Bollywood had its share of prime time in the past few months but rest assured, the next 53 days would belong to Dhoni's CSK, Kohli's RCB and Rohit's Mumbai Indians challenged by young pretenders comprising KL Rahul's KXIP and Shreyas Iyer's Delhi Capitals among others.

IPL happening in foreign shores is not a new phenomenon, not even the shift to the Emirates but as Indian sports hits the restart button with the billion dollar cricketing extravaganza, the hugely popular event to be held closed doors in a bio-secure environment will be a new experience. David Warner or Chris Gayle's towering sixes welcomed by artificial crowd cheer will be the new normal and the deafening roars during Super Overs will be missing but no one can



NUMBER GAME

WITH IPL SET TO KICK OFF, HERE IS A LOOK AT THE EVENT'S STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST EDITIONS...

■ Royal Challengers Bangalore holds the record of amassing the highest totals in IPL history, scoring 263-5 and 248-3 against now-defunct teams -- Pune Warriors and Gujarat Lions respectively in 2013 and 2016. CSK holds the third position in the list with a score of 246-5 against Rajasthan Royals in 2010

■ RCB is also the team with the lowest total in IPL, having been dismissed for 49 by Kolkata Knight Riders in 2017, while RR and DD are second and third in the list with totals of 58 and 66 against RCB and Mumbai Indians in 2009 and 2017

■ MI's 146-run win over DD in 2017 is the biggest in terms of runs' margin in IPL. RCB and KKR hold the second and third place with 144-run and 140-run wins over Gujarat Lions and RCB in 2016 and 2008

■ Eight matches have been decided on the basis of Super Over with KKR being involved in three such ties, while RR have won two Super Over matches -- the most in IPL. All eight teams participating in IPL 2020 have played at least one Super Over but Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders are yet to win one

■ The dubious record of conceding most extras in a match belongs to KKR, who gave away 28 against Deccan Chargers in 2008, followed by KXIP and CSK, who conceded 27 and 26 extras against RCB and MI in 2011 and 2009

■ Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Virat Kohli is the highest run-getter in IPL history, having amassed a total of 5,412 runs in the last 12 editions of the tournament. He is followed by Chennai Super Kings' Suresh Raina (5,368) and Mumbai Indians skipper Rohit Sharma (4,898)

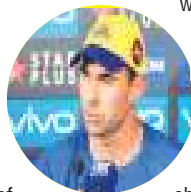
complain as at least the show will go on in amid a devastat-

ing health crisis. When the IPL was partially held in UAE back

in 2014, KKR were the eventual champions.

His sabbatical from the game has done Mahendra Singh Dhoni a world of good. Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming said on Friday, asserting that the enigmatic skipper is 'mentally engaged and determined' to encounter the challenges of a 'tactically

different' IPL. Dhoni's CSK will take on Rohit Sharma's Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on Saturday. Fleming, a former New Zealand captain, stressed that his team's experience of



winning big matches will come in handy during the next 53 days. Dhoni retired from international cricket last month after being on a break for over one year and when asked about the 39-year-old's



Mumbai Indians start favourites in opener against CSK

Mumbai Indians are traditional slow-starters in the IPL but on paper, they will be the favourites against Chennai Super Kings in the opening game in Abu Dhabi. MI looks the most prepared and set team with a scary batting line-up of Rohit, Quinton de Kock, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Hardik and Krunal Pandya, Kieron Pollard. Trent Boult and Nathan Coulter-Nile will complete their quota of foreigners. For CSK, the core has remained the same save for Suresh Raina, who was their worst performer last year and has pulled out citing personal reasons this year. His replacement Ruturaj Gaikwad remains in quarantine having tested COVID-19 positive at least five times. But there is Watson, Ambati Rayudu, Kedar Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja, and Bravo, who have all won matches from hopeless situations. In case Curran is allowed to travel to Abu Dhabi, he could well be the pinch hitter at the top of the order.

preparedness for the IPL, Fleming said, "It has been no different. He's very fit and mentally, he's been very engaged and determined." "In some ways the break can work for the experienced and older players that we have. MS is fresh and ready to go," Fleming said.

16% voters up in arms against govt, says Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP leaders are continuing their attacks on weaker sections and backward classes in villages and towns across the State ever since coming to power in 2019 elections, pointed out Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu.

He said that in the past 16 months, the ruling party has lost support of 16 per cent voters as the BC, SC, ST and Minorities have distanced themselves from the ruling party.

Addressing a video conference with party leaders in Narasaraopet Lok Sabha constituency, Naidu said that people were unhappy over the looting of YSRCP leaders through illegal transportation of sand to other States, sale of illicit liquor and countless scams taking place in all sectors.

He alleged that everyday



hundreds of lorries were carrying sand illegally to Telangana and on their return journey, they were bringing illicit liquor bottles for illegal sale by the ruling party leaders in the State.

Naidu condemned the filing of false cases against 15 farmers in Nellore district for demanding purchase of their paddy. He deplored that hundreds of farmers were implicated in false cases and sent to jail for fighting against the govern-

ment demanding Amaravati as the capital city.

He lamented that no other government in the country filed so many cases against farmers as in the State till now. He alleged that the ruling YSRCP committed a breach of trust by proposing to fix metres on agricultural pump sets.

Naidu accused the Jagan's regime of putting all sections of people at risk by totally neglecting Coronavirus preventive and treatment facilities all over the State.

He alleged that now attacks were going unabated on temples across the State. He lamented that even Gods have no safety and security under the present regime. He claimed that 16 per cent voters were up-in-arms against the YSRCP government who had earlier supported the ruling party and people will teach a befitting lesson to the YSRCP for their wrong deeds and corruption.

Govt blaming courts for its faults: Tulasi Reddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APCC working president N Tulasi Reddy on Friday accused the government of blaming the courts as it was unable to administer the state.

The senior Congress leader observed that the GOs passed by the government turned out to be violative of the law of the land and the Constitution. Similarly, ordinances and laws passed by the government turned out to be unconstitutional leading to courts striking them down.

It was natural for the courts to found fault with them as every one - whether the common man, or the Chief Minister is equal in the eyes of the law.

The Constitution has provided everyone the right to appeal to the higher courts if the court verdicts were not in their favour. But it is not proper to blame the courts for delivering verdicts not



favourable to governments. Courts did not spare people like Lalu Prasad Yadav, or Jayalalithaa. But they did not blame the courts for the verdict.

In 1962, court had passed remarks against the then Chief Minister Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. Hence, he stepped down as the Chief Minister but did not found fault with the courts, he reminded.

Tulasi Reddy welcomed the Supreme Court' direction to courts to speed up trial of criminal and corruption cases against the current and former elected people's representatives.

8 more Corona containment zones in Krishna dist

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As many as eight villages were announced as Covid-19 containment zones in Krishna district as new Coronavirus cases were registered on Friday.

Krishna District Collector A Md Imtiaz said that Katrenipadu village in Musunur mandal, Velvadam, Pedapurupudi in Mylavaram mandal and Vinjarampadu in Pedapurupudi mandal were declared as containment zones.

He said that Vanapamula, Appikata and Moparru villages in Pedapurupudi mandal and Choutapalli village in Veerulapadu mandal were declared as containment zones.

He appealed to people of these eight villages to follow the Corona containment zone norms to restrain the spread of pandemic and to cooperate with the government towards containment of Covid-19.



the Governor said that he visited many places of worship but the cleanliness that is being followed in Tirumala in spite of visits by thousands of pilgrims every day shows the commitment and dedication of the strong workforce of TTD. "The darshan with social distancing and other norms for pilgrims is well executed by the management," he reiterated.

Speaking on the occasion,

‘Chalo Amalapuram’ call only a drama: CPI

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI state secretary K Ramakrishna found fault with the BJP for giving a call for 'Chalo Amalapuram' and 'Chalo Antardvedi' to protest against the burning of chariot at Antardvedi temple recently. Ramakrishna on Friday said that when the State government has already ordered for a CBI probe into the Antardvedi chariot burning incident, why the BJP leaders are still creating a fuss in the name of 'Chalo Antardvedi', he questioned? They are creating law and order problems," he said.

He, however, alleged that the YSRCP and BJP are enjoying



love-hate relationship to hoodwink the people. In the state, the BJP leaders put up a show as if they are criticising the YSRCP government. But at the Centre, both are friendly parties, he pointed out.

It may be recalled that hundreds of BJP activists were

taken into preventive custody, as they raised slogans against the government for not protecting the properties of temples and hurting the sentiments of the Hindus. Police made security arrangements in the region to prevent any untoward incidents.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP and party spokesperson GVL Narasimha Rao wrote a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah requesting strict instructions be given to the State government to prevent attacks on temples.

GVL said that the YSRCP government is resorting to undemocratic means and is hurting the sentiments of Hindus.

‘Allocate 50 per cent govt contracts to BCs’

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Expressing concern over the attacks on Backward Classes across the state, Kesana Sankar Rao, president of the Backward Classes Welfare Association, submitted a memorandum to BC Commission chairman Justice Sankaranarayana stating that Backward Classes were humiliated and there were atrocities against women, including murders. The leaders of 13 Backward Class Associations met BC Commission chairman here on Friday.

Kesana Sankar Rao said that there were 143 backward castes in the state and it was high time their problems were solved. He appealed to the BC Commission chairman to

extensively tour the state to learn the problems of Backward Classes. He demanded allocation of 50 per cent of government contracts to the BCs. Likewise, the 50 per cent of the contract works in the local bodies and the government undertakings should also be allotted to the BCs.

He also demanded that the state government should allocate 50 per cent of house sites and houses to the Backward Classes. He demanded full reimbursement of fee for the students of Backward Classes. Every district should have Mahatma Phule Vigjana Kendram, he said.

Kummari Kranti Kumar, Suryabaliya Association secretary Kesava Rao, Appa Rao from Dasari Association and others were present.

TN Governor lauds TTD for darshan arrangements

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Lauding the efforts of the management of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) in making wonderful darshan arrangements to the pilgrims following all Covid guidelines, Tamil Nadu Governor Bhanwarilal Purohit expressed that his visit to Tirumala will remain as a memorable day in his life.

He had darshan of Lord Venkateswara, along with his entourage on Friday. After darshan of the Lord, he was rendered Vedasirvachanam by Vedic priests at Addala Mandapam. Additional executive officer of TTD AV Dharma Reddy presented him with the prasadam of Lord Venkateswara.

Speaking on the occasion,

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Farm Bills...

Continued from Page 1

In the 21st century, these Bills are the need of the country, he said, adding that farmers will no longer remain in shackles and sell their produce wherever they want.

Launching a blistering attack on the Congress without naming the party, Modi said those who ruled the country for decades are "deceiving and misleading" farmers by spreading misleading and "lying" to them on the provisions of these Bills, which seek to replace ordinances brought in by the Centre.

Those who are opposing the changes in the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act had made similar promises in their manifesto, he said in a reference to the Congress and added that when the BJP-led NDA government has done it, then these people are opposing it.

"These people forget how much aware the country's farmers are. Farmers can see that some people do not like the opportunities being provided to them. They can see who are standing with the middlemen who pocket a big part of their earnings," the Prime Minister said.

Govt will provide home isolation kits for Covid patients, says CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home isolation kits should be given to every patient, who is in home isolation, and plasma therapy should be made available in Covid hospitals, said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

He held a review meeting on prevailing Covid situation in the state at the camp office here on Friday.

Officials said health desks have already been set up in 540 Arogyasri hospitals and will be ready in remaining 27 hospitals very soon. The Chief Minister has instructed Arogya Mitras that they should handle six main responsibilities, which include medical infrastructure in the hospitals, availability of doctors, quality food, sanitation, health and patient care.

He said grading is mandatory for every Arogyasri network hospital and every hospital should come under A-category soon. He said all the A-category hospitals should get NABH accreditation within a year. He directed officials to provide financial assistance of Rs 5,000 to normal delivery



■ Officials said health desks have already been set up in 540 Arogyasri hospitals and will be ready in remaining 27 hospitals very soon

■ The Chief Minister has instructed Arogya Mitras that they should handle six main responsibilities, which include medical infrastructure in the hospitals, availability of doctors, quality food, sanitation, health and patient care

and Rs 3,000 to caesarean under YSR Arogya Asara in Arogyasri hospitals.

He directed officials to ensure standards in the existing 11 teaching hospitals, along with 16 upcoming hospitals, and all hospitals under ITDA.

Standards should be maintained in medical facilities in hospitals, along with the availability of doctors, food and sanitation, and ambience as well, he said and suggested that private hospitals should have the same standards.

Officials said that a total of 18,609 oxygen beds are available across the state and 5,723 patients are undergoing treatment with the oxygen facilities.

The government has so far conducted 48,84,371 Covid tests and now 94,453 cases are active, and the positivity rate was 12.31 per cent, the recovery rate was 84.48 per cent and the death rate was only 0.86 per cent, officials said.

Officials said 5,21,350 N95 masks, 7,61,097 PPE kits are available and 265 convalescent plasma has been used for plasma therapy to treat Covid patients. He suggested keeping the information of blood group of the patient in Arogyasree QR code cards and to use the services of Village Secretariats in distribution of Arogyasree QR code cards across the State.

Health Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas (Nani), Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, DGP Gautam Sawang, Special Chief Secretary for Medical Health Dr KS Jawahar Reddy, Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar and other officials attended the meeting.

Naidu avoiding cases under refuge of stays: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Welcoming the Supreme Court view of expediting the cases against those in public life, YSRCP MLA Ambati Rambabu has said there are many cases pending against N Chandrababu Naidu and said the High Court gag order has become a national debate.

Speaking to the media here on Friday, he said there is a disproportionate assets case pending against Naidu since 2005 and the cash-for-vote case did not reach its logical conclusion.

In Amaravati land scam, Naidu and his son Lokesh's involvement is there and the gag order on FIR has become a national debate and has drawn criticism, he said.

There were cases against many public figures but never was such a gag order issued and why the former Advocate General, or his associates,



"The case filed by Lakshmi Parvathi in 2005 on disproportionate assets of Naidu is still pending, along with the cash-for-vote case involving Naidu, and the recent Amaravati land scam will also be moved for hearing," pointed out

AMBATI RAMBABU
YSRCP MLA

including kin of a serving judge, are so special to attract the extraordinary provisions of gag is something people are unable to understand, he said.

"The case filed by Lakshmi Parvathi in 2005 on disproportionate assets of Naidu is still pending, along with the cash-for-vote case involving Naidu, and the recent Amaravati land scam will also be moved for hearing," he pointed out.

He slammed Naidu for avoid-

ing the cases under the refuge of stays. Amaravati land scam is one of the biggest scams in the country where Naidu, his son Lokesh, and the most influential people were involved in the scandal, he alleged.

No one is above law, where even the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi also deposed before the court and affirmed that the State government has deep respect towards judiciary.

Corona claimed...

Continued from Page 1

In its letter to the Centre, the IMA said that no country has lost as many doctors and healthcare workers to the pandemic as India. "Mortality rate of doctors fighting the pandemic was four times that of ordinary citizens and of private practitioners eight times as much."

The IMA statement also said that "To feign that data on death of doctors doesn't merit the attention of the nation is abominable. If the Government doesn't maintain the statistics of total number of doctors and healthcare workers infected by Covid-19 and the statistics of how many of them sacrificed their life due to the pandemic, it loses the moral authority to administer the Epidemic Act, 1897, and the Disaster Management Act. This also

exposes the hypocrisy of calling them Corona Warriors on one hand and denying them and their families the status and benefits of martyrdom."

The doctor fraternity in AP also expressed its anguish over the attitude of the Union government towards healthcare professionals and frontline warriors. "Health is a state subject. Such data is not maintained at Central level by the ministry of health and family welfare," Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan had said in a written reply in Parliament.

The IMA, infuriated by this reply, released a list of 382 healthcare workers who succumbed to Covid-19. "This amounts to (an) abdication of duty and abandonment of the national heroes who have stood up for our people," the IMA said in its statement.

YSRCP demand exposed its incompetence: Galla Jayadev

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Guntur MP Galla Jayadev stated that demanding the CBI to take over cases registered against TDP leaders by the YSRCP while their own party is in power, reveals their own incompetence to find any wrongdoing. He said that when the whole world was suffering from Covid-19, its economic impact and creating a humanitarian crisis, the YSRCP is busy bringing their vendetta politics to Parliament.

Jayadev said that protesting in front of Gandhi statue, ignoring not only the important deliberations in the House but also ignoring the condolence message in the Lok Sabha for their



own MP Bali Durga Prasad, demonstrates their utter lack of empathy.

Jayadev said, "Why are they not demanding that the 29 commitments provided in the APRO Act be fulfilled in full?"

Why are they not fighting for Special Category Status for the state, Kadapa Steel Plant, Vizag Railway Zone, backward area development grants, and others? Why are they not demanding for the GST dues owed to the state, especially when the state is facing a financial crisis?"

Jayadev said that in the last 16 months since the YSRCP government came to power, 107 times the statements and rulings by the High Court, or Supreme Court have gone against them. He alleged that the only objective of the YSRCP government since coming to power has been to tarnish the good work done by the previous TDP government.

Cops foil BJP...

Continued from Page 1

Besides, prohibitory orders are in force in Antarvedi since the chariot burning incident over which the state government has ordered a CBI probe.

MLC PVN Madhav managed to reach the proposed agitation spot in Amalapuram, near Antarvedi, along with a couple of other leaders, but they were removed by police and taken in jeeps to different police stations.

The crackdown on BJP leaders began late last night when the state unit general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy was "forcibly" taken away from his place of stay in Amalapuram.

Vishnuvardhan, who enjoys the rank of Union Minister of State being the Vice-Chairman of Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, alleged police took him on a tour of over 300 km through the night and later detained him in an undisclosed private location.

Bill to cut MPs' salaries...

Continued from Page 1

Opposition members in both the House supported the move, but pressed for restoration of MPLADS fund, which has been suspended for two years. They also said public money should not be spent under such circumstances on projects, including a new Parliament building and bullet train.

Lok Sabha has 543 members and Rajya Sabha has a strength of 245.

A member of Parliament draws a salary of Rs 1 lakh per

month and a constituency allowance of Rs 70,000 per month, besides other allowances.

The Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020 will replace a similar ordinance issued in April this year. The consolidated amount of MPLADS funds for two years — Rs 7,900 crore — will go to the Consolidated Fund of India.

The Upper House also passed the Salaries and Allowances of Ministers (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which proposes to reduce

the salaries and allowances of ministers by 30 per cent for a year.

While supporting the cuts in salaries, most Opposition members who participated in the discussion in Rajya Sabha on Friday urged the government to review its decision to suspend the MPLADS fund for two years, saying it was necessary to carry out development works in their respective constituencies. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi said this was a temporary suspension.

Shopian encounter: Army finds...

Continued from Page 1

"The inquiry has brought out certain prima facie evidence indicating that during the operation, powers vested under the AFSPA 1990 were exceeded and the Do's and Don'ts of Chief of Army Staff as approved by the Supreme Court have been contra-

vened.

"Consequently, the competent disciplinary authority has directed to initiate disciplinary proceedings under the Army Act against those found prima-facie answerable," the statement said.

It is not immediately clear how many Army men are being proceeded against.

Rebel MP...

Continued from Page 1

It was Vijayasai Reddy that had issued the show cause notice to the MP in the capacity of party general secretary. Raju had rejected the notice saying no disciplinary committee was formed before issuing him the notice. In Parliament, he has also been daring the party high command to disqualify him.

YSRCP MPs protest for CBI probe into Amaravati scam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MPs continued their protest holding placards near the Mahatma Gandhi statue inside the Parliament premises for the second day here on Friday, demanding a CBI probe into the Amaravati land and AP FibreNet scams.

YSRCP general secretary V Vijayasai Reddy told newsmen that the AP High Court stay on investigations by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up by the Government and issuing a gag order on the media was not in the true spirit of the Constitution and democracy.

Mentioning Prevention of Corruption Act, Section 19, sub-section 3- Clause C, Vijayasai Reddy said the stay cannot be justified unless there are special and extraordinary circumstances which was not the case here.

Rs 800 cr scam in APFSL, alleges former APSFL ED

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

K Gouri Shankar, former ED, Business Operations, APSFL, alleged that Rs 800 crore scam took place in the Andhra Pradesh State Fibernet Limited (APSFL) during the tenure of TDP government. Addressing the media persons here on Friday, Gouri Shankar said that the then technical advisor to government Vemuri Hari Krishna Prasad was involved in Rs 800 crore scam by awarding contracts related to APSFL to companies related to his kith and kin.

Addressing the media here on Friday, Shankar alleged that Hari Krishna Prasad indulged in various illegal activities of giving contracts to his sister concerned companies though they do not have

the prerequisite to participate in the tender through fabricated documents. He said that Tera Soft and Netops Fiber Solutions LLP, Carpus Solutions and other companies.

He said that to name a few illegal contracts in APSFL of Hari Prasad, Rs 320 crores Phase-I fibre laying tender was allotted to Terra Soft and he got benefited.

He challenged for an open debate on the various scams in APSFL committed by Hari Krishna Prasad. Shankar recalled that a sub-committee was formed by the government and found irregularities in the APSFL. He said that Sumit Kumar, MD APSFL, identified fraud in the functioning of APSFL after he took charge in 2019.

KCR's Front...

Continued from Page 1

The TDP and YSRCP also extended support to all the controversial Bills in Parliament that were opposed by States ruled by regional parties.

Though KCR may have not really expected the TDP to extend support to the TRS due to political rivalry between him and N Chandrababu Naidu, the fact that the YSRCP is moving away from him and inching closer to the BJP may well have left a sour taste in his mouth. This is despite KCR extending a friendly hand to YSRCP supremo YS Jaganmohan Reddy before he was elected the Chief Minister of AP and also afterwards.

Prior to the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, KCR had mooted a non-Congress and a non-BJP Federal Front of regional parties, with the aim of capturing power at the Centre.

Monsoon withdrawal likely from next week

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Southwest Monsoon is likely to start withdrawing from west Rajasthan by the end of next week, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday.

Conditions are likely to become favourable in the next two days for the withdrawal of monsoon. North Indians plains are also witnessing above normal temperatures, it said.

"These are one of the weather patterns we see when conditions are ripe for monsoon withdrawal. From September 20 onwards, we don't see the possibility of monsoon rains in west Rajasthan," IMD Director Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

The IMD has revised the withdrawal dates for monsoon

from this year.

According to the new schedule, monsoon was expected to withdraw on September 17. However, due to low pressure area in the Bay of Bengal, the retreat has been delayed.

The withdrawal of the Southwest Monsoon from west Rajasthan also makes conditions conducive for onset of winter.

Several parts of central and south India are likely to receive heavy rainfall in the next two days.

The IMD has also issued orange warning for Kerala, Goa and parts of Karnataka and Maharashtra on Saturday.

Orange warning has also been issued for Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Goa on Sunday.

AP levies...

Continued from Page 1

The new cess will be entirely used for carrying out road works, including the much-needed repairs through the APRDC.

"Of the total to be realised, we plan to give at least Rs 100 crore to the urban local bodies which otherwise do not have access to such money," a top official said.

But there is a major catch that could thwart the government's plans.

The RDC is now penniless, without any budgetary support from the state government.

It had borrowed Rs 3,000 crore in February 2019 but all that was used by the previous N Chandrababu Naidu regime towards a freebie scheme 'Pasupu-Kumkuma'.

Beginning November this year, the RDC has to start paying interest on the loan as the moratorium period ends.

TTD ready for annual Brahmotsavams

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

All the arrangements are in place to conduct annual Brahmotsavams from September 19 to 27 in 'Ekantam' in view of COVID-19 restrictions, said TTD Trust Board Chairman YV Subba Reddy.

Addressing media persons at Annamaiah Bhavan in Tirumala on Friday, the Chairman briefed them on the important days and events during the nine-day fete. He said Ankurarpanam will be conducted on September 18 between 6 pm and 7 pm while Dwajaroohanam between 6.03 pm and 6.30 pm in the auspicious Meena Lagnam as fixed by the Agama pundits.

On Vahana Sevashas he said, after consulting the chief priest and Agama scholars, it has been decided to observe all morning and evening Vahana Sevashas in Kalyanotsava



Mandapam. Every day morning Vahanam is taken out between 9 am and 10 am and evening Vahanam between 7 pm and 8 pm while on Garuda Seva, which occurs on September 23, the Vahana Seva will be conducted between 7 pm and 8.30 pm.

The same day, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy will present silk clothes on behalf of the government to Srivaru on the day of Garuda Seva.

the world via media," he added.

The TTD Chairman initially refused to enter into a political dialogue at Tirumala but was pressed by the media to respond on charges made by opposition leader and former CM N Chandrababu Naidu against YS Jaganmohan Reddy and TTD.

He said Dr Subramaniam Swamy, Rajya Sabha MP, has filed a PIL in the High Court seeking auditing on misappropriation of funds in TTD during the TDP regime from 2014 to 2019 by an independent agency. When consulted the same with the CM, he directed that not only the past regime, but also the financial activities of the current regime in TTD should be subject to auditing by CAG to have transparency. Following the directive of CM, the TTD Board has resolved for auditing by CAG for all annual financial activities.

RTC to ply city buses in Vijayawada, Vizag from today

Continued from Page 1

Passengers would be able to sit on alternate seats in the buses. No standing passengers would be allowed. The staff would check the temperature of passengers at every bus stop.

Krishna Babu appealed to people to defer travelling till the atmosphere is conducive.

Referring to the running of buses to the neighbouring State, Krishna Babu said that the Telangana RTC has set three conditions to run the services as per the route permit. He said that it was not possible to give route-wise equal opportunity. The Karnataka government also stated that it was not possible, he said.



Heavy rains lash districts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Some parts of Kumram Bheem Asifabad and Mancherial districts saw downpours on Friday. Meanwhile irrigation projects, Yellampalli and Kaddem received copious inflows with upstream areas recording heavy rains. Surplus water was discharged from these two projects.

Kumram Bheem Asifabad district registered an average rainfall of 8 mm. Tiryani and Sirpur (T) mandals witnessed 29.2 and 28.8 mm of rainfall. The district had 952 mm of rainfall as against the normal 969 mm of rainfall from June 1 to September 18.

Mancherial district's average rainfall was 3.1 mm. Mandamari mandal recorded the highest rainfall of 25.5 mm, followed by Naspur which saw 12.5 mm of rainfall.

State fluoride-free, thanks to Mission Bhagiratha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State now has no fluoride-affected habitations, thanks to the TRS government's flagship programme 'Mission Bhagiratha', which is designed to provide safe drinking water to people through tap connection to every household.

Telangana had 967 fluoride-affected habitations as of April 1, 2015. There are no fluoride-affected districts in Telangana as of August 1, 2020, according to a report tabled in Parliament. The report proves the huge success of Mission Bhagiratha -- brainchild of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao -- which had been taken up at a cost of over Rs 40,000 crore.

The report about Telangana overcoming the problem of fluorosis comes a month after the state was ranked Number



1 in the country under the Centre's Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM). Telangana secured top ranking with 98.31 percent of households having functional tap connections. "Number of fluoride-affected villages at the time of formation of Telangana was 967. After the successful implementation of the Mission Bhagiratha, the number has come down to zero," tweeted Municipal Administration and Urban

Development Minister KT Rama Rao on Friday. He also tagged the list of states with arsenic and fluoride affected habitation as tabled in the Parliament. KTR congratulated the Mission Bhagiratha team for its success in overcoming the problem. The Nalgonda district has been affected by fluorosis, a crippling disease which affects bones and teeth due to excessive intake of fluorine-heavy

State had 967 fluoride-affected habitations as of April 1, 2015. There are no fluoride-affected districts in TS as of August 1, 2020, according to a report tabled in Parl

water, for a long time. More than a lakh people in the district are estimated suffering from the disease. Those afflicted by the disease are found with crippled limbs, twisted joints, bent spine, disfigured faces, stunted growth and yellowish or brownish enamel on their teeth.

Inclusive development govt's goal, says KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Municipal Administration and IT Minister KT Rama Rao on Friday stated that Christian Society played a key role in the development of the nation and the state. The Minister stated that he was born at Christian Mission hospital.

"I changed seven schools during my schooling; however, I pursued most of my education in Missionary School. The contribution of Missionaries in regard to Education and Health is tremendous. Even Missionary Hospitals are playing efficient role even in Corona days," he said.

While participating in Christian Religion heads meeting (get together) at Club House of Ministers' Quarters on Friday, organised by the Welfare Minister Koppula Eshwar, KT Rama Rao said the TRS government is sincere towards finding a solution to the problems of Christians. "I



IT Minister KT Rama Rao addressing the Bishops and eminent leaders of Christian community in Hyderabad on Friday

also requested Minister Koppula Eshwar to set up Christian Advisory Association in the state. Some stated that law and order problems will arise if a separate Telangana state is created, however, not a single law and order problem arose in the last six years," he said.

"We will not answer with words but answer with actions. We are providing good govern-

nance. I will convey the opinions expressed by the Christians in the meeting to the Chief Minister. We will complete the Christian Bhavan very soon. Inclusive development is our goal," the Minister said. State's Planning Board vice chairman B Vinod Kumar said that all sections of the people are happy under the leadership of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.

SEC prepares action plan for GHMC polls



State Election Commissioner C Parthasarathi at a review meeting in Hyderabad on Friday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

State Election Commissioner C Parthasarathi on Friday convened a review meeting on the preparation of the GHMC for the polls and discussed issues and challenges likely to be faced, including those posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, with GHMC Commissioner DS Lokesh Kumar and other officials. The term of the current elected body of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC), which was elected in February 2016, ends on February 10, 2021.

On the occasion, officials discussed pre-election activities, and decided to make a plan of action. This would include programmes to train all GHMC officials, including the circle-level, to acquaint them with software applications in the Te-Poll application, developed by the Centre for Good Governance for preparation and publication of Electoral Rolls, randomisation of polling and counting

The term of the current elected body of the GHMC, which was formed in February 2016, ends on February 10, 2021

personnel and election process etc. The SEC said it should be aimed at using maximum technology for expeditious, error-free and transparent election processes with the help of the CGG team, including certain innovations like Face Recognition Software and other pilots, after thorough scrutiny. Pointing out that in the 2016 GHMC elections, the poll per cent was 45.29 per cent, the Commissioner asked officials to prepare an action plan to improve the poll percentage and organise intensive campaigns to improve voting percentage.

Govt misleading people on 2BHK scheme: Bhatti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Taking the gauntlet thrown by CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka in Assembly on Wednesday that TRS had not built any houses for the poor, Animal Husbandry Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav, on day 2, took Congress Legislature Party Leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka on a tour of the double bedroom houses being built by the state government.

However, the tour came to an abrupt end following a verbal spat among the leaders. Speaking to the media, Bhatti lashed out at Minister Talasani alleging that the latter had shown 2BHK units built in neighboring constituencies of Hyderabad instead of showing houses built in Greater Hyderabad limits. Irked with Bhatti's statements, Talasani invited the CLP leader to Kolluru. On the other hand, Ministers Talasani, Malla Reddy and Mayor Bonthu Rammohan went to Kolluru. The Congress leaders returned from Nagaram whereas Bhatti ended his visit at Rampalli.

"I am ready to see the progress of 2BHK works under the limits of 150 divisions. The government is misleading us in showing 1 lakh 2BHK units. I will consider only 3,428 2BHK units as constructed by the government. The government is trying to deceive the people by showing the count of the 2BHKs constructed somewhere else outside the Hyderabad city. The govern-



TRS-Cong in secret pact: BJP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana BJP on Friday alleged that the TRS and Congress entered into secret pact to fight the ensuing GHMC elections. "They are afraid of BJP as the party is much ahead of the pink party in GHMC," said BJP senior leader DK Aruna.

"How can Animal Husbandry Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav go to CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka's residence without the permission of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao? The TRS is facing anti waves in GHMC limits and hence the TRS has indulged in high-drama along with Congress," she alleged. "TRS and Congress may contest next Assembly elections afraid of BJP. The BJP would expose the Congress-TRS high drama in regard to 2BHK scheme in the GHMC elections," the BJP leader further alleged.

potshots at Bhatti for allegedly making baseless allegations. "The government is ready to show all 2BHK units. They are making baseless allegations. The government is ready to show all the 2BHK units if they come with us. We are ready to give the details of remaining 2BHKs. The government constructed 2BHKs on the outskirts as there is no place in GHMC limits. The Congress leaders fled away even though we said to we'll give details of 1 lakh 2BHKs," he said.

RTC unions seek clarity on resuming ops

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As Road Transport Corporations of Telugu states either over technicalities, the unions observe that the dilly-dally tactics would benefit the private bus operators. They suspect that the RTCs of both the states are likely to get caught in a whirlpool of losses if they continue to hassle over operation of buses on the basis of kilometres. The RTC workers noted that the delay would benefit the private bus operators and cause inconvenience to commuters.

Andhra Pradesh has already commenced over 150 bus ser-

vices to Telangana. Even if the RTC revenue is being cornered by private bus operators, the RTC officials here seem to be unmoved. The discussions between officials of both the transport undertakings did not come to a head. The discussions held at MD level were found to be not fruitful. The lockdown imposed in the state in the early this year has caused immense losses to the RTCs of both the states.

The TSRTC bore more brunt of the losses and not able to overcome the loss due to RTC workers observing strike. The resumption of services since May 19 in the rest of the



state, barring the city, is sufficient to meet the fuel expenses and other maintenance costs of the RTC. The RTC is feeling pinched to pay salaries to employees every month.

In fact, the RTC earns more through operation of the interstate services rather than the operation of the city and dis-

trict services. Soon the interstate services are resumed the better it would be for the RTC, the unions say. In fact, level playing field between the RTCs of Telugu states is posing a stumbling block in the negotiations for resumption of bus services. AP buses run for a distance of 2.62 lakh km in Telangana, while the Telangana bus services run in AP for a distance of 1.52-lakh km. The AP officials proposed to reduce the operation of its buses by 52,000 route km so that the TSRTC can operate its bus services by another 50 route km in AP. The experts in transport sector welcome the proposal.

TSBIE instructs junior colleges to take all Corona precautions

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As the Telangana State Board of Intermediate Education (TSBIE) permits all the junior colleges to start the admission process for the first year students and take online classes for all the students, the Board has issued a set of guidelines for the college managements.

In a notice, addressed to all the Junior Colleges, IAS Syed Omar Jaleel, Secretary, TSBIE, instructed, "Online learning, teaching and monitoring and doubt clearance shall be con-



tinued and all teaching staff, non-teaching staff shall attend the work from home for counseling, Whatsapp group study, other online study group and

others till September 20." He added that the attendance of 50 per cent teaching and non-teaching staff shall be rotational basis on alternative days.

3 held for duping public promising 2BHK houses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The police on Friday arrested a three-member gang for cheating 89 victims and collecting money from them under the guise of providing them 2BHK houses.

The arrested persons were identified as VSK Vara Prasad, E Venkateshwara Raju and K Padma Durga.

Vara Prasad approached Raju through a friend. Raju convinced his relative Padma Durga and they both collected applications and Rs 1 crore from the victims.

Govt may hike salary of outsourced staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is understood to have in principle agreed to hike the salaries of class-IV Corona warriors working in government hospitals on outsourced basis.

Recently, the class-IV outsourced employees have urged the government to extend them some incentives in recognition of their services in hazardous circumstances. The beneficiaries would be sanita-

tion workers, security guards and those who serve the Corona patients. Health Minister Eatala Rajender held a high-level meeting to discuss the issue. He also held a meeting with trade union leaders and invited their suggestions on the issue. The Minister preferred to hike their wages instead of extending incentives. When he took it to the notice of KCR, the latter is learnt to have responded positively to the idea. Therefore, proposals are being prepared to hike salaries of the employees.

Projects, tanks brimming with water

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Many tanks in Telangana are overflowing, which was unprecedented in the state for the past six years, thanks to the recent incessant rains. While 13,000 tanks are overflowing the sluices, another 17,000 tanks are full to the brim. If the rains were to continue for some more days, many tanks would become full.

Of the 20,111 tanks in Godavari River basin, 6,630 are overflowing the sluices, while 10,900 are ready to overflow the sluices. Over 2,669 tanks in Karimnagar and 1,259 in Warangal district are over-



flowing. Over 5,000 tanks in the two districts are full up to the brim. About 3,800 tanks in Khammam district and 2,000 in Adilabad district are full up

to the brim. There are over 23,301 tanks in Krishna River basin. Of them, 6,500 are overflowing, while another 5,900 tanks are up to the brim. In

Mahabubnagar district, 3,390 tanks are overflowing, while it is 1,700 tanks in Medak district, 1,110 in Nalgonda district, 210 in Ranga Reddy district.

In the Krishna and Godavari River basins, 13,000 tanks out of the total 43,412 tanks are overflowing the sluices, while 17,000 are up to the brim. Over 20 lakh acres are being irrigated under tanks during the current Vanakalam season. With the implementation of the Mission Kakatiya, the ayacut under various tanks has increased by 51 per cent and 17 per cent of the dried bore wells got recharged.

MLC polls: TJS gathers support for Kodandaram

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) on Friday addressed letters to political parties seeking support in ensuing Graduate MLC elections for their chief Prof M Kodandaram. The TJS chief will contest from Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduates MLC constituency in the coming elections. The party leaders have submitted letters to Congress, TDP, CPI, CPM and New Democracy parties. The TJS leaders sought the support of these political parties stating

that the need of ensuring the victory of Prof Kodandaram is essential for the future politics of Telangana state. "Kodandaram will represent the youth, unemployment youth in the Legislative Council effectively if elected as an MLC in the ensuing Graduate MLC elections," they opined. The TJS leaders had already handed over the letters to TPCC and AICC and TTDP Chief L Ramana, CPI state secretary Chada Venkat Reddy and CPM state secretary Thammineni Veerabhadram.

SHORT READS



Mandatory daily antigen test for reporters, Parl staff

New Delhi: Amid fresh cases of coronavirus among MPs, reporters and parliamentary staff entering the Parliament complex will have to undergo mandatory antigen test on a daily basis, according to a new protocol put in place. Members of both Houses are undergoing RT-PCR test on regular intervals on a voluntary basis, said a senior Parliament official. A member of Parliament can undergo RT-PCR test as many times he or she likes. Journalists covering the Monsoon session from press galleries of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha also have the option to undergo the RT-PCR test which is valid for 72 hours. Since the report of the much reliable RT-PCR takes time, antigen test has been made mandatory on a daily basis. Several MPs had tested positive for COVID-19 around the time the session began.

Woman sexually harassed, her family forced to leave village

Muzaffarnagar (UP): A woman was allegedly sexually harassed and her family members threatened by the accused to withdraw the case against them in a village in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar district, police said on Friday. According to the First Information Report (FIR) lodged by the family, the woman was harassed by the accused on September 13. The accused also thrashed her family members when they objected to the act, police said. Under constant threat from the accused to withdraw the case, the family migrated from the village in New Mandi police station area on Thursday, they said. According to acting Station House Officer Sanjay Kumar, six people were booked in connection with the case.

MP calls for evolving research in Homeopathy

New Delhi: A BJP member in Rajya Sabha on Friday called for evolving research in Indian medicine systems of Homeopathy and Ayurveda, saying India can become a world leader by developing alternative technologies and not by following established technology. Speaking on 'The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020' and 'The Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020', which were promulgated as ordinances earlier, Sudhanshu Trivedi said there is a need to establish dedicated infrastructure in medical bodies in the country and thus the need for bringing the bills. Some opposition party members, however, took on the government for promulgating the ordinances.

Adityanath govt mulls Ordinance against 'love jihad'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Adityanath govt mulls ordinance against 'love jihad' Lucknow, Sep 18 (PTI) Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has asked officials to formulate a strategy and bring an ordinance if required to prevent religious conversions in the name of love, an official said on Friday. "It has been seen in the recent past that women have been made to convert in the name of love and marriage and later subjected to cruelty and even murder," the official who did not wished to be named said. "Taking a serious note of such incidents, the CM has directed that a concrete strategy be made to control such incidents," he added. "It has often been seen that this is being done in an organised manner," he claimed. "If required, an ordinance can be brought for it," he added. The aim is to ensure that such crimes are checked and effective

action is taken against the culprits. All this is being taken into consideration, he added. In Kanpur, the police had recently set up a Special Investigation Team to look into reports of "love jihad". Last year, the Uttar Pradesh State Law Commission had submitted a report to Adityanath, suggesting a new law to check forcible religious conversions. "The report was submitted along with a draft legislation, Uttar Pradesh Freedom of Religion Bill, 2019," law commission secretary Sapna Tripathi had said. The report was prepared after going through pre and post-independence laws in the country and neighbouring countries like Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan besides keeping in mind court judgments. "The commission is of the view that existing legal provisions are not enough to check religious conversions and on this



serious matter, a new law is needed like in some other states," the report said. The 268-page report included newspaper clippings regarding forcible conversions, international covenants on the right to religion, anti-conversion laws in neighbouring countries and

India. It said states like Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand had made special laws to ban conversions by force, fraud, marriage or allure-

Nadda slams Opposition over farm bills

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was going all out against the opposition for what he called 'falsehood' spread by it over their resistance to three farm bills, BJP President JP Nadda, too, staunchly defended the legislation. Interestingly, both deviated from their original topic - the PM was virtually inaugurating the Kosi mega bridge project and Nadda was launching a special edition of 'Kamal Sandesh' magazine. "First, peasants were in slavery. Prime Minister Modi gave a call to liberate farmers. This Bill gives them the free-

dom to choose whether the farmer sells his crop in mandi or sells it in any corner of the country," said Nadda. He reiterated that both systems of selling agricultural produce under the Agriculture produce market committee and the MSP from the Centre will continue to exist. In a



strong charge, Nadda alleged that those who stand with middlemen are objecting to these bills. "Those opposing it are speaking the language of middlemen and not of farmers," he remarked. "The Congress party had said in its manifesto that we will bring the farmers out from APMC, the Essential Commodities Act has rusted, we will change it," he said. PM Modi, too, called out the opposition and called their arguments a "blatant lie". This assertive and aggressive defence by the BJP President and the Prime Minister comes just a day after the resignation of Harsimrat Kaur Badal from the union cabinet protesting against the Bills.

BSY dismisses rumours of JD(S) joining govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Friday brushed aside speculation of Janata Dal (Secular) joining the state government or extending any support. The chief minister, who is in the national capital on a three-day tour, dismissed such reports that emerged after JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy recently met him to discuss "development-related works". "It is all speculation, there is no truth in it. As one of the leaders of the Opposition party, Kumaraswamy had recently met me to discuss development-related works. There was no political issue

discussed in that meeting," Yediyurappa told reporters here when asked about the reports. He said his party BJP has a comfortable majority in Karnataka and does not require any support from JD(S). Yediyurappa also refuted the Opposition's charge that his son and BJP state vice-president B Y Vijayendra was acting like a "super CM". He said Vijayendra was focusing on the party works and not interfering in the functioning of the government. "Some of the opposition leaders are making baseless allegations out of jealousy looking at his political growth," Yediyurappa said.

Parliament passes Bill to cut salaries of MPs by 30%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament on Friday passed a bill to reduce for one year the salaries of MPs by 30 per cent "to meet the exigencies arising out of COVID-19 pandemic". Rajya Sabha passed the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020. It had got the approval of Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The bill was introduced by Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi.

Centre insulting Corona warriors, says Rahul Gandhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday attacked the government for stating that data on healthcare staff who were affected by COVID-19 or had died from it is not maintained centrally and alleged that "corona warriors" are being insulted. Minister of State for Health Ashwini Choubey informed the Rajya Sabha this week that health is a state subject and "such data is not maintained at Central level by Ministry of Health". This was in response to a question on the number of healthcare staff, including doctors, nurses, support staff and



ASHA workers, who have been affected by coronavirus or died due to it. Tagging a news report on Choubey's reply, Gandhi titled his tweet, "Adverse data-free Modi government!" "Their (healthcare workers') safety and respect are more important than beating plates or lighting lamps," the former

Congress chief tweeted in Hindi, referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated campaigns honouring 'corona warriors'. "Modi government, why this insult of corona warriors?" Gandhi asked. Choubey, in his reply, however, also said the database of those seeking relief under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Insurance Package is maintained at national level. As many as 155 healthcare staff, including 64 doctors, have died due to the coronavirus infection, according to the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19, he said.

Covid recovery rate at 78.96%: Health Ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The top five states with a high number of active COVID-19 cases -- Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh -- are also the ones that are reporting a high level of recoveries, the health ministry said on Friday. With a record 87,472 patients having recuperated or having been discharged from home or facility-supervised care and hospitals in a span of 24 hours, the total number of COVID-19 recoveries has surged to 41,12,551 in the country, taking the recovery rate to 78.86 per cent, while the case fatality rate has dropped to 1.63 per cent, it added. The country has been consistently reporting a very high level of daily recoveries of more than 70,000 for the past 11 days, the ministry said. "Recovered cases of coronavirus infection are 4.04 times the number of active cases as

recoveries outnumber the latter by 30,94,797," it highlighted. "The top five states with high active caseload of COVID-19 are also the ones which are presently reporting a high level of recoveries," the ministry said. It said 59.8 per cent of the active cases are being reported from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. These states have also accounted for 59.3 per cent of the total recoveries and 90 per cent of the new recoveries are reported from 16 states and Union territories, the ministry said. Maharashtra (19,522) has accounted for 22.31 per cent of the new recoveries, Andhra Pradesh 12.24 per cent, Karnataka 8.3 per cent, Tamil Nadu 6.31 per cent and Chhattisgarh (six per cent). Together, these states account for 55.1 per cent of the new recoveries, the ministry said.

PM inaugurates rail projects for Bihar; slams UPA govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated the 'Kosi Rail Mahasetu' along with a slew of other rail projects for Bihar and hit out at the previous UPA government for the "slow" progress in the development of railways in the state during its rule. The prime minister dedicated the 'Kosi Rail Mahasetu' to the nation and inaugurated via video conference various projects related to electrification and new rail lines. Kosi rail mega bridge was 'dream project' of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the then Railway minister Nitish Kumar, but after the Vajpayee government, speed on this project slowed, Modi said. "In 2003, Atal ji was the prime minister and Nitish ji railway minister when the new Kosi rail line was planned with an aim to solve the problems being faced by people of Mithila and Kosi," Modi said.

Kejriwal appeals to all non-BJP parties to unite in RS to oppose farm bills

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal appealed to all non-BJP parties on Friday to unite in the Rajya Sabha and oppose three bills that he claimed would leave farmers in the hands of big companies for exploitation. In a tweet in Hindi, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief asked the non-BJP parties to ensure that all of their members are present in the House and that they do not stage a walkout "drama". "All three bills of the Centre will leave farmers in the hands of big companies for exploita-



tion. I request all the non-BJP parties to unite in the Rajya Sabha and oppose these bills, make sure all your MPs are present and do not stage a walkout drama. Farmers all over the country are watching you," he said. The Centre introduced the

Farmers' Produce Trade And Commerce (Promotion And Facilitation) Bill, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill in Parliament on Monday to replace ordinances promulgated earlier. These bills seek to provide a barrier-free trade for farmers' produce outside the notified farm mandis (wholesale markets) and empower farmers to enter into farming agreements with private players prior to production for the sale of their produce.

‘Affordable healthcare for every citizen’

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha approved two bills on Friday, replacing ordinances related to the Central Council of Homoeopathy and the Indian Medicine Central Council. The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 seeks to further extend the time to form the Central Council of Homoeopathy by a year, after exhausting two years

for the purpose. The Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 seeks a year's time to reconstitute the central council and provides for a board of directors to exercise its powers in the interim period. Replying to a debate on the two bills, Union Health minister Harsh Vardhan said the government is committed to providing affordable and easy healthcare facilities to every

citizen. He also defended the Centre's decision to bring ordinances, saying there was nothing "abnormal" and that governments have been taking this route, depending on the necessity. Both the bills were introduced in the Upper House on September 14, the first day of the ongoing monsoon session, which is being held in the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

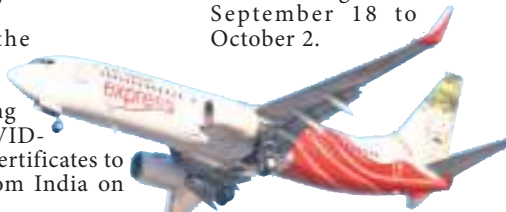
The Dubai Civil Aviation Authority has suspended Air India Express flights till October 2 for bringing passengers with COVID-positive certificates twice during the last couple of weeks, senior government officials said on Friday. As per the UAE government rules, each passenger travelling from India need to bring an original COVID-negative certificate from the RT-PCR test done 96 hours prior to the journey.

Dubai suspends AI Express flights till Oct 2 for bringing flyers with +ve certificates

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"A passenger, who had a COVID-positive certificate dated September 2, travelled on Air India Express' Jaipur-Dubai flight on September 4. A similar incident had happened with a passenger on one of the airline's other Dubai flights previously," said one of the officials. Both the incidents of passengers flying with COVID-positive certificates to Dubai from India on

Air India Express flights happened during the last couple of weeks, the officials noted. In a statement later during the day, Air India Express confirmed it had received a "notice of suspension" from the DCAA on September 17 to suspend its Dubai flights from September 18 to October 2.



Cong slams govt delay over Council of Homoeopathy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress slammed the government on Friday for the "inordinate" delay in constituting the Central Council of Homoeopathy, saying it is taking away the autonomy of such autonomous bodies, as it has done in the past with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020 seeks to further extend the time to form the Central Council of Homoeopathy by one year after exhausting two years for the purpose.



Congress leader Ripun Bora, who initiated the debate in the Rajya Sabha, also raised objections against the Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020, which is being discussed simultaneously with the Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

Provide gadgets, internet pack to poor students: Delhi HC to schools

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Friday directed private as well as government schools to provide gadgets and an internet package to poor students for online classes, saying the absence of such facilities prevent children from pursuing elementary education. A bench of Justices Manmohan and Sanjeev Narula said private unaided schools "shall be entitled to claim reimbursement of reasonable cost for procurement



of the equipment and internet package from the State under the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009, even though the State is not providing the same to its students". The bench directed consti-

tution of a three-member committee, comprising education secretary from the Centre or his nominee, Delhi government's education secretary or his nominee and a representative of the private schools, to expedite and streamline the process of identifying and supplying the gadgets to poor and disadvantaged students. The court said the committee shall also frame standard operating procedures (SOPs) for identifying the standard of the equipment and internet package to be supplied to the

poor and disadvantaged students. This would ensure uniformity in the gadgets and internet package being used by all the poor and disadvantaged students, the bench said. The judgment came on a PIL by NGO Justice for All, represented by advocate Khagesh Jha, seeking directions to the Centre and the Delhi government to provide free laptops, tablets or mobile phones to poor kids so that they can access classes online during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Covid tally in India past 52 lakh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's COVID-19 tally raced past 52 lakh with 96,424 people testing positive in a day, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease rose to 41,12,551 on Friday. The country's recovery rate stands at 78.86 per cent. The total coronavirus cases mounted to 52,14,677, while the

death toll climbed to 84,372 with the virus claiming 1,174 lives in a span of 24 hours, the data updated at 8 am showed. The COVID-19 case fatality rate due to the coronavirus infection has further dropped to 1.62 per cent. There are 10,17,754 active cases of COVID-19 in the country which comprises 19.52 per cent of the total caseload, the data stated.

Farmers' woes

The farm Bills may claim to open up the agricultural sector but the implied corporatisation may engulf farming communities



Corporatisation of agriculture in the US, where factory farming birthed an uninterrupted chain of “farm to fork,” has wiped out rural communities, their organic methods, their unique produce, their relevance and independent existence. It all began in the 1970s to realise a dream of becoming big enough to command the world’s food market with industrialised processes, merging of lands and shifting priorities to commodity crops. But in no time there was a glut due to over-production, farmers could never get the commensurate prices and were driven to debts. They had no option but to foreclose and sell out. Now farmers do not even make

up a quarter of the total US agricultural production. Buying into the promise of “making it big,” they stretched their resources and were subsumed by food giants. This is exactly the scenario that our farmers fear following the passage of farm Bills, which began as ordinances during the lockdown, in the Lok Sabha. Yes, structurally, they may seem to streamline the agricultural processes but the farmer is not willing to give up his right to exist on his terms. Worse, he fears that these could ultimately reduce the current system of open-ended FCI procurement by the State. Little wonder then that farmers have taken to the streets across North India despite the Prime Minister’s assurance that the new Bills would “empower” them by giving them direct linkages to the market and that their minimum support price (MSP) would still be guaranteed. Such has been the cascading effect of their anxieties that regional parties that sustain on the rural votebank, namely the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) and the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), are under pressure to withdraw support to the ruling BJP as allies. The farmers have made it very clear that there would be no political future for parties and MPs that voted with the Government. So the lone SAD Minister, Harsimrat Singh Badal, resigned as Union Minister of Food Processing Industries while in Parliament Sukhbir Singh Badal warned that the proposed laws would “destroy” the 50 years of hard work done by successive Punjab governments to build the farm sector. While the Government insists that the new laws will help create “one nation, one market” and remove trader barriers so that farmers can sell their produce outside notified grain markets, the latter fear that in an open, competitive market, they would not get the minimum support price that the Government has promised to continue. Besides, they feel that entering into contracts with corporations would willy-nilly give the latter negotiating rights and greater control that would impinge on their autonomy and decision-making. And that although the older system would continue, as a weakened parallel mechanism, it would ultimately crumble before emerging monopolies. It is the implication behind the grandiloquence of a prosperous countryside and the devil in the detail that have our farming community up in arms. For example, the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill 2020, allows buys and sales outside the notified Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis*, thereby limiting their cartelisation tendencies. It also prohibits State Governments from collecting the fee, cess or levy for trade outside the APMC markets. A licence won’t be required to trade in farm produce and anyone with a PAN card can now buy directly from growers. Hence they want clarity on what “outside” means and contrary to perception that they want middlemen out, they actually have a trusted bond with their existing commission agents, as their licence is proof enough of their credibility and delivery abilities, and would not want to experiment with an untested model. With most of them not literate enough about exercising their rights, dispute resolution could also end up being loaded against them. Besides, they would want direct payment as banks could deduct amounts as loan recovery. State Governments like Punjab are obviously upset that access to another market would dry up their own revenue from APMC *mandis* and are seeing this as an affront to federal controls. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, seeks to bring uniformity in contractual farming rules and State APMC acts. So the farmer can now enter into a contract with a corporate entity at a mutually agreed price. The problem here is that the mechanism for price fixation is not codified and farmers fear that corporations could use their institutional heft to manipulate or browbeat them into accepting their terms. Finally, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020, aims to remove cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes from a regulated list, which is being seen as a major threat to the food security of the poor. The Government argues that as a food-surplus nation, we don’t need it anymore but the pandemic-induced crisis has shown us how supply chain disruptions and local level hoarding can lead to a price spiral.

Farmers are not entirely without reason, battling as they are bad loans and non-payment of sugarcane dues in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. They do not want to be swamped. Many experts would argue that it is easy enough to push reforms in a sector that anyway makes a very small portion of our GDP. But farmers make up 60 per cent of the country’s population, a voter base that no political party can ignore. Both the SAD and JJP owe their political legitimacy to farmers and have no option but to advocate their rights. Besides, both represent States that are heavily dependent on procurement at MSP. The Bills may well turn out to be the BJP’s Achilles’ heel provided the Opposition is quick enough to mount a united campaign.

Flight of fancy

Aerial sightseeing has become very popular as several nations still have travel restrictions on incoming arrivals



It began with some intrepid folks chartering planes to fly around. Then airlines such as Singapore Airlines and Australia’s Qantas caught wind of the idea and ran with it. What are we talking about? The concept of “flights to nowhere in particular” seems to have taken off, literally. Qantas’ recent trip, involving low-flying, aerial survey of the Great Barrier Reef, was sold out. Airlines are happy as this allows them to fly their aircraft relatively full, thus keeping some jobs safe and their expensive assets, the planes themselves, flying. Of course, scenic flights that operate in and out of the same airport are not a new concept. Qantas itself has run seasonal flights to Antarctica for several years every southern summer. But 2020, as we all know, is not like any other year, with several nations still putting travel restrictions on incoming arrivals, some not even allowing non-citizens to return and others instituting strict quarantine regulations, even for travel within a country.

As a result the global aviation business is hurting, thousands of pilots, cabin crew, ground crew and aircraft maintenance engineers have already lost jobs and unless things change dramatically, several thousand more will lose their jobs in the coming months. Many airlines have already shut for good and many more are in deep financial distress. It is not a good time to be an airline or be employed by one. So yes, while these flights of fancy might seem extravagant and a waste of money and resources, even adding pollution, their popularity means that airlines will probably survive as well as regain some overall confidence in flying. Let us not forget, these flights are being bought by people, who after six months of being grounded, want to get back in the air. They want to experience airport security and airline food for better or for worse. The very frequent flyer might have celebrated the first couple of months of no flying but almost every single person in that category misses that experience now and these flights, pointless as they might seem, allow these people to get a fix. There are many willing to take off in India as well and maybe a scenic flight or two around the Himalayas or the wonderful coastal areas may not be a bad idea here.

opinion06Presumption of innocence

The media overlooked the principles of ethical juridical coverage while tracking Sushant Singh Rajput’s death and its sordid aftermath



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Media, particularly television, coverage of Sushant Singh Rajput’s suicide — I will call the manner of his death so until established otherwise — and its aftermath has raised questions. Avoiding the mutually accusatory statements that have been doing the rounds, I would rather focus on some of the deeper issues involved. The first is whether the extent of coverage extended to it is justified.

The event, doubtless, was most tragic. A young man, who has given much to Indian cinema, and could have given more, has been cut short in his prime. The unnatural nature of his passing, the allegations and counter-allegations ranging over it, the controversy about who should investigate it, the Centre’s decision to put the CBI in charge, the Supreme Court’s verdict endorsing the transfer and the subsequent developments, certainly merited media coverage. But did it have to take up huge chunks of prime-time coverage on most channels since June 14 when the alleged suicide occurred?

The question is relevant when the country is facing a serious threat of Chinese aggression, a raging and escalating COVID-19 pandemic and an economy in crisis — to mention three of the most important challenges. The argument that these are also receiving attention raises the question: Is the attention of the deserved quality and extent? The question can be countered by two arguments. First, any answer, in the negative or affirmative, will involve a large measure of subjective judgement and, hence, cannot be regarded as definitive. The second can be that viewers want the kind of coverage provided.

As to the first, all judgments on all issues are subjective in the sense that whatever the quality of the evidence, a person or a group must assess it and come to a conclusion. The assessment is by individuals who have their own predilections and orientations, which they may or may not be able to overcome. But then, a society would not have been able to function if it did not proceed by accepting as valid judgements that, under the normative criteria embedded in its underlying social contract, passed the tests of rationality and morality.



Here, rationality dictates the question: Whether Rajput’s death and its sordid aftermath has greater relevance to the lives of the country and its people than the Chinese aggression, the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the economic crisis? One can argue that the aftermath’s importance can hardly be under-stated because it is leading to the unravelling of the Bollywood drug network, which in turn may lead to the eradication of the drug trade’s tentacles throughout the country. Against this, one has the Union Minister of State G Kishan Reddy’s written reply to a question by a Congress MP, K Sudhakaran, in the Lok Sabha on September 15 stating, “Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) carries out search, seizure, arrest and investigation continuously throughout the year on the actionable inputs developed on its own and/or on receipt from other sources. During the period of COVID-19 lockdown, no such actionable inputs were received by the NCB revealing the nexus between people in the film industry and drug traffickers.”

He, however, added, “However, a case in this regard has been registered by NCB Mumbai zonal unit on August 28, 2020. Till date, in this case 10 persons have been arrested. Drugs such as *Ganja*, *Hashish*, *Tetra Hydro Cannabinol* and *Lysergic acid Di-ethylamide* have been seized in the operation.” Clearly, one has to see what the NCB produces. Until then it would be a bit too much to cite the possibility of its unearthing a pan-India drug racket to justify the massive coverage given to the train of events following Rajput’s death. This leads to the second justification cited above: Viewers want it. This may be true given that the titillation and voyeuristic pleasure that a very large number of people get from watching the lives of celebrities unscramble or the aftermath of a shocking tragedy unfold.

The mere fact that people want to see something does not make it acceptable. Time was when nothing was considered wrong with masses assembled in Rome’s Colosseum roaring in applause as a gladiator killed another or a lion. Even now, many in Spain are happy to witness bullfights in which matadors kill bulls in unequal combat, and thousands participate in *jallikattu* in South India in which bulls suffer horribly.

Clearly, popular participation or viewing does not by itself justify an event or its extensive and approbatory coverage — especially when it diverts attention from critical issues facing a country and trivialises discourse in what the German social philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, calls the “public sphere.” The latter, he states in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), is a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space. In its ideal form, the public sphere is “made

up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state.” It is a space where private individuals discuss public matters, which mediates between society and the state, leading to a critical consensus translating itself into a coherent public opinion, which makes the state accountable to citizens. The media has a critical role in providing information for discussion in the public sphere. It, however, also has a responsibility to ensure that investigations proceed along right lines. Investigating and prosecuting agencies charged with delivering criminal justice are known to make mistakes and even frame innocent persons, often when under pressure to solve a crime. This writer’s decision to become a journalist has been significantly influenced by his witnessing, as a school student in the early 1950s, the film *Call Northside 777*. Directed by Henry Hathaway, it was based on the real life efforts by a *Chicago Daily Times* reporter, James McGuire, undertaken at the behest of the city editor, Karin Walsh, that led to the release of Joseph Majczek, wrongly convicted of murdering a police officer and serving a 99-year prison term.

One, however, must proceed with extreme caution. Pressures on investigative agencies to produce results can make probes go horribly wrong, leading to prolonged, rough interrogation, arrest and prosecution of innocent people whose lives are dev-

asted in the process even if the judiciary exonerates them in the end. The matter reminds one of the title of Malcom Feeley’s much-discussed book, *The Process is the Punishment: Handling Cases in a Lower Criminal Court*, first published in 1979. Doubtless, the book deals with lower criminal courts in the US and not India. Also, we are talking here not just about lower criminal courts but the entire process. It can be a long haul, involving expenses in the form of lawyers’ fees and transport, time spent in preparations, which often involves time taken off from income-generating activities and, of course, stress and worry.

Should a person, eventually proved innocent, have been made to suffer all this because media pressure led to him/her being pronounced guilty? This does not mean that investigative journalism should not extend to cases under investigation. But it does mean scrupulous observance of the canons of fair play and integrity and two cardinal principles of democratic, libertarian jurisprudence, wedded to respect for human rights.

The first is enshrined in Article 11(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. It reads, “Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.” It is also incorporated in The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, originally Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which came into force on 3 September 1953. It states in Article 6(2), “Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.”

The famous English jurist, William Blackstone, articulated the second principle when he wrote in *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, “...all presumptive evidence of felony should be admitted cautiously, for the law holds that it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.” Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States, went further and said, in a letter in March, 1785, “That it is better 100 guilty Persons should escape than that one innocent Person should suffer, is a Maxim that has been long and generally approved.”

Journalists should remember both, always.

(The writer is Consultant Editor, *The Pioneer*, and author)

SOUND BITE

I have always enjoyed watching Dhoni play because of the style he has. The aggression...I really like that. It has influenced me in my game, too, as football is a game where you need to be tough.

Footballer
—Anirudh Thapa



Farming is the soul of Punjab. Wounds on the body can heal but wounds of the soul will not be tolerated and condoned.

Congress leader
—Navjot Singh Sidhu



Since the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, Asian-Americans have been forced to endure demean-



No matter how hard you work and what you do, the President is going to do something that is detrimental to keeping the Americans safe.

Ex-White House Aide
—Olivia Troye



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Question Hour matters

Sir — Question Hour is the liveliest hour in Parliament and lends a certain depth to proceedings. MPs ask questions to hold the Government and its Ministers accountable. It is a sacred parliamentary device meant for exercising legislative control over executive actions. Unfortunately, the ruling party has watered down the Question Hour for this monsoon session. This decision erodes the constitutional mandate of parliamentary oversight over executive actions as envisaged under Article 75 (3) of the Indian Constitution.

Noor Ahmad
Hyderabad

Stranded Indians

Sir — It was heart-wrenching to watch the viral video on social media, which claimed that thousands of Indians, mostly from UP and Bihar, are lodged in jails of Saudi Arabia for more than six months now. With the lockdown eased, many Governments have evacuated their citizens as has ours. But somehow we have been callous about these helpless

migrants, who have not been able to articulate their plight.

AMS Nadwi
Lucknow

Biased investigation

Sir — The ongoing investigation into the Delhi riots of February 2020 has begun to assume a far-facial character. The focus of the

investigation has shifted from the perpetrators of the riot and its instigators and turned towards only civil society dissenters and protesters of Government policies. In effect, the conspiratorial net has been cast so wide as to capture anyone who opposed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), be it a student activist, political leader or voluntary worker. The investigation must

be thorough, fair and transparent, and deemed as such.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

China’s digital theft

Sir — The collection of digital data on our President, Prime Minister, politicians, judges, military officers, industrialists and other dignitaries by China is a



recurring frictions could escalate anytime. The Defence Minister underlined the state of preparedness of Indian troops for any eventuality. At the same time, he sounded statesman-like when he observed that there are many ways to start a war, not many to end it. Hence, it is axiomatic that cooperation is better than confrontation.

G David Milton
Maruthancode

matter of national security. An English newspaper report said that a company associated with the Chinese Government and the military is monitoring the Internet and social media activities of about 10,000 distinguished Indians and their close ones. It is clear from this that along with strategic and economic aggression, the digital breach is also a part of China’s hybrid war against India. Along with the expansion of information technology and the Internet, the issue of data security is a matter of grave concern.

Bhupendra Singh Ranga
Haryana

Classes resume

Sir—The Telangana Government has announced that senior students of classes IX to XII should start attending school with 50 per cent teachers. However, with many parents unwilling to pay the fees for the month of June, the State Government must arrange the necessary amount from its Treasury to get the system rolling.

SM Arif Hussain
Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

The expanding judicial remits

Over the years, the courts have changed the face of justice in India and focussed on issues where the executive has failed in its duty



VK BAHUGUNA

In any system of governance, the judiciary is always an essential part of civilised life. In Indian history, too, kings played a very important part in dispensing justice. In the days of yore, population pressure was less, crimes were few as people were more law-abiding, resources were available in abundance and the system of justice was not stretched like it is today. By and large the judicial system followed the dictates of the rulers and it sufficed. However, with the advent of democracy, modern jurisprudence developed. Independent jurisprudence got a big boost after the Magna Carta was signed by the King of England in 1215. Now, people in most parts of the world recognise the judiciary as an independent pillar of Government. It is complementary to the executive and the legislature but independent from the other branches of Government, as judicial accountability enshrines the principle of neutrality.

The beginning of codified common law in India can be traced back to 1726 when a Mayor's Court in then Madras, Bombay and Calcutta was established by the East India Company. Needless to say, the courts changed the face of justice in India and focussed on issues where the executive failed in its duty. This judicial assertion started from the Kesavananda Bharati case when it ruled that basic features of the Constitution cannot be changed. The enunciation of the doctrine of Public Interest Litigation (a relaxation on the traditional rule of *locus standi*) by Justice PN Bhagwati opened the courts to socially-disadvantaged sections of society and course correction in the functioning of the executive.

In the recent past, many landmark judgments in the field of environment have endeared judges to the people of the country. Notable among them were Justice Kuldip Singh and Justice AN Verma. The 1996 Godavarman case turned the trajectory of forest and wildlife management in India. Despite the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, the lackadaisical attitude of the Central and State Governments put forests and biodiversity at great risk. Interventions by courts in the last 24 years forced executive agencies to act for the smooth implementation of constitutional provisions for the conservation of forests and wildlife resources.

India was one of the earliest nations in the tropical world to implement working plan provisions for managing forests sustainably. However, the working plans were almost forgotten by it. The Supreme Court, through its interventions, streamlined forest management in the country and forced respective governments to prepare and regulate management of forests through working plans. Now the results are visible on the ground.

Similarly, rampant mining in forest areas is being closely monitored by the apex court. This positive action of the Supreme Court struck a balance in restoring the constitutional obligation of the executive. Yet another instance of excellent intervention relates to declaring Ganga River a live entity by the Uttarakhand High Court. Such decisions have touched the lives of millions of our citizens. What is most significant in this regard is the recognition of the rights of those who cannot speak for themselves like trees, animals and rivers which are crucial for sustaining life on Earth. The establishment of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) in the country, which now has an impressive collection of nearly ₹50,000 crore in its kitty, was possible on the direction of the Supreme Court.



In yet another epoch-making intervention, the apex court came down heavily on the real estate-politician-bureaucrat nexus in Noida. A Supreme Court Bench, headed by Justice Arun Mishra, sent a stern message to those involved in the Amrapali housing projects. The builder Anil Sharma, who was allegedly in league with politicians and officers of the Noida Authority, swindled more than ₹8,000 crore of homebuyers' hard-earned money. This crime was perpetrated under the noses of those who were supposed to protect the interest of the people. The problem with our governance system is such that it gleefully ignores the sufferings of the people at the hands of criminals and the corrupt. The Supreme Court has been relentlessly trying to restore faith in the rule of law among the 40,000 hapless homebuyers while the executive with all its power has failed miserably on all counts. The court had appointed a receiver for the case, tied up funds from banks and asked the National Building Corporation to complete the projects. The promoters of Amrapali are cooling their heels in jail for the last six months and their properties are under auction.

The vital question is why does the executive fail in its duty and why does the judiciary have to step in? The answer lies in the lop-sided democracy we follow, wherein only vote-fetching and Government formation are a priority of our political masters and public interest takes a back seat. Because of this the remits of the judiciary are being redefined. The judiciary, however, also needs to reinvent itself on certain issues concerning quick delivery of affordable justice so that it does not fall into the same rut like the executive.

(The writer is a retired civil servant)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

YOU LOOK AT COUNTRIES. IN AUSTRIA THEY LIVE IN THE FOREST. AND THEY DON'T HAVE FIRES LIKE THIS. AND THEY HAVE MORE EXPLOSIVE TREES. —US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP



AUSTRIA IS A COUNTRY WHERE PEOPLE DO NOT LIVE IN THE FOREST, BUT RATHER WITH THE FOREST AND IN A CLOSE, SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE. —AUSTRIAN AGRICULTURE MINISTER ELISABETH KOESTINGER

A matter of interest

If borrowers get interest relief during the moratorium period, bank investors and depositors would stand to lose unless compensated by the Govt, like it happens in farm loan waivers



SUBHASH CHANDRA PANDEY

Responding to the pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had "permitted" banks to grant moratorium on payment of instalments of term loans due after March 1 up to August 31. A similar dispensation was "allowed" on recovery of interest on working capital. The moratorium was initially permitted up to the end of April and 55.1 per cent of customers of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs), accounting for 50 per cent of outstanding credit, had availed this facility. In Public Sector Banks (PSBs), 80.3 per cent of all individual customers, accounting for 80 per cent of total outstanding individual loans, opted for the moratorium. A whopping 74 per cent of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) borrowers and 28.8 per cent of corporate borrowers, covering 81.5 per cent and 58 per cent (by outstanding amount in category loans), availed the facility.

For private banks, 41.8 per cent of individual customers, accounting for 80 per cent of outstanding individual loans, and 20.9 per cent of all MSME customers opted for moratoriums, comprising 42.5 per cent of outstanding loans to MSMEs. About 21.6 per cent of corporate borrowers, covering 19.6 per cent of total outstanding corporate loans, had availed the facility.

The Supreme Court has extended the moratorium and the Central Government has appointed an expert panel to look into the issue. Exactly how many loans accounts and what loan amount is under moratorium are not known. Some borrowers may have decided against seeking the moratorium facility due to uncertainty about relief on interest. Had the interest relief been announced upfront, almost all borrowers would have instantly opted for the moratorium, except possibly for borrowers too proud of their financial standing to seek any relief.

Since the verdict of the apex court was not available by August 31, it was the borrowers' call to take a wager on the verdict and decide whether to opt for a moratorium or not. It is unclear if the relief, if and when granted, would be available only to those availing of the moratorium. Overall, the system lacks incentives for those remaining fully compliant while the non-compliant people may hope to get some relief. Had the interest relief been a matter of legal right under the Banking Regulation or Disaster Management Acts, it would have been through by now. The Disaster Management Act (DMA), empowering the Government to take immediate relief and rescue measures, cannot be over-read to give it unfettered powers to deal with the full economic fallout of the disaster. It certainly does not empower the Government to alter terms of private contracts on jobs, rentals, sales, lending and so on. That explains why the tone and tenor of parts of the "orders" issued under the DMA is not peremptory, prescriptive, definitive but indicative, persuasive and advisory in nature. Hence, legally binding orders regarding timely payment of full salaries, non-recovery of rent and school fees and so on could not be issued for this reason. Appeals to good conscience is a different matter.

Likewise, the Banking Regulation Act (BR Act) would by itself not confer any rights on the RBI to mandate any alteration in individual contracts entered into by the banks unless supplemented with legal remedies under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act (SARFAESI Act) or the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Appropriately, the RBI has "permitted" grants of moratorium while extending regulatory forbearance on recognition of the non-performing asset (NPA). The BR Act does not empower the RBI to mandate

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IN THE ABSENCE OF FULLY DISAGGREGATED DATA ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOANS UNDER MORATORIUM, A BACK-OF-THE-ENVELOPE QUANTIFICATION OF THE IMPACT OF INTEREST RELIEF CAN BE ₹1 LAKH CRORE PER MONTH ASSUMING INTEREST RELIEF TO BE ABOUT ONE PER CENT PER MONTH ON TOTAL PRE-PANDEMIC OUTSTANDING CREDIT OF ABOUT ₹100 LAKH CRORE. EVEN DIRECT FISCAL RELIEF TO THE GENERAL POPULATION IS NOT OF THIS MAGNITUDE

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changing loan terms already contracted. Loan contracts can be changed only on the orders of insolvency courts. Mandatory moratorium requires more than the BR Act.

There are no free lunches in economics except those paid for by others. If borrowers get interest relief during the moratorium period, bank investors and depositors would stand to lose unless compensated by the Government, like it happens in farm loan waivers. Charity at others' expense is systemic. Relief to borrowers at the expense of depositors is akin to relief to consumers ending up suppressing remunerative market prices for farmers. The bank depositors are also adversely impacted by the pandemic-induced fall in interest rates that stand to benefit new borrowers as well as the borrowers who are able to refinance high-cost old loans. The post-outbreak rate cuts and liquidity infusion by the RBI, aided by rising foreign exchange reserves, has caused a precipitous fall in interest rates. Some are offering record-low home loan interest rates under seven per cent per annum with new products of repo-linked home loans on offer. Low interest rates bring cheer to borrowers but gloom to depositors.

There are no fiscal guarantees to depositors on minimum interest rates and the IBC haircuts have been too costly in some cases. When corporate borrowers get a tax reduction bonanza, they don't share the booty with lenders as they are not obliged to. When farm loans are waived, Governments provide fiscal support to banks but at present the Centre does not seem able and willing to compensate the banks for interest relief.

In the absence of fully disaggregated data on different types of loans under moratorium, a back-of-the-envelope quantification of the impact of interest relief can be ₹1 lakh crore per month,

assuming interest relief to be about one per cent per month on total pre-pandemic outstanding credit of about ₹100 lakh crore. Even direct fiscal relief to the general population is not of this magnitude.

Financial stakes on the Supreme Court's verdict are very high. The interest relief has been sought from the highest court of justice precisely because it is not a legal right. The golden balance of justice is being watched by distressed borrowers and anxious depositors. All borrowers are not equally distressed by the pandemic. Some differentiating criterion based on quantum of liability outstanding on March 1 and purpose of loan (whether educational; for first home/car or second one, for the Economically Weaker Section or affordable housing, past credit history) and proven impact of the contagion on income can be evolved to give relief to a truly needy class of borrowers. The relief even to this subset should not be entirely a burden on bank depositors. Ideally such relief is best provided by governments under fiscal stimulus paid by taxpayers, current or future.

The need to maintain the health of banks can hardly be overemphasised. Deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs stigmatising indebtedness (indebted person embarrassed and lenders reviled) continue to change worldwide.

Post World War, the wheels of growth are lubricated by the continuous supply of credit. India joined the borrow/spend bandwagon in the 80s. Lending by Scheduled Commercial Banks rose from ₹8,64,300 crore (30 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product [GDP]) at the end of March 2004 to ₹67,35,200 crore at the end of March 2014 (60 per cent of the GDP). At present, bank lending is only about 50 per cent of the GDP.

As on July 31, the total deposits of SCBs were ₹141,61,689 crore (₹127,44,583 crore a year ago); outstanding credit was

₹102,65,888 crore (₹97,29,002 crore a year ago) and investments were ₹42,78,294 crore (₹35,57,063 crore a year ago). The combined effect of risk aversion of banks to lend and predominantly domestic financing of fiscal deficit is that only about two-third of deposits get lent to non-Government entities.

We have made great strides in terms of expanding the reach of banking services and financialisation of savings but high-profile delinquencies by those who can afford to pay continue to eclipse these achievements.

The gross NPA of SCBs that had peaked to 11.2 per cent in 2017-18 has been brought down to 8.5 per cent by March. This achievement is at great cost to bank investors/depositors on account of hefty haircuts following not-so-competitive slump sales of distressed companies under the conventional, single round bidding system being followed under the IBC. The RBI has assessed that the gross NPA of all SCBs may increase from 8.5 per cent in March to 12.5 per cent by March 2021 and even to 14.7 per cent if the adverse economic impact of the pandemic is very severe. Seeing the plight of forecasting tools, the economic fallout of the contagion is hard to predict and measure.

Since bank lending is only about 50 per cent of the GDP and post-pandemic recovery would require a heavy dose of credit, it is imperative to maintain incentives for financial savings.

Erosion of bank profitability runs the risk of dire consequences of de-financialisation or informalisation of savings, derailing the hard-won recovery. The banking system needs calibrated support to prevent relapse into transmitted sickness.

(The writer is a retired IAAS officer and former Special Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.)

Fight hunger with an inter-sectoral strategy

The 'POSHAN Abhiyaan' seems to have made some headway with an ambitious target of achieving a malnutrition-free India by 2022



SUNIL RAJPAL

It is disconcerting that every second child in India suffers some form of nutritional failure in India. Over the years, Government data have borne witness to how many people, especially women and children, do not get three square meals in a day. Worryingly, the potential disruptions caused by the lockdown may make the varied forms of malnutrition a lasting reality. However, the launch of the Government's flagship programme 'POSHAN Abhiyaan', seems to have made some headway, with an ambitious target of achieving a malnutrition-free India by 2022.

It also aims to reduce stunting in children aged between zero and five

years from 38.4 per cent to 25 per cent during the same period, along with reducing the level of anaemia and low birth weight in children.

With inter-sectoral convergence being the key strategy, the programme makes a shift from the existing approach of making planning and implementation the responsibility of one Ministry. Instead, it rightly notes the various critical components of success and makes 'POSHAN Abhiyaan' a multi-ministerial initiative. While the Ministry of Women and Child Development acts as the nodal office, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is responsible for the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) that ensures cleanliness and hygiene and the Ministry of Education is responsible for the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDMS).

Two other Ministries, that of Health and Family Welfare and the one responsible for Rural Development, are looking after health programmes such as Mission

Indradhanush for immunisation coverage and rural income schemes, such as MNREGA, respectively. The LPG distribution scheme by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas enabled safe and hygienic cooking in underprivileged households.

But will India accept malnutrition as everyone's problem? The copious fund allocation for the 'POSHAN Abhiyaan' and its increase in the past three years have shown the Government's sincerity in taking the mission to its intended conclusion. From ₹950 crore in 2017-18, the current allocation for the 'POSHAN Abhiyaan' reached a sum of ₹3,400 crore for the financial year 2019-20. However, the potential challenge can be bringing social and behavioural change towards malnutrition at the community level. Ensuring equitable nutrition to build a healthier nation will require the following.

Eating local and seasonal food: This comprises a part of the trend known as "sustainable eating" and has

been proven to be an economical solution to the food crisis globally. This saves time and the cost of transportation while promoting the use of fewer preservatives. Such food items are also suitable to fulfil the nutritional needs of the people in a way that is commensurate with the local environment.

The concept of introducing kitchen gardens in schools to fulfil some part of the requirements under the MDMS is an innovative step. In the coming days, introducing more steps, such as promotion of local, nutritious millet and crop diversification to promote traditional millet will be the right steps to complement this ongoing effort. Recent studies have observed that investing \$1 in nutrition-related interventions will have economic gains of about \$19 to \$22.

Addressing intrinsic social and cultural biases: In his paper 'POSHAN Abhiyaan: Making Nutrition a Jan Andolan', NITI Aayog member Vinod K Paul and co-

authors observe that despite the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 mandating the legal age of marriage at 18 for girls, 30 per cent of them are married before that age and eight per cent are already pregnant by the time they are 15-19 years of age. Facing intra-household deprivations due to their sex and abject poverty, these young girls often forego necessary nutrition, care, and rest even during their pregnancy, thus delivering low birth weight babies. For these babies, the cycle of malnutrition has already begun, they note.

This long-standing social bias deepens with socio-economic nuances. For example, in tribal households, the overall amount of food is anyway low and the men, by tradition, get the larger share of it, considering the physical labour they must undertake. A male child may get less to eat than his father, but is likely to get more than his mother, grandmother or sister. There is a need to free nutrition from the perceived requirement of the

receiver. Disseminating a scientifically-validated diet chart according to age and sex to the Panchayat level can help in spreading awareness and help households modify their practices.

Clear and visible measures for better accountability: Owing to the possible institutional leakages, Government initiatives should be monitored by some metric for accountability. For this, an enhanced information and process system is crucial. Monitoring, surveillance, and evaluation remain critical to all Government initiatives not only to firm up the people's trust but for better outcomes as well. Understanding ground-level realities will not only enrich policymakers' understanding, it may help in building a positive perspective among beneficiaries about public interventions. Public consultations, surveys among beneficiaries and social audits are some of the most effective ways to do this.

Building a case against hidden hunger: Few realise that malnutrition

is not exclusively a rural phenomenon. Many people, especially children, in the cities, too, suffer from malnutrition, albeit of a different kind. Since a good part of their diet is filled with refined and finished items, not to mention the large amounts of salt, sugar and trans-fat they consume, the children lack micronutrients such as iron and zinc. Traditional crops and millet, marked as nutri-cereals that should have been part of our diet, are fast becoming a favourite of the educated and wealthier part of the society. However, as companies producing fast-moving consumer goods look to the rural market to revive from the economic effect of the pandemic, it is important to ensure that rural consumers do not acquire the habits of cities. The onus is on the Government to ensure that the learnings from the cities reach the villages before it is too late.

(The writer is Associate Professor, Health Economist, IIHMR University, Jaipur)



CAPSULE

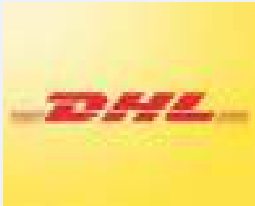


Expecting continuous improvement in leather exports: CLE
New Delhi:The country's exports of leather and footwear items are expected to see continuous improvement in the growth rate in the coming months on account of increasing demand in global markets, CLE said on Friday. Council for Leather Exports (CLE) Chairman Aqeel Ahmed Panaruna said the exports in August stood at USD 356.15 million and 'our industry is confident of achieving 90 per cent of last year's exports in September'.The sector's export in July was USD 333 million and USD 245 million in June.He added that as of now, there is an increase in demand for casual products and lesser demand for formal items, as more people are still working from home.But, we are optimistic that once the pandemic situation settles down, the overall demand will increase and there will be more opportunities for sector.



Angel Broking's Rs 600-cr IPO to open on Sep 22

New Delhi: Angel Broking on Friday said it will launch its initial public offering (IPO) on September 22 to raise an estimated Rs 600 crore. The company has fixed a price band of Rs 305-306 per share for its IPO, Angel Broking said in a virtual press conference.The initial share-sale will be open for public subscription on September 22 and close on September 24, while the bidding for anchor investors will open on September 21. Angel Broking is aiming to raise Rs 600 crore through the IPO, which comprises fresh issuance of shares worth Rs 300 crore and offer for sale of Rs 300 crore by promoters and other shareholders.International Finance Corporation will sell shares to the tune of Rs 120 crore in the offer for sale. Proceeds of the issue will be utilised for meeting working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes. Angel Broking, a leading full-service retail broking house in the country, has presence across 1,800 cities and towns through a network of sub-brokers and 110 branches.



DHL Express announces annual price adjustments

Coimbatore: DHL, leading international express service provider, announced a price hike in shipment rates for India on Friday that will come into effect on January 1, 2021.The increase in the country will be 6.9 per cent, compared to 2020, a DHL release said Further, the surcharge for Overweight Pieces and Non-Stackable Pallets will be adjusted to Rs 7,250 per piece and Rs 15,000 per pallet.This is to continuously ensure the resilience of its network and constantly maintain high service standards. "At DHL Express, it is our endeavor to deliver unparalleled quality to our customers.This needs us to make significant and continuous investments in infrastructure and technology," DHL Express India Country Manager R S Subramanian said. Prices are adjusted on an annual basis by DHL Express, taking into consideration inflation and currency dynamics such as administrative costs related to regulatory and security measures. These measures are updated by national and international authorities on a regular basis.

Google removes Paytm app from Play Store

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Google on Friday said it has removed Paytm app from the Play Store for violation of its policy on sport betting activities. Paytm will not be available for download now but there will be no impact on existing users of the app.

"The app was blocked for violation of play policies - a clarification of our policy was released earlier today ahead of the IPL tournament," Google said in an e-mailed response on Friday.

Google also said that only the app availability on Play Store is impacted and there is no impact on users.In a tweet, Paytm said Paytm Android app is temporarily unavailable on Google's Play Store for new downloads or updates.

"It will be back very soon. All your money is completely safe, and you can continue to enjoy your Paytm app as normal," it added. Paytm is a popular app for digital transactions.

In a blog on Friday, Google said it does not allow apps facilitating sports betting and will remove such apps from the Google Play Store.

"We don't allow online casinos or support any unregulated gambling apps that facilitate



'Will remove apps that facilitate sports betting from Play Store'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Google on Friday said it does not allow apps facilitating sports betting and will remove such apps from the Google Play Store.

There is often a surge in launch of such apps before major sporting tournaments like the IPL. The latest season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) is scheduled to start from September 19 in the United Arab Emirates.

"We don't allow online casino

or support any unregulated gambling apps that facilitate sports betting. This includes if an app leads consumers to an external website that allows them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money or cash prizes, it is a violation of our policies," Google said in a blog post.

It added that these policies are in place to protect users from potential harm.Google did not specify if any apps have been removed for non-compliance on these grounds.Further,

sports betting. This includes if an app leads consumers to an external website that allows them to participate in paid tournaments to win real money or cash prizes, it is a violation of our policies," the blog post said. According to the blog post, these policies are in place to protect users from potential harm.

There is often a surge in launches of such apps before major sporting tournaments like the IPL.

Google said that when an app violates these policies, it notifies the developer of the violation and removes the app from Google Play until the developer brings the app into compliance."And in the case where there are repeated policy violations, we may take more serious action which may include terminating Google Play Developer accounts. Our policies are applied and enforced on all developers consistently," the blog posted.

Kia Motors launches Sonet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

South Korean auto major Kia Motors on Friday launched its compact SUV Sonet in India, priced between Rs 6.71 lakh and Rs 11.99 lakh (ex-showroom), marking its foray into the highly competitive and fast-growing segment.

The sub-four metre model comes in both petrol and diesel engine options and will compete with the likes of Hyundai Venue, Maruti Suzuki Vitara Brezza, Tata Motors Nexon, Honda WR-V and Ford Ecosport, among others.

In total, Kia Motors India said, the Sonet will be available across 17 variants, including two petrol engines, two diesel engines (WGT and VGT configurations), five transmissions and two trim levels -- Tech Line and GT-Line. The petrol variant will have a 1-litre GDI delivering power of 120 PS and another 1.2-litre G1 engine with power of 83 PS.

India Ratings revises banking sector outlook to negative for H2 FY21

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Domestic rating agency India Ratings and Research on Friday revised its outlook on the country's banking sector to negative for the second half of this fiscal from stable due to the likely increase in stressed assets, credit costs and weak earnings.

It expects restructuring/slip-pages pool from the corporate sector to be around Rs 3.3 lakh crore to Rs 6.3 lakh crore during the current fiscal.

The agency said it has revised its outlook in view of "an expected spike in stressed assets, higher credit costs, weaker earnings on account of interest reversals and lower fee income, and muted growth prospects in the wake of the measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19".

In the worst case, the spike in stressed assets due to the pandemic is expected to double the credit costs for the banking system than estimated pre-COVID-19 levels for



FY21, it said. It has revised the rating outlook on public sector banks (PSBs) to negative for the second half from stable, while maintaining a stable outlook for private banks, as they are better placed to withstand the challenges presented by the pandemic.

The agency in the report said state-run lenders' modest capital buffers are expected to deplete further in FY21 due to provisioning requirements. Also, pre-COVID profitability expectations for FY21 would be belied and most banks are

likely to report net losses.

These banks may also need to continue to build up their provision cover in FY22 for restructured assets as some of the restructured assets could turn NPA in FY23.

"PSBs' could require Rs 350 billion-Rs 550 billion in H2 of FY21 for tier 1 ratio of 10 per cent," the report said.

Under the new restructuring framework, lenders would be able to handhold those borrowers who have been temporarily impacted by COVID-19 but are otherwise viable.

TRAI tightens rules on tariff plans issued by telcos

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom regulator TRAI on Friday issued a fresh set of rules for publication and advertisement of tariff plans by telcos, in a bid to boost transparency in mobile offers and to help subscribers make informed decisions.

The consumer-oriented move assumes significance as telecom subscribers often grapple with issues such as lack of information, unclear or hard to find plan details a situation that affects subscribers' ability to make proper choices.

Tightening the rules for telcos, TRAI on Friday issued directions on tariff publication



and tariff advertisements.

It has been observed that existing measures adopted by telecom service providers are not transparent as they should be and that some of the telecom service providers are not prominently highlighting additional terms and conditions and are also collating the terms and conditions applicable to various tariffs on a single

web-page and that the relevant information either gets lost in the maze of detail or becomes ambiguous and incomprehensible to consumers," TRAI directive said.

Overhauling the regulatory requirements in this regard, TRAI has now directed telcos to publish, service area wise - within 15 days - each tariff plan for postpaid and prepaid subscribers, and offer full information to subscribers at customer care centres, points of sales, retail outlets and websites, and apps with requisite disclosures.

The "essential disclosures", mandated in TRAI's directive, include information on

units/volume of voice, data and SMS, and its rates, limits of usage rates and speeds beyond entitled use.

Telcos will also have to transparently inform subscribers about upfront cost alongwith details like advance rentals, deposits, connection fee for postpaid services as well as top up, tariffs vouchers and others. TRAI asserted that "clear, unambiguous and easy to understand" disclosure also has to be made on the validity period of tariff plan and last date of bill payment. Other details that have to be transparently communicated to subscribers are specific inclusions made in the tariff plan.

Import duty on masoor dal reduced

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has reduced the import duty on masoor dal by 20 per cent till October-end, a move aimed at increasing availability in the domestic market. A notification of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs has amended a June 2017 notification "so as to reduce" the basic customs duty on lentil (masoor dal) for the period from September 18, 2020 to October 31, 2020".

The import duty on lentil has been reduced from 30 per cent to 10 per cent from countries other than the US.

In the case of import of the lentil from the US, the duty has been brought down to 30 per cent from the earlier 50 per cent. In June also, the import



duty was cut to 10 per cent for the shipments originating from any country other than the US till August 31. In case of the US, the customs duty was brought down to 30 per cent from 50 per cent.

The reduced customs duty was applicable during the period June 2 to August 31, 2020. The duty was restored to previous level from September 1.

India is the world's largest consumer and importer of pulses.The country's total pulses production during 2019-20 crop year (July-June) stood at 23.15 million tonnes as against 22.08 million tonne in the previous year, as per the government's estimates.

Of this, the lentil output is

estimated to have declined to 1.18 million tonne from 1.23 million tonne in the 2018-19 crop year. Reacting to the development, Indian Pulses & Grains Association Vice Chairman Bimal Kothari said the government should have a consistent import policy.

He said the duty cut announced in June benefitted foreign farmers and traders as global prices of lentil rose after India reduced the import duty.

Kothari said the country imported about 25 lakh tonnes of pulses last fiscal to meet domestic demand and out of that 8.5 lakh tonne was lentil.

He pegged the imports of lentil to rise to 10 lakh tonnes this fiscal, although the overall inwards shipments might come down to 20 lakh tonnes.

Sensex drops 134 pts; financial stocks drag

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Domestic equity benchmark Sensex ended 134 points lower on Friday, dragged by losses in financial stocks amid mixed global cues.

After swinging 564.69 points during the day, the 30-share BSE index settled 134.03 points or 0.34 per cent lower at 38,845.82. The NSE Nifty fell 11.15 points or 0.10 per cent to finish at 11,504.95.

HDFC Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding over 2 per cent, followed by Kotak Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti, Titan, SBI, HUL, HDFC and Tata Steel.

On the other hand, Bharti Airtel,M&M,NTPC,Tech Mahindra,Sun Pharma and PowerGrid were among the gainers.According to traders,



despite a positive start, domestic stocks ended on a negative note tracking weakness in financial stocks and foreign fund outflows. Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth Rs 249.82 crore on a net basis on Thursday, exchange data showed.Meanwhile, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul

and Tokyo ended with gains, while most stock exchanges in Europe were trading with a negative bias.Global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.39 per cent higher at USD 43.47 per barrel. the forex market, the rupee strengthened by 21 paise to close at 73.45 against the US dollar.

Lift onion export ban: Congress MP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MP Rajeev Satav urged the government on Friday to withdraw its decision to ban the export of onions, saying it is an anti-farmer move and would affect them adversely, especially in Maharashtra.

"The government decision to ban the export of onions would affect farmers adversely. The poor farmers are already distressed due to the bad condition of the economy and the COVID-19 situation. The onion export ban would further aggravate that suffering. I urge the government to review its decision and withdraw this notification," Satav said in a special mention in the Upper House of Parliament.

"Maharashtra is one of the big onion-exporting states. In 2019-20, Maharashtra had exported 18.5 lakh metric tonnes of onions. Thus, it is a prime source of farmers' income in the state," he pointed out.

The Centre banned the export of all varieties of onions with an immediate effect on Monday to keep a tab on the prices of the commodity in the domestic market.

Earlier, during the Zero Hour, Arpita Ghosh of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) suggested that the government should not



withdraw its control over the prices of vegetables like potatoes and onions.

She said the Centre is trying to de-control the prices of essential commodities, including vegetables like potatoes and onions.It has been observed that the prices of essential commodities like potatoes and onions have shot up by 50 to 80 per cent, Ghosh said. "Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been trying immensely to keep the upward prices in control in West Bengal. Potato is being made available at Rs 25 per kg to people through 'Sufal Bangla'. Regular campaigns are being organised to curb black marketing.

"She has made arrangements to provide ration to people for free till June 2021 in view of the coronavirus situation. Arrangements have also been made to preserve 70 lakh tonnes of potatoes in 400 cold storages," the TMC leader said.

India public cloud mkt to reach Rs 63,000cr by FY'25

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's public cloud market stood at Rs 17,000 crore in FY2020 and is expected to grow at about 30 per cent CAGR to reach Rs 63,000 crore by FY2025, a report by industry body Nasscom said.

Also, small and medium businesses (SMBs) can account for 28-30 per cent of the cloud market by 2025, it said.

The report titled 'SMB Cloud Adoption in India: Towards a Cloud First nation' showcased how SMBs are at

the cusp of digital transformation with cloud adoption as the catalyst.

In a survey of 1,000 SMBs in India, 60 per cent said they are already using cloud, though almost half are at early stages of adoption. Best-in-class SMBs that adopted cloud have been able to drive 25-30 per cent productivity improvement and 15-20 per cent reduction in operational costs.

Security, analytics and offline to online are the three major opportunity segments for cloud adoption, the report

said. More than 50 per cent of the respondents cited lack of management support, talent and capital as key constraints for cloud adoption.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the SMB segment and they have struggled with liquidity crunch, lack of demand and lack of an alternative operational model. However, according to the report findings, SMBs that have an online presence have shown greater resilience and are expected to see short-term revenue gain," Nasscom said.

Asian shares higher despite Wall Street slump, virus fears

PNS ■ TOKYO

Asian shares were mostly higher Friday despite some investor attention shifting again to the uncertainties in global economies amid the coronavirus pandemic, as reflected in the overnight fall on Wall Street.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 0.2% to finish at 23,360.30. South Korea's Kospi added 0.4% to 2,414.86. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 lost 0.3% to 5,864.50. Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 0.6% to 24,489.40, while the Shanghai Composite edged up 1.9% to 3,332.96.

Another slide in technology

companies helped pull stocks lower on Wall Street Thursday, extending losses from the day before.

The S&P 500 lost 0.8% after having been down 1.7% earlier. The selling was widespread, with eight of the 11 sectors that make up the benchmark index ending the day lower. The sectors that include Amazon, Facebook and Apple took the heaviest losses.

The selling came a day after the Federal Reserve said it will keep interest rates at nearly zero for years to support the wheezing economy. The statement failed to encourage Wall Street and the S&P 500 recorded its first loss in four days

Wednesday. "Hesitations as to whether the U.S. economy can sustain the current pace of recovery amid the lack of additional fiscal policy support and the Fed standing put on stimulus had the market reeling once again," said Jingy Pan, senior market analyst at IG. "The Fed hangover had seen to a conundrum for Asia markets with muted moves noted going into Friday between the Wall Street decline and the greenback weakness post Fed meeting." Low interest rates are usually a boon for investors, sending stocks soaring. So why the sell-off? Analysts gave varying reasons for the market's weakness.

Bringing comedy back to live space an uphill battle: Abish Mathew

One of the most recognised faces of Indian comedy, and the mind behind talk show 'Son of Abish', Abish Mathew says that COVID-19 forced a lot of creators to go completely digital and it will be difficult for the comedy industry to come back to the live space.

"Just like a pendulum, we went from a completely live experience to completely digital, doing web series, sketches and shows. Once again, live stand-up was appreciated more than the YouTube stand-up. After the COVID-19 hit, everyone took to the digital space. Coming back to the live arena is going to be different. What that means is, this pandemic will blend the digital and live in a hybrid space," Abish, who has hosted Amazon Prime Video's 'Comicstaan', told IANSLife.

Speaking about the impact of the ongoing pandemic on the comedy industry, he shared over the phone: "Before COVID-19, we were justifying ourselves by saying industry standards don't apply to us because we're artists. As soon as COVID-19 hit, we would see that immediately, everyone evolved. Nobody cribbed, nobody complained. A lot of people were forced to evolve

into digital creation, and they have adapted to it really well. That's when I realised we're an industry."

Luckily, Abish's talk show had been going on for the last six years, and was easy to plug into the digital port because hundreds of viewers were anyway watching the edited version online. "The setback in the live industry was a lot, but thanks to Zoom or video conference platforms, it is recovering very slowly as well. It's like being back in 2009."

The show's seventh season, which was completely home-made, features Shruti Haasan, Kalki Koechlin, Asif Ali, Flying Beast aka Gaurav Taneja, Tanmay Bhat, Kanan Gill and Rahul Subramanian as guests in some of its episodes. Boman Irani and Anubhav Singh Bassi are upcoming guests on the show. While the content proves to be an engaging crowd-puller just like before, the setting of the show has transformed from a set to a video conferencing call.

On making of the seventh season, he says, "Pandemic had set in uncertainty about 'what we are going to do', and it has started growing. We were discussing possibilities and, I said, wait, why don't we do 'Son of Abish'? And my friends and others were like, 'That's not a good idea'.

I agreed. But, then they said, hold on, 'It's your show, you can do what you want. What's the worst that could happen? I would not get views.' I'd show people this was done at home, if it doesn't work. This time around it was a bunch of people, who had this attitude which can be summarised in five words: F*** it, let's do it."

"Everyone was doing this entire season for the first time, so there were no expectations, thus no stress. The only deadline was Friday 8 P.M. We, as artists, what we do is we keep editing, editing, adding, adding, colour correcting. You put that effort in movies. Here, the effort was to put out the best version you can. Otherwise, you keep working, and people don't like it, and your emotion is connected to it. 'Son of Abish' is my therapy"

The hit talk-show, has previously featured stars like Irrfan Khan, Vidya Balan, Taapsee Pannu, Sonakshi Sinha, Badshah, Vicky Kaushal, Abhay Deol, Radhika Apte, Vishal Dadlani, Vir Das, Jim Sarbh, Siddhant Chaturvedi, and Kunal Kamra.

"Son Of Abish Picks is where we bring new talent and it is an explosive hit. The comments are overwhelmingly about them and a lot of

artists are being recognised because of this. Bringing in international artists has expanded the reach of the show. Bringing a huge Pakistani Creator (Irfan Junejo) has sparked a lot of cross border artist collaboration," he adds.

Abish Mathew has become one of the most sought after comedians and producers in the comedy world. "In the future, these changes will happen — Tier-based seating: You will have broadcast, people watching it on a website online or a software. You have the live experience, which means the closer you are to stage, the more expensive it gets. In the digital show, the differentiation would be like this: people who can only watch the show, people who can be on the same Zoom or Google Hangouts call but not have the right to speak, people who get chat access, people who get a private conversation at the end of the show, and then people who can do screenshots (new-age selfies) 'backstage' will be another tier."

"As an artist, you'd be doing shows with people from San Francisco and from Mumbai, which is why you can't just do jokes for the people of Bombay. You'd have to make it slightly more global and understand your

audience," Abish said.

After the pandemic, everyone is coming to the realisation that we have an audience which is very wide, he says.

"Our accountability has increased. During the pandemic, I have learnt the names of more of my fans than I have in my entire career. I knew 5-6 people, now I know 20 people who keep coming back to the show. There's a community finally being built around 'Son of Abish', which is a very positive thing. Everyone wants to belong, also the audience and the artist."

Abish also spoke about content-wise evolution for creators.

"There are two things that can happen: implosion and explosion. In implosion, when you get validation from people who follow your stuff, you only start to create for those people. If you take one million followers, and you create jokes for them, they'd become exclusive super fans. You'd become buddies with them. You make specific art that connects with them. Then there's an explosion, where I want new people to discover my stuff. It was a numbers game. We'd have to figure whether we have to make implosive or explosive art."



As international film festivals are transitioning to virtual formats, there is an increased demand in trimmed down yet accurately curated short films. One of its kind being — *A Date in the Dark*, the first-ever Telugu virtual audio short film officially selected for the Mont. Blanc International film festival Paris made by a small-town guy from Kadapa, Singara Mohan. He talks to *The Pioneer's* **SHIKHA DUGGAL** on his journey, battling odds and more.

Audio effects in short films opening new doors for art!

Those who swore away from digital versions of books have now adapted to technology. 2020 is dedicated to experimental selections and directors from Telangana seem to make a clear mark. As narrated by filmmaker Singara Mohan, the audiences are already overwhelmed by the volume of online content and it's giving them a cinematic experience surrounded by audio and sound effects. "My plotline discovers the last day of a man who spends time with his wife who is blind. It was an extremely tough journey as we needed to create,

capture, and manipulate several sounds. It's not a regular short film, what we hear is as important as what we see. We replicated the environment, narrated the scenes, actions, and conducted a brilliant sound designing," shares the writer-cum-director.

Weaving the short film into an emphasis on beautiful performances drawing attention to sound elements, Singara Mohan, a B-tech dropout, believes in penning down extraordinary content. The inflection points, art, and dialogues must acquire a unique place in the audience's hearts. "The content should enhance the intensity of the movie, fit into the

specific genre, and engage the viewers. The sound shouldn't go unnoticed because the whole short film is based on it. I have unlocked the sound's potential to create storytelling picturesquely," he adds.

The film's narrative structure is inspired by another similar virtual audio film called 'Dialogue in Dark' paving new pathways for writers. Mediums keep changing and the switch to audio films is a novelty that is being recognised and appreciated. They are better for the environment, are economical, and can add new dimensions to what the writer brings to the table.

Caring for your eyes amid COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic seems like it is here to stay for a while. As the number of cases is shooting up as days pass by, it is of utmost importance to maintain social distance and not travel unnecessarily. By staying home, we can manage several activities like working online, studying for school, ordering groceries and supplies, etc. But what about our health? Especially the health of our eyes? What if we have decreased vision or redness or pain? How will we know whether it is an emergency or it can wait? Should we postpone the visit to the eye doctor?

As a patient, you would naturally be apprehensive about your eyes as vision is one of the most essential sense that is required to function. It is also well known that certain diseases, if not taken care of in the initial stages, can lead to permanent visual loss. In these times, teleconsultation/telephone and video consultation are proving to be very useful to have an initial assessment of the condition of the patient and decide on whether the patient needs a hospital visit or not.

The conditions for which one can seek a teleconsultation and avoid a physical visit include:

- Complaints of dryness, eye fatigue, discomfort: this is often due to the necessary use of computers as many people are now working online and prolonged use of digital media either for work or entertainment can cause this
- Complaints of redness, eye swelling, mild to



DR SOMASHEILA MURTHY, Head, Cornea and Anterior Segment Service, LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad.

moderate pain, watering, itching, lid nodules: many of these conditions can be managed medically and a good teleconsultation including a video consultation would be the first step

When should you visit the hospital and on an emergency basis?

- Do not wait if you have:
 - Sudden loss of vision
 - Complaints of severe pain, associated with

redness, light sensitivity: in such a case the patient should prepare for a hospital visit as these symptoms could be due to a more severe eye disease

- Any significant injury such as household chemicals falling accidentally into the eye, injury to the eye with a blunt or sharp object while working/playing, etc.

When should you visit the hospital, not as an emergency but where routine follow-ups can not be ignored:

- Diabetic patient with or without deterioration of vision
- Patients with a history of glaucoma or other eye diseases such as corneal transplants
- Other chronic conditions for which the patient is on medications as advised by the ophthalmologist (uveitis, etc.)

How safe is it to visit the hospital during the pandemic:

The followings steps are being taken by several hospitals to ensure the utmost safety for patients:

- A triage system at the entry point itself, where patients who have symptoms suggestive of COVID infection are being seen in an isolation room
- The patient numbers are maintained at a uniform inflow and outflow so as to ensure that there is no overcrowding in lounges or clinics
- A social distance of one meter is maintained between patients even while being seated
- The hospital personnel use personal protection equipment to ensure the patients are not exposed to them and vice versa
- Equipment used for examining the patients are sterilised after each examination
- Follow-up through teleconsultation is being encouraged to minimise the number of visits that patients have to make to the hospital

India's deaf community has lauded the efforts of actor Ranveer Singh to make Indian Sign Language an official language.

Ranveer has been urging authorities to consider and declare Indian Sign Language (ISL) as the 23rd official language of India. He recently signed a petition aimed at furthering awareness for the cause.

His independent record label, IncInk, which he has formed with Navzar Erane, also released sign language music videos. Twenty-five members from the deaf community in India appreciated him by putting out a thank-you video for him. "We were very happy to hear the good news about Ranveer Singh, who is a famous Bollywood actor, to support ISL to be recognised as the 23rd official

language of India. We are so glad that he supports this," the members stated.

"Indian sign language is a beautiful language. We want to thank Ranveer for showing support to the deaf community," they added.

An overwhelmed Ranveer said that his independent music label was created to encourage inclusivity.

Ranveer said, "IncInk was created as a platform to encourage inclusivity through art and we are deeply committed towards making Indian Sign Language (ISL) become the 23rd official language of India."

He added, "This progressive step will create a ripple effect in providing equal access across all areas, from education to employment to entertainment to more than 10 million deaf people in India."

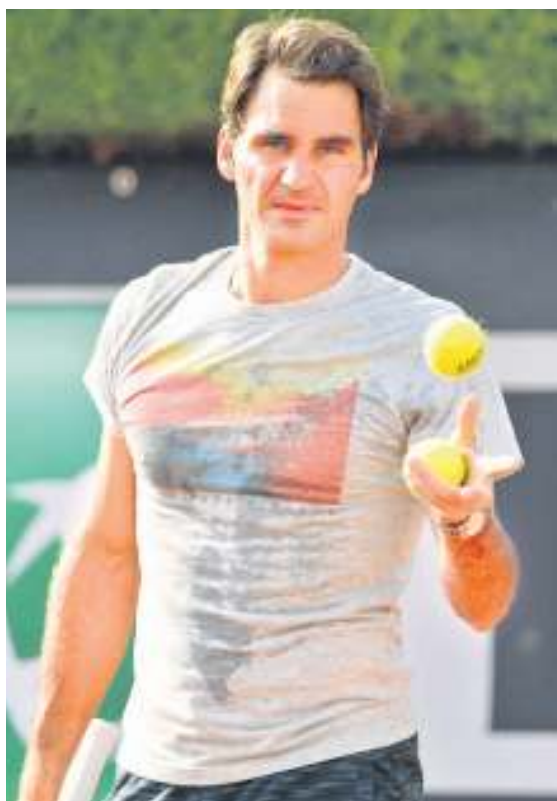
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Twenty-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer has been mesmerising fans with his breathtaking shots on the tennis courts ever since he turned professional in 1998. Now the Swiss legend has left his fans speechless with a rendition of a Beatles' classic.

Federer sang The Beatles classic *With A Little Help From My Friends* as part of a commercial for Sunrise, a Swiss telecommunications provider based in Zurich.

This was not the first time the 39-year-old had recorded a song. According to the ATP Tour website, in 2017, he had joined

Grigor Dimitrov and Tommy Haas to create the Backhand Boys supergroup during the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells.

The trio recorded a version of the 1982 Chicago hit *Hard To Say I'm Sorry* with Haas' father-in-law, the world-renowned record producer and musician David Foster on piano.

After this year's Australian Open, Federer decided to give the 2020 season a miss following a setback in his rehabilitation from a knee surgery that he underwent in February. He has said he will return in 2021, thus making 2020 only the second year in his career in which he would not win a title.

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Filmmaker Hansal Mehta feels we need more films to be made on the LGBTQ community.

"There has been an absolute change in our society as well as our cinema regarding LGBTQ people. But I really think that we need to make more films about them, and need to normalise the subject as much as possible," Mehta told IANS.

Mehta made the widely applauded *Aligarh* in 2015, which is inspired by the real-life story of a professor who was suspended from his job because of his sexual orientation.

"From *Dostana* to *Kapoor & Sons*, *Aligarh* and *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, a lot of films have been made about LGBTQ people. The stories have evolved with time, for sure. Speaking of myself, I always try to tell our stories of our times, of our world. It's great if we depict society's reality through films," Hansal Mehta said.

Hansal Mehta is currently directing Rajkumar Rao and Nushratt Bharuchha in his upcoming film, *Chhalaang*.

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ARCHIE

MAN! ALL THAT STUDYING, AND I STILL ONLY GOT A 65 ON THE TEST!

HAR-HAR!

FACE IT, ARCH! YOU'LL NEVER MEASURE UP TO THE GREAT REGGIE!

LOOK WHO'S TALKING! YOU GOT A 65, TOO!

YEAH, BUT I DIDN'T STUDY!

HENRY SCARLETT! COME BACK ON!

GARFIELD

I'M FINALLY GETTING MY MAN CAVE!

IT'S ABOUT TIME

I ASKED LIZ TO HELP ME DECORATE

UH-OH

I'M THINKING A SCRAPBOOKING TABLE OVER HERE...

GOODBYE MAN CAVE, HELLO CRAFT ROOM

NANCY

SNOW ZOMBIE DEFEATED!

CRASH

GINGER MEGGS

OKAY, HOW ABOUT THIS... I WILL DO DOUBLE THE CHORES THIS WEEK IF YOU ALLOW ME ONE HOUR OF TIME OUTSIDE.

HMMM... THAT'S NOT BAD.

I'LL GRANT IT, BUT YOUR TIME STARTS...

TIME FLIES WHEN YOU'RE COMPLETELY CLUELESS.

NNNO--

CALVIN AND HOBBES

I'M HOME!

POW!

GLAD TO SEE ME??

WHAT I WOULD GIVE TO BE A LATCHKEY KID.

REALITY CHECK

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

REMEMBER WHEN WE JUST DELIVERED THE BABIES?

CROSSWORD

1		2		3	4		5
				6			
7				8			
	10			9			
11						12	
			13				
16				14			
						17	
18							
			19				

ACROSS

- Use these on envelopes
- Icy
- A scented flower
- Hot remains from a fire
- Got away from
- A month
- A hole in a hill for a train
- Birthday present
- Scraps of material
- A funny play or film

DOWN

- Certain
- Help
- Finished
- Plates
- The leader of an empire
- Looked at
- Quicker
- Make up your mind
- Cosy
- Don't go

SOLUTION

G	R	A	D	U	A	L	L	Y
A	O	B	E		S	P	A	I
T	R	I	A	L				
H	S		O	R	E			
U	S	E	D			O	R	A
N	G		B	A	D			
D	O	C	T	O	R		S	O
E	H	S	J	B	E			
R	E	I	N	S		O	P	E
N	T	I						
H	A	P	P	I	N	E	S	S

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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.

ALL SET FOR IPL SHOW

CSK take on Mumbai Indians in the delayed tournament opener



PTI ■ ABU DHABI

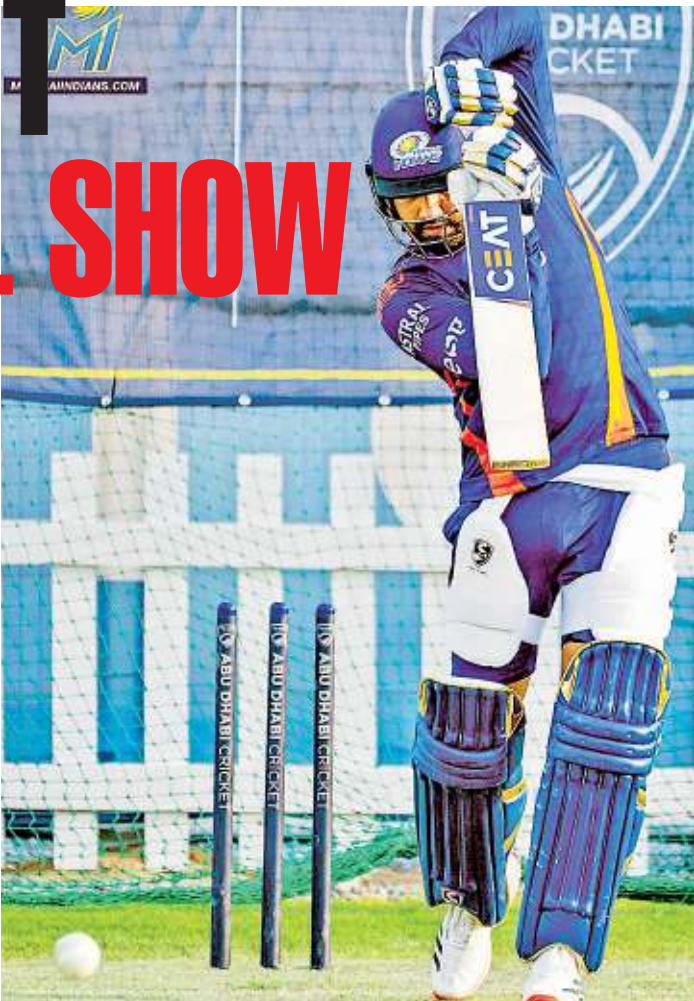
Mahendra Singh Dhoni's poker face, Virat Kohli's raw emotions and Rohit Sharma's effortless handling of his *Galacticos* will be back to charm cricket fans across the globe with the Indian Premier League starting on Saturday, promising to be a happy distraction in a world scarred by Covid-19.

Rohit's defending champions Mumbai Indians will be locking horns with Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings in what is likely to be a fittingly exciting opening showdown here.

The tournament, which has been shifted to the UAE due to five million plus Covid cases in India, is a 'TV-only event', expected to be lapped up by all and sundry who crave for cricket and Bollywood in equal measure during prime time.

Bollywood had its share of prime time in the past few months but rest assured, the next 53 days would belong to Dhoni's CSK, Kohli's RCB and Rohit's Mumbai Indians challenged by young pretenders comprising KL Rahul's KXIP and Shreyas Iyer's Delhi Capitals among others.

IPL happening in foreign shores is not a new phenomenon, not even the shift to the Emirates but as Indian sports hits the restart button with the billion dollar cricketing extravaganza, the hugely popular event to be



held closed doors in a bio-secure environment will be a new experience.

David Warner or Chris Gayle's towering sixes welcomed by artificial crowd cheer will be the new normal and the deafening roars during Super Overs will be missing but no one can complain as at least the show will go on in amid a devastating health crisis.

A look at the teams would indicate that Mumbai Indians by a distance is the most formidable with Rohit, Pandya brothers — Hardik and Krunal, the indomitable Kieron Pollard and the 'King of Death' bowling Jasprit Bumrah giving it a menacing look.

The perennial Dad's Army Chennai Super Kings can never be counted out till that man with 'Hawk Eyes' uses his peripheral vision behind the stumps.

Experience can't be bought and the likes of Shane Watson, Dwayne Bravo, Faf du Plessis and Ravindra

Jadeja have given their blood and sweat for the 'Yellows' and it would be no different this time.

For Kohli, winning a tournament as a captain would reaffirm his status even as naysayers question his style of leadership. The team is a shade better with presence of Aaron Finch, Chris Morris and the wonderfully gifted Devdutt Padikkal, who if all goes well, is destined to become a big name in years to come.

Delhi Capitals, with their new found vigour and more pragmatic new owners, found their mojo last year and would like to go one better under an enormously talented skipper in Shreyas Iyer, who can be matched in skills by a Prithvi Shaw or a Rishabh Pant.

Seasoned brains like Ravichandran Ashwin would be ideal foil for the team's youthful exuberance.

KXIP's KL Rahul is a class act and how he shapes as a leader could also create a narrative for the future

MSD is fresh, engaged & determined after break: Fleming

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

His sabbatical from the game has done Mahendra Singh Dhoni a world of good, Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming said on Friday, asserting that the enigmatic skipper is "mentally engaged and determined" to encounter the challenges of a "tactically different" IPL.

Dhoni's CSK will take on Rohit Sharma's Mumbai Indians in the tournament opener on Saturday. Fleming, a former New Zealand captain, stressed that his team's experience of winning big matches will come in handy during the next 53 days.

Dhoni retired from international cricket last month after being on a break for over one year and when asked about the 39-year-old's preparedness for the IPL, Fleming said, "It has been no different. He's very fit and mentally, he's been very engaged and determined."

"In some ways the break can work for the experienced and older



players that we have. MS is fresh and ready to go," Fleming said in a pre-tournament interview to CSK's official website.

The three-time champions are banking heavily on their 35-plus players, including Dhoni himself, Shane Watson, Dwayne Bravo, Kedar

Jadhav, and Imran Tahir to name a few.

"...Experienced players identify key times and that's why they've done so well in their careers. They can turn games, absorb pressure or just sum out the situation. That's what experience is about and that's why we value it so highly," said Fleming.

"And that's why we've been able to get over the line in so many close games because the key player has been one with a lot of experience. And you also mix that with skill. You are conscious of having a skilful side and adding youth when we can and with that get the balance pretty right."

Starting against a quality side like MI is certainly exciting for Fleming, who wants his men to have a crack at the defending champions after their agonising last-ball loss in the previous edition.

"The first game is always full of anxiety, nerves and excitement, and CSK-MI has added extra excitement and pressure and we enjoy that. We've earned the right to play the

first game by playing well last year, and given the way the final finished last year, it's nice to have another crack at MI.

"They (MI) are a very good side and it gives you a good gauge as to how the pre-season has gone and the areas that need improvement. You get a good idea after the first game as to where your team is sitting."

With the home advantage of playing seven games at Chepauk gone, Fleming is bracing up for a very different tournament tactically where adaptability will be the key.

"I see this season is going to be very different tactically. With no real home ground advantage here, we've got to be very good at adapting to the conditions in each ground.

"We've got three different grounds to assess and each ground has its own character and nuances and we've just got to be good enough to pick the right team and get the right game plan to match that. It's like every game is an away game," he explained.

HEAD TO HEAD			
Matches:	28	MI won:	17
		CSK won:	11
MEETING IN 2019			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mumbai Indians defeated Chennai Super Kings by 37 runs at Mumbai (League) Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 46 runs at Chennai (League) Mumbai Indians beat Chennai Super Kings by 6 wickets at Chennai (Qualifier 1) Mumbai Indian beat Chennai Super Kings by one run at Hyderabad (final) 			
FOR THE RECORD			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rohit Sharma who scored 4898 runs at an average of 31.60 in 183 innings of 188 matches for Deccan Chargers and Mumbai Indians is the third highest scorer in IPL behind Virat Kohli (5412 runs in 177 matches) and Suresh Raina (5368 runs in 193 matches). Dwayne Bravo who claimed 147 wickets in 131 innings of 134 matches, needs just three wickets to become the fifth bowler to take 150 wickets in IPL. 			
		Faisal Features	

when Indian cricket goes through another change of guard in next few years.

There will be a lot of interest as to how he handles players like Glenn Maxwell, Gayle and Mohammed Shami, who are savage on their days but can be ordinary on some others.

Handling an inconsistent team to a decent finish will be on top of Rahul's agenda.

The low profile Sunrisers Hyderabad once again will be gun-

ning for a place in the summit clash and their skipper David Warner knows how to win the IPL having always led the way with spectacular performances.

There is Jonny Bairstow's flair, Kane Williamson's poise and Rashid Khan's flamboyance with a host of youngsters like Virat Singh and Priyam Garg eager to make a name for themselves.

When the IPL was partially held in UAE back in 2014, KKR were the

eventual champions.

If Ben Stokes is the world's best all-rounder across formats, Andre Russell probably is a bit more destructive in this format as he hit 52 sixes during their horrendous last edition.

The 2018 U-19 World Cup stars — Shubman Gill, Shivam Mavi and Kamlesh Nagarkoti — add a dash of youth. Eoin Morgan's leadership skills that might prove to be handy in case a normally inconsistent Dinesh Karthik misfires.

Rajasthan Royals is the weakest team lacking quality in the Indian line-up but expect Jos Buttler, Steve Smith and Jofra Archer to do the heavy lifting in Stokes' absence. Stokes is currently in New Zealand to be with his ailing father.

MI START FAVOURITES

Mumbai Indians are traditional slow-starters in the IPL but on paper, they will be the favourites against Chennai Super Kings in the opening game in Abu Dhabi.

MI looks the most prepared and set team with a scary batting lineup of Rohit, Quinton de Kock, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan, Hardik and Krunal Pandya, Kieron Pollard. Trent Boult and Nathan Coulter-Nile will complete their

Injured Osaka withdraws from French Open



AP ■ PARIS

Newly crowned US Open champion Naomi Osaka pulled out of the French Open with a sore hamstring on Friday, in a fresh blow to the coronavirus-hit Grand Slam which is already missing world number one Ashleigh Barty.

Japan's Osaka made the announcement just days after lifting her third Major title behind closed doors in New York.

"Unfortunately I won't be able to play the French Open this year," Osaka said in posts on Instagram and Twitter. "My

hamstring is still sore so I won't have enough time to prepare for the clay — these two tournaments came too close to each other for me this year."

The French Open is due to start on September 27 at Roland Garros, rescheduled from earlier in the year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Osaka, who has never made it out of the third round of the French Open, did not say when she will play next. She did assure her fans they would see her "sooner than later".

The withdrawal of third-ranked Osaka means Roland Garros will be missing two of the

Attendance reduced to 5K/day

Paris: The French Open rescheduled for later this month will be limited to 5,000 spectators daily, a reduction from the 11,500 announced by organisers, the Paris police prefecture said on Thursday.

Earlier this month, the French tennis federation revealed plans to allow 11,500 fans to attend each day, with the Roland Garros venue divided into three independent zones.

However, the deteriorating health situation in the country and current French Government regulations capping public gatherings at 5,000 forced them into a rethink. The revised number was announced by tournament director Guy Forget just 10 days ago. **AFP**

world's top three, after reigning champion Barty said earlier this month that she wouldn't return to defend her title.

Sindhu pulls out of Denmark Open

New Delhi: Olympic Silver medalist PV Sindhu on Thursday pulled out of the Denmark Open tournament scheduled to be held in Odense from October 13 to 18.

"Sindhu is not playing in Denmark, she has pulled out," a source in the Gopichand Academy told **PTI**.

The BAI had on Tuesday written to the players who have sent their entries for the Denmark Open, stating that they would be "travelling or participating at their own responsibility due to the current pandemic" and "have to send their consent within September 17".

Though Sindhu decided against travelling to Denmark, she plans to participate in the Asia Open-I and Asia Open-II scheduled to be held in November.

Kidambi Srikanth, Lakshya Sen and Subhankar Dey were among those players who have sent their consent letters and will be participating in the super 750 event.

Saina Nehwal and Parupalli Kashyap have also sent their consent letters but will take a final call nearer to the date of the tournament.

Variety in spin, will give CSK edge in UAE conditions: Lee



New Delhi: Former Australian speedster Brett Lee has tipped three-time champions Chennai Super Kings to win the 13th IPL, saying the variety in their spin department gives them an advantage in the UAE conditions.

"They (CSK) are up there. I have picked them to win and I think CSK have a good chance because of their spin attack," Lee said

on *Star Sports* show *Game Plan*.

"With Santner, Jadeja needs to step up and be the No 1 spinner and CSK have got great variety and none of the spinners are same, so they are at an advantage for the conditions in the UAE as the tournament progresses."

Four-time winners Mumbai Indian will miss the services of their bowling spearhead Lasith Malinga who opted out of the tournament citing personal reasons.

However, the 43-year-old Lee said he has no doubts that Jasprit Bumrah will be able to fill in the shoes of the experienced seamer.

"I am always Bumrah's fan since he burst onto the scene some years ago. He has got a different bowling action, he pushes the ball in, and can swing the ball both ways. He is good with the new ball but I like him with the old ball and that's why he can fill the shoes of Malinga and can bowl at death overs," he said.

"He can bowl at 140kmph and zoom the ball in at the batsman's feet. He is bowling the yorkers consistently and there are very less bowlers like that, so he can fill those shoes."

Lee, who has 310 wickets in 76 Tests and 380 scalps in 221 ODIs, said he considers Mumbai Indians in his top four.



The Australian said he is ready to bat at any position that Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene deems fit. "Rohit! what a world class player, runs on the board, on and off the field what he's contributed to Mumbai is something really really special.

And *Quinny* (De Kock) has been outstanding with the gloves and bat in hand," Lynn said in a video posted on Mumbai Indians official Twitter handle.

Halep extends her perfect record

AP ■ ROME

Top-seeded Simona Halep improved to 7-0 in tennis' restart with a 7-5, 6-4 win over Dayana Yastremska on Friday to reach the Italian Open quarters.

Halep, who is actually on an 11-0 run overall stretching back to February, recovered an early break in the opening set and then overpowered her 29th-ranked opponent the rest of the way.

Having won a title in Dubai before the coronavirus pandemic, Halep marked her return with another trophy in Prague last month. She then skipped the US Open due to health concerns amid the pandemic.

Halep, who lost two straight finals in Rome to Elina Svitolina in 2017 and 2018, will next face either 10th-seeded Elena Rybakina or Yulia

Putintseva.

Also on the red clay courts of the Foro Italico, defending champion Karolina Pliskova defeated Russian qualifier Anna Blinkova 6-4, 6-3 and will next play 11th-seeded Elise Mertens, who eliminated Montenegrin qualifier Danka Kovinic 6-4, 6-4.

In men's action, 15th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov ended the run of 19-year-old Jannik Sinner with a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 win.

Sinner, the Italian who had beaten third-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas in the previous round, missed an easy overhead smash into the net on Dimitrov's fifth match point.

The tournament has been played without fans so far due to the pandemic, although the Italian Govt announced Friday that up to 1,000 spectators will be allowed in to watch the semifinals and finals.



Spurs avoid embarrassing exit

AFP ■ LONDON

Tottenham scored twice in the final 10 minutes to avoid a humiliating Europa League exit to Lokomotiv Plovdiv as Jose Mourinho's men came from behind to beat the nine-man Bulgarians 2-1 on Thursday.

Harry Kane's penalty and Tanguy Ndombele's winner five minutes from time ensured the 2019 Champions League finalists did not fall at the first hurdle of their Europa League campaign to a side that have never progressed beyond the qualifying stages of European competition.

"I think it was a helluva experience for the players. Sometimes in football miracles happen and when you play a knockout, one-leg it is the perfect scenario for a miracle to happen," said Mourinho.

"Everyone on their side had the moment where they dream and we had the moment where we believed a nightmare could arrive."

Mourinho named a strong side featuring Kane, Hugo Lloris and Son Heung-min with just four changes from Sunday's 1-0 defeat to Everton to start their Premier League campaign.

But there was more evidence



why Spurs are desperate to secure Gareth Bale's return on loan from Real Madrid as they struggled to break Plovdiv down and went behind to Georgi Minchev's header 19 minutes from time.

The tie swung back in Spurs favour nine minutes later when Momchil Tsvetanov punched clear off his own line and the referee had no option but to point to the spot and send Tsvetanov off.

Birsent Karagaren was then also



Gareth Bale looks at fans as he arrives at the training ground of Tottenham Hotspur in London on Friday. Real Madrid winger Gareth Bale is in London to complete his return to Tottenham seven years after he left for Madrid in 2013 for 100 million euros **AP**

shown a second yellow card before Kane dispatched the spot-kick into the top corner.

Ndombele has struggled for game time under Mourinho despite being the club's record signing.

But the Frenchman, who was introduced on the hour mark, proved the match winner by bundling home from close range.

A trip to Macedonia next week to face KF Shkendija faces Mourinho's men in the third qualifying round.

Liverpool finally signs Thiago

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool completed the signing of Thiago Alcantara from Bayern Munich on Friday, bringing in one of the world's most technically gifted players to add another dimension to the English champions' midfield.

The 29-year-old Thiago ended his seven-year spell at Bayern by moving for an initial fee of 20 million pounds (\$26 million), with a potential additional 5 million pounds (\$6.5 million) later.

"My decision is purely of a sporting nature," the Spain international said in a video announcing his departure from Bayern.

"As a football player, I seek new challenges to develop myself further. Bavaria will always be my home."

Thiago, whose father is former Brazil midfielder Mazinho, leaves Bayern as a European Cup winner, his last match being the 1-0

victory over Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final in August. He also won seven straight Bundesliga titles with Bayern.

"When the years are passing, you are trying to win as much as you can — and when you win, you want to win more," Thiago said.

"I think this club describes what I am as well. I want to achieve all of the goals, win as many trophies as possible."

At Liverpool, he will add a more creative edge — nurtured at Barcelona's famed La Masia academy — to a midfield that currently is more notable for its energy and intensity through hard-running players like Jordan Henderson, Georginio Wijnaldum and James Milner.

Thiago — with his technique, touch and vision — will provide Liverpool with more control in midfield, too, allowing manager Jurgen Klopp to adopt a different approach in certain games.



Sakshi pushed me out of my comfort zone: Anushka

After months of uncertainty, Anushka Shetty-starrer *Nishabdham* is finally opting for a direct-to-web release. Initially slotted for April 2 earlier this summer, the outbreak of coronavirus thwarted the producer's release plans and ever since, the film was in the news over OTT reasons. While Anushka and her fans were not in favour of a streaming release to begin with, the inordinate delay in theatres reopening seems to have finally convinced them OTT is the way to go.

Talking about the OTT release on October 2, film's director Hemanth Madhukar said, "We have been waiting for the right opportunity to bring to audiences this ambitious story starring some of the best Indian talent. The movie was shot simultaneously in both Telugu and Tamil. With a global release on Amazon Prime Video across 200 countries and territories, we are happy to take the film to audiences' world over."

Anushka, who played a speech and hearing impaired artist Sakshi in the film, said that role was something she hitherto essayed in her career so far. "It's a character that pushed me out of my comfort zone, a character I'm glad it came my way," she said.

In the film, Sakshi gets entangled in a criminal investigation when she unexpectedly witnesses a tragic incident that occurs in a villa with a reputation for being haunted. With a team of police detectives determined to get to the bottom of the case and the list of suspects ranging from a ghost to a missing young girl, the film promises to be an edge-of-the-seat thriller, the makers said.

Also featuring Madhavan, Anjali, Shalini Pandey, Subbaraju and Avasarala Srinivas and popular Hollywood actor Michael Madsen in key roles, *Nishabdham* has been shot extensively in Seattle and other parts of the US.

After countryside, *TUCK JAGADISH* MOVES TO HYD

After a six-month hiatus, the filming of Nani-starrer *Tuck Jagadish* will resume in Hyderabad from October 5. Shiva Nirvana, film's director, intends to complete 90-95 percent of the film in Hyderabad before he moves to Rajahmundry once again, finds

NAGARAJ GOUD

With V behind him, Nani will join the shoot of *Tuck Jagadish* from October.

We've learned that director Shiva Nirvana has planned an extensive schedule in Hyderabad from October first week and all safety measures will be followed for a smooth conduct of the shoot. According to a source, the director has already completed a major chunk of outdoor schedule before the pandemic forced the unit to take a six-month break. "Nirvana has shot outdoor schedules in the scenic locales of Rajahmundry and Palani, Tamil Nadu for 28 days. He has another week schedule in Rajahmundry, which he intends to start after

completing the Hyderabad leg of filming. By December, he is looking at wrapping up the complete film. The release date will be decided in late January," points out a source.

A production venture of Sahu Garapati and Harish Peddi under Shine Screens, *Tuck Jagadish*, an SS Thaman musical, features Nani alongside Ritu Varma, while Aishwarya Rajesh is playing a strong supporting role. Nirvana has assembled a strong supporting line-up for the film. Significant among them include Jagapathi Babu, Murali Sharma, Nassar, Rao Ramesh, Naresh and Rohini, while CVL Narashimha Rao, Maala Pravathi, Devadharshini, Bindhu Chandhramouli, Praveen, Kishore

Polimera and Pammi Sai are essaying other roles.

Speaking to *The Pioneer* earlier, Nirvana billed the film as an emotional family drama set in a rural landscape. "It has been some time since Telugu audiences saw a full-fledged rural family drama with an A-list star in the lead and this is that film. Performance-wise for Nani, the film will be a step ahead than Ninnu Kori. It has a contemporary story and focuses on bonds within a family. The idea is to shoot it in a way that the audiences after watching will say, 'Bhale vunnarra valla' (They are so good)," Nirvana had said.



NITHYA MENEN'S guest appearance in *Gamanam*



Actor Sharwanand unveiled the look of Nithya Menen from cinematographer VS Gana Shekar's maiden production venture *Gamanam* on Friday. The actress will be seen as singer Shailaputri Devi in the human drama, which marks the directorial debut of debutante Sujana Rao. Gana Shekar clarifies that Nithya's presence is limited to the song alone and she doesn't have any scenes as such in the film. "She just appears in the intense classical song and in the context of the narrative; the role carries its own weight. The moment you listen to the song, you cannot think of any other actress in the world other than Nithya performing for it," he marvels,

speaking to *The Pioneer*.

The famed lensman is producing the film, an Ilaiyaraaja musical, in collaboration with Ramesh Karutoori and Venki Pushadapu. Headlined by Shriya Saran, Shiva Kandukuri and Priyanka Jawalkar, Shekar is keen on a big screen debut for the film. "We thought of giving it to prominent streaming players initially, but while doing the colour grading, I felt it was better fit for the silver screen as it looked a bigger film. The moment you see it in a laptop or on a smartphone, the visual and sound experience will be lost. We are waiting. If we are lucky enough, it will go to cinema halls or it will go straight to streaming. I can't hold it for long," he explains.

— NG

Rajendra Prasad in a political satire

After his earlier film, *Dream*, a psychological thriller, with Bhavani Shankar won many laurels; Rajendra Prasad has teamed up with the director again for *Climax*. Produced by P Rajeshwar Reddy, and K Karunakar Reddy, the film, according to the makers, is a political satire, which revolves around a murder mystery with intriguing characters dotting the narrative.

Prasad is upbeat about the project. "*Dream* won seven international awards

but it only pleased a certain section of the audience. *Climax* is a multi-genre flick that has romance, family emotions,

CLIMAX IS A MULTI-GENRE FLICK THAT HAS ROMANCE, FAMILY EMOTIONS, THRILLING ELEMENTS AND HUMOUR IN EQUAL MEASURES.

thrilling elements and humour in equal measures. If the audiences think it's different for such emotions to sit in one story, they have to watch *Climax*," he said.

Bhavani Shankar is hopeful that the film, co-starring Pridhvi, Shivashankar master and Sri Reddy, will find love from the audience of different ilk.

The producers informed that the film's shoot has been wrapped up and they are targeting a theatrical release. Rajesh Nidhwana is scoring the music.



Rashmika is 'super proud' of her positive outlook

Rashmika Mandanna, who is back in Hyderabad after a five-month stay at her home in Coorg, is proud of the positive attitude she has imbibed. She says no matter the situation, people around her never saw mood swings on her face. "I don't know why anything comes my way I'd just smile through it.. be it good or bad.. and honestly, I am super proud and grateful for myself. I don't think anyone.. JUST ANYONE has seen the bad days or the mood swings on my face.. That's because I already know that there's so much in the world that's happening.. So many hardships that when you see me I want to take all that away and I want to make you smile.. I want you to feel at home.. I want you to feel calm.. I want you to depend on me as much as I depend on you.. (Sic)," she wrote on her Instagram page.

Addressing her followers, she further wrote, "I don't want to be your favorite actress.. I just want to be your family..! What I say here.. I mean it.. You matter! (Sic)."

On the work front, Rashmika is gearing up for the shoot of Allu Arjun-starrer *Pushpa*, where she plays a village belle. She is rumoured to be playing Ram Charan's love interest in Koratala Siva's *Acharya*.

