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Farooq consult party leaders

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Centre open to add stimulus

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'South has a bank of great actresses'

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BACK TO LIFE

Charminar, the city's major landmark, saw more than usual throng on Sunday - the day TS reopened after 39 days of lockdown - More pictures inside

TS govt seeks vaccine testing facility in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government on Sunday urged the Centre to set up a vaccine testing facility here "on a war footing" basis.

In a letter to Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, state IT and Industries Minister K T Rama Rao stated that Hyderabad has emerged as the vaccination capital of the world by producing one-third of the global vaccines.

He noted that COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin was developed and also is being manufactured here. He said there is an urgency to set up a second testing facility, and Hyderabad is an ideal location to host such a facility, as the city has a large number of vaccine manufacturers.

"The testing of each batch of vaccine produced in the country is being carried out only in the Central Drug Laboratory in Kasauli.

And for the entire process of sending the vaccination batch from Hyderabad to Kasauli takes approximately 30-45 days, which is time-consuming, and cost-intensive," Rama Rao pointed out.

Over the next few months, a significant amount of Covid vaccines will be produced in Hyderabad, he added. Citing reports, the Minister said as per projections of the Centre almost 50 per cent of the total covid vaccine supply between August and December 2021 will be from Hyderabad.

Ker govt seeks moratorium on repayment of loans

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has approached the Centre to put in place a moratorium on repayment of loans till December 31 in order to provide relief to individuals in the unorganised sector, MSMEs, agriculture and others adversely affected by COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Kerala has sought a moratorium of loans without accrual of interest and penal interest during the moratorium period.

Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal, in a letter to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, said the impact of the second wave induced lockdown has adversely affected the economic and social well-being of all sectors of the society. "...it is felt that the burden of repayment of the loans taken by individuals, especially those in the unorganised sector, MSMEs and agriculturalists is particularly onerous at this time, and these sections need some relief by way of moratorium on the repayment of loans at least till December 31, 2021," Balagopal said in a letter dated June 16.

Details on page-5

Insolvency law changing the way society perceives biz failures: Sahoo

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Can't pay Rs 4L ex gratia to Covid victims: Centre

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that ex-gratia compensation of Rs 4 lakh cannot be paid to the families of those who have died of COVID-19 as it is beyond fiscal affordability and the finances of central and state governments are under severe strain.

In an affidavit filed before the top court, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the Centre submitted that it has by ways of "Minimum Standard Relief", under section 12 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, taken several steps providing for substantial and speedy measures by way of increase in health, infrastructure, ensuring food safety to every citizen.

"The prayer of the petitioner for payment of ex-gratia to all

Telangana a role model for other states, claims KCR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Sunday inaugurated various newly constructed government offices including the integrated district offices complex and police commissionerate in Siddipet and Kamareddy districts and called the state a role model for other states in administrative reforms.

District collectorate complexes and police offices have been built as part of the government's efforts to ensure good government.

During the inauguration programmes, the CM elaborated some of the government's flagship schemes such as Mission Kakatiya, Kaleshwaram Projects, Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bhima, Shadi Mubarak, and others tracing the



Kamareddy District Collector Dr A. Sharath touching CM K Chandrasekhar Rao's feet on Sunday.

historical background and in-depth reasons to launch them.

The two districts were among 23 new districts carved out by dividing 10 districts after the formation

of Telangana state. This had increased the total number of districts in the state to 33.

CONTENTIOUS IRRIGATION PROJECTS

Is a friendly match on between TS and AP?

SNCN ACHARYULU ■ HYDERABAD

The Chief Ministers of Telugu States, while seeming to have cordial relations, never lose an opportunity to assert their own state's rights over shared river waters on which contentious projects are coming up.

In this context, the State cabinet's recent criticism of the 'illegal' projects conceived by AP, including the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Project and the Rajolubanda Right Canal, as well as TS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's comments in this regard on Saturday have raised eyebrows. Having accused AP of theft of water, TS has expressed its resolve to construct its own projects, regardless of the ones proposed by AP.

Telangana political circles are now of the view that, considering the impending Huzurabad Assembly bye-election, KCR wants to stoke Telangana sentiments for reaping political benefits. However, ruling party leaders of Andhra Pradesh said it was just a "friendly match" between the two CMs, who have "no differences". For, before issuing the statement on irrigation projects, the Chief Minister's Offices in both the states discussed the issue.

According to YSR Congress leaders in Telangana, former minister and BJP leader DK Aruna has taken up an agitation on the Rajolubanda Diversion Scheme (RDS) against the Andhra Pradesh government.



Finance Minister Harish Rao at the accident spot and (inset) one of the injured pigs

Harish escapes from mishap

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Finance Minister T Harish Rao on Sunday escaped from a road accident, which caused injuries to one person, two pigs, and left several cars in his convoy damaged. The accident took place at Bandaram Kaman in Kondapaka mandal at Duddeda crossroads.

According to reports, when Harish's convoy was nearing the crossroads at Duddeda in Siddipet district, suddenly some wild pigs

came onto the road. Flustered drivers, while trying to avoid running over the pigs, applied sudden brakes, lost control over their vehicles, and ended up hitting one another.

Some persons in the convoy sustained minor injuries, though Harish Rao escaped. Two pigs also sustained severe injuries in the mishap. Some of the cars in the convoy were damaged. Harish Rao later left for Hyderabad in another car, after sending the injured person to a hospital.

CJI thanks Hyderabadis

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana on Sunday profusely thanked all those who called on him during his week-long stay here and also lauded the Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and others for the warm welcome accorded to him. According to an official release from the state government, Justice Ramana also thanked the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam and the Devasthanams of Yadadri and Srisaillam officials for facilitating a holy darshan during a visit to those shrines.

"Me and my wife Sivamala are thankful to all the officials and staff of Raj Bhavan, High Court, Government and Police and journalists who cooperated with me ever since I set foot on the 'Telugu soil till my departure to New Delhi,' the release quoted Ramana as saying. Describing the people who paid him a visit as true examples of 'selfless' and 'matured Telangana society', he said none of them have raised their person-



Objection, Hon.ble CJI, Sir: You're 'Muddu Telugu bidda', but...

al problems but only asked him to strengthen the judiciary. He cautioned the people to adhere to all the precautions with regards to the COVID-19 until the government and scientists declare that it is over. CJ Ramana said he always regretted that his parents were no longer there to cherish his pinnacle position in the judiciary and bless him for his achievements.

Odisha rolls out scheme for kids who lost one or both parents

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With several children having been orphaned since last year, after the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Sunday launched a scheme to provide financial aid to all kids who have lost one or both their parents, no matter what the cause.

The beneficiaries of the 'Ashirbad' scheme -- applicable from April, 2020 -- have been divided into three categories -- those who have been orphaned, those who have to move to welfare homes for want of a caretaker, and children who have lost their earning parent, a statement issued by the chief minister's office said.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Jyeshtha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi : Ekadashi: 01:31 pm

Nakshatram : Swati: 04:45 pm

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

Rahukalam : 07:24 am - 09:02 am

Yamagandam : 10:40 am - 12:17 pm

Variyam : 09:48 pm - 11:14 pm

Gulika : 01:55 pm - 03:33 pm

Good Time : (to start any important work)

Amritakalam : 08:43 am - 10:10 am

Ahhijit Muhurtham : 11:51 am - 12:44 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 33/23

Humidity: 50%

Sunrise: 05:42 am

Sunset: 06:52 pm

Current Weather Conditions Updated JUNE 20, 2021 5:00 PM

Over 3.06 cr Covid vax doses still available with states and UTs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 3.06 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses are still available with states and union territories and over 24.53 lakh doses will be received by them in the next three days, the Union health ministry said on Sunday.

It said that 29,10,54,050 vaccine doses have been provided to states and union territories (UTs) so far through the government of India's free of cost channel and the direct state procurement category.

A record 13.59 lakh get the jab on single day in Andhra

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh achieved on Sunday what the health authorities feel could be a world record as over 13.59 lakh people were vaccinated from 6 AM to 10 PM in more than 2,200 locations in all 13 districts of the State.

Covid Task Force chairman of the State K S Jawahar Reddy said it was a remarkable achievement to vaccinate 1.3 million people in a day under the mega vaccination drive.

This showed that our medical team and other staff can take up over one million vaccinations in a day if the government at the Centre maintains the (vaccine) supply, Reddy said. The two Godavari districts, East and West, topped the list with 1.55



lakh and 1.54 lakh vaccinated. Krishna, Visakhapatnam and Guntur also crossed one lakh each. By 10 PM, 13,59,410 people were administered the coronavirus vaccine in the State.

In brief

'New delta plus variant could become a variant of concern'

Delta Plus variant, a mutated version of the more aggressive B.1.617.2 strain that drove the second wave of infections in India, is undergoing additional mutation called K417N which could become a "variant of concern" if unchecked, said AIIMS Chief Dr Randeep Guleria, adding that India needs to learn from the UK where the said variant is causing a surge in cases. Dr Guleria said India could see a faster surge if aggressive Covid-appropriate behaviour is not followed. He also insisted on aggressive surveillance to guard against any spike in the Covid cases following unlocking in parts of the country.

Tamil Nadu lockdown now till June 28

The Tamil Nadu government today announced major relaxations, including the resumption of metro services and inter-district public transport, as it extended the Covid lockdown in the state by a week. State capital Chennai and three surrounding districts - Tiruvallur, Kanchipuram and Chengalpeta - have been provided major relaxations as part of the easing of lockdown amid the receding second Covid wave. The ongoing lockdown in the state has been extended till June 28. The relaxations will not be enforced in Coimbatore and 10 other districts that have been categorised as hotspots, officials said.

'Will solve issues at the earliest': Infosys on portal complaints

Flooded with complaints from several income tax payers who are also shareholders in the company regarding the new e-filing portal, Information Technology giant Infosys has assured that it is committed to resolve all glitches being faced by users within the next few weeks, even as it claimed that close to one lakh users have filed their income tax returns so far through the platform. The company manages the new platform which had been introduced by the Finance Ministry on June 7, 2021. Replying to questions raised by shareholders during the company's 40th annual general meeting held on Saturday, related to the problems being faced while using the new income tax portal, Infosys' chief operating officer (COO) UB Pravin Rao said that the company is concerned at the inconvenience being faced by users, and will try to address the problems of crores of taxpayers.

All Coronavirus deaths to be certified, or action likely: Centre in Court

All coronavirus deaths regardless of where they take place, should be certified as Covid deaths, the Centre has said in an affidavit in the Supreme Court amid media reports of huge discrepancy in death figures in at least six states. In a 183-page affidavit filed late last night, the Centre also promised action against doctors who fail to comply with this rule. So far, only deaths of coronavirus patients that took place in hospitals were certified as Covid, not the ones that happened at home or even at hospital parking lots, leading to a discrepancy in fatality figures that ran into lakhs.

Sena MLA writes to Uddhav to reconcile with BJP

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik, who is under the Enforcement Directorate's scanner for alleged money laundering, has written a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray appealing to him to reconcile with the BJP "before it is too late". In the letter dated June 10, Sarnaik said even though the alliance with the BJP has broken, personal and harmonious relations between leaders of the 'yuti' (Shiv Sena-BJP) remain.

Monday Mirchi

Queenly birthday bash

For film stars and other celebrities as well as those with power and pelf, it is natural to hire event managers and celebrate their birthday in regal style, with tabloids and dailies splashing those dazzling moments the next day. But a young officer in Telangana, treated with utmost respect in official and political circles for her prominence in CMO and proximity to powers that be, saw her birthday being celebrated spontaneously in style: food distribution, free eye checkup campaign, planting of saplings, shower of wishes from prominent people, selfies with saplings, musical rendition by fans, photomontage, collages and whatnot. All this was done on the birthday of IAS Smita Sabarwal. Her followers across the state, from villages to HI-TEC City, celebrated her birthday. A fan page of the bureaucrat gave a call for planting a sapling; of course with a selfie. As part of the Green India Challenge, Smita also planted a sapling. She appreciated everyone who did something good to mark her queenly birthday.

Geographies do not distance mentor-mentee

In bureaucracy too, sound mentor-mentee relationship is beyond geographies. They may miss being colleagues because of a posting, but their relationship puts magic in the work to be done. Yadadri Bhongir got a new Collector last week and a former boss shared his excitement on Twitter. Principal Secretary Arvind Kumar congratulated Pamela Satpathy on being posted as Collector Yadadri-Bhongir and said that it was "well-deserved & recognition of her hard work & dedication". Pamela thanked Arvind for being a mentor all through her journey and even said that she was always indebted for the support. The Municipal Administration Department and specifically Warangal is going to miss her, the senior official pointed out, while saying that they will continue their good work.

Dhoti-clad Collector

In June 2019 the Tamil Nadu government modified its earlier order on dress code to include dhoti as formal dress for men working in state government offices. Even otherwise, on January 6th, dhoti-clad babus are common in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry offices since they celebrate International Dhoti Day. We don't know how many borders dhoti has crossed. Whatever it may be, dhoti did make an entry in TS official circles. On a couple of occasions during scorching summer in May, an IAS officer was seen in dhoti. Clad in the comfortable non-formal wear, the Collector of Rajanna Sircilla carried out inspections in villages. The officer, Krishna Bhaskar, who is IPS-turned-IAS, was seen perfectly duty-conscious in dhoti, inspecting the construction of hospitals, grain purchase

centers, and the like. The onset of monsoon has perhaps changed his preferences. These days he is seen in formals.

Masking begins at home

While lifting the lockdown completely, the Telangana government made it a point to put the onus of Covid-appropriate behavior on the public. So, people are still expected to wear masks, maintain appropriate distance, follow hand hygiene, and of course, get vaccinated. Like in the past, there are also people who flout the very rules they are supposed to popularize and help enforce. The latest official to join the band wagon is Siddipet Collector Venkatrami Reddy. A picture of his without mask, while accompanying Minister Harish Rao (who was inspecting arrangements for the inauguration of Integrated Collectorate Complex by the Chief Minister), drew public attention and evoked social media outrage. The picture sends a wrong message, considering that masking, like charity, begins at home. People were given specific instruction to wear mask even at home, after the second wave peaked. With the Huzurabad bye-election on the horizon, and the third wave round the corner, maybe this time they will recommend double-masking at home.

Babu has reasons to feel at home

After an agonizingly long wait, 2006 batch IAS officer Revu Mutyala Raju has been allocated subjects in the CMO. He has been given housing, redressal of applications and grievances of elected representatives. Housing has been a priority area for Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who has targeted construction of at least 23 lakh affordable houses over the next few years. Raju will now have to also deal with MPs and MLAs. This surely comes as a whiff of fresh air for Raju, who otherwise had hardly anything to do for more than one and half months.

Painful last journey of a beloved bureaucrat

Former chief secretary of combined Andhra Pradesh SV Prasad, a towering and beloved bureaucrat who died of Covid recently, merited the glowing tributes that were paid to him. After all, he had won the hearts of everyone with whom he had come in contact. He was loved by everyone, right from a senior bureaucrat to a support staffer in his office. Few turned up for the last journey of the ever-smiling babu, understandably because of the lethality of the second wave of Covid. Only three persons shouldered the responsibilities for Prasad's last rites: Telangana DGP M Mahender Reddy, Telangana Transco CMD D Prabhakar Rao and APTransco executive director A Chandrasekar Reddy. They proved to be good Samaritans for not just the living, but also the dead.

- Yours truly

Sahoo: Insolvency law changing the way society perceives biz failures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fuelled by a huge unsatiated appetite for freedom of exit, the insolvency law is changing the way the society perceives business failures as it becomes a reform by, for and of the stakeholders, according to IBBI Chairperson M S Sahoo.

Little over five years after its enactment, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), which provides a time-bound and market-linked framework for resolution of stressed assets, has passed the constitutional muster. In Sahoo's words, with every judgement of the Supreme Court, the Code has developed deeper and stronger roots, and probably boasts of the largest body of case laws.

In value terms, the Code has rescued 70 per cent of distressed assets through insolvency resolution plans and has released remaining 30 per cent

of such assets through liquidations.

Sahoo, who has been at the helm of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) since its inception in October 2016, said the Code is changing the way the society perceives business failures.

IBBI is a key institution in implementing the Code.

According to the IBBI chief, by rescuing viable businesses through the insolvency process, closing unviable ones through liquidation, and facilitating voluntary liquidations, it is releasing the entrepreneurs from honest business failures.

"Firms, which may fail to withstand market pressures, would need to use the Code for either a re-organisation of business or a clean and dignified exit. 'Failing in succeeding' will soon be the new mantra for budding entrepreneurs in the



In Sahoo's words, with every judgement of the SC, the Code has developed deeper and stronger roots, and probably boasts of the largest body of case laws

country. Days are not far ahead when we will celebrate failure," Sahoo told PTI in an e-mail interview.

Since the provisions of the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) came into force on December 1, 2016, a total of 4,376 CIRPs have commenced till the end of March this year.

Out of the total, 2,653 have been closed, including 348 CIRPs that ended in approval of resolution plans. As many as

617 CIRPs were closed on appeal or review or settled, while 411 were withdrawn and 1,277 ended in orders for liquidation, as per IBBI's latest quarterly newsletter.

Citing the takeaways, Sahoo said that a huge unsatiated appetite for freedom of exit "made the Code a reform by, for, and of the stakeholders, and prohibition on undesirable persons to wrest control of a stressed company ushered in fair debtor-creditor relationship."

Significant improvements in the score for resolving insolvency made doing business in India easier and emergence of new markets for resolution plans, interim finance and liquidation assets are among others.

While pointing out that six amendments and dozens of subordinate legislation have kept the Code relevant with the

changing needs and addressed implementation difficulties, Sahoo said that mostly importantly, "the rule of law got institutionalised in an anarchic stressful situation when the claims of all creditors together is inconsistent with the available assets of the company".

All said, there are also misses but not many.

Apart from the few missing elements such as cross border and group insolvency to complement corporate insolvency, Sahoo said that though the work has begun, an institutional framework for grooming a cadre of valuers is sometime away.

"As compared to previous regime which took nearly five years for conclusion, the process under the Code yielding a resolution plan takes on average 400 days. It, however, falls short of intended 180/270 days," he said.

Telangana a role model for other states...

Continued from page 1

KCR, as the Chief Minister is popularly known, said old districts were divided to decentralize governance and take fruits of separate statehood to the doorsteps of the people.

KCR illustrated with examples of several administrative reforms the government is implementing, implementation of the welfare schemes, and how they were of benefit to the people.

He touched upon each and every scheme by its name, scope and results.

The government also undertook the unique task, which no other state government ever did in the country, of constructing integrated collectorates at the district headquarters and set up special police offices for the senior police officials.

To make the government employees who are playing a key role in creating 'Bangaru Telangana' (golden Telangana)

Collectors touching KCR's feet throws a surprise!

Continued from page 1

The Siddipet incident took place when the Chief Minister made the Collector sit in his seat at the inauguration of the newly built Integrated Collector's Office Complex here on Sunday. Later, Collector Venkatrami Reddy introduced his family members to the Chief Minister. This is the second time that Venkatrami Reddy touched KCR's feet. Earlier, Venkatrami Reddy had exhibited his respect for KCR in the same manner during the formation of new districts. Several IAS officers were visibly shocked at the Siddipet Collector's action. At one point, speculations were rife during the Dubbak by-elections that KCR may field Siddipet Collector Venkatrami Reddy as the TRS' candidate. However, neither Venkatrami Reddy nor TRS leaders condemned it. So, some opposition leaders feel that the IAS officer may join politics soon, given his 'tilt' towards KCR.

and to increase their involvement, collectorate complexes were constructed at the district headquarters.

MLA camp offices are also coming up so that MLAs are accessible to the people in the constituencies.

At Siddipet district headquarters, the chief minister inaugurated the integrated district offices

complex, district police commissionerate complex and MLA camp office.

He said Telangana has become a role model for other states in development and in the administrative reforms.

KCR, who hails from Siddipet district, interacted with the people and some prominent personalities.

Is a friendly match on...

Continued from page 1

After taking the customary police guard of honour, the CM inaugurated the police commissionerate.

He went around the complex and examined it. The CM expressed satisfaction over the quality of construction.

Speaking on the occasion, KCR listed out administrative reforms the government is implementing, implementation of the welfare schemes, and how these schemes are helping the people.

The CM also explained in detail about Mission Kakatiya, Mission Bhagiratha, Kaleshwaram Projects, Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bhima, Kalyana Laxmi, Shadi Mubarak, KCR Kits and other schemes tracing the historical background and in-depth reasons to launch them.

Stating that he brought in so many schemes for the long-term benefit of the people, the Chief Minister these schemes can never be changed even if a new government comes in the state.

The controversy on RDS is decades old. During the separate Telangana movement, Telangana politicians utilised the RDS controversy as a weapon against Andhra leaders. The allegation with regard to RDS is that Andhra Pradesh is illegally utilising more water and doing injustice to Telangana region. The TRS government now thinks that the agitation taken up by BJP leader DK Aruna may create problems for TRS, particularly during the upcoming Huzurabad assembly bye-election. According to sources, KCR has decided to bring the situation to neutral, thereby denying any political mileage to BJP on the RDS controversy. So, he wants to create an impression that the TRS government is fighting against the AP government to protect TS interests.

Can't pay Rs 4L ex gratia...

Continued from page 1

"Thus, utilisation of scarce resources for giving ex-gratia may have unfortunate consequences of affecting the pandemic response and health expenditure in other aspects and hence cause more damage than good. It is an unfortunate but important fact that the resources of the governments have limits and any additional burden through ex-gratia will reduce the funds available for other health and welfare schemes," the affidavit filed by the Centre said.

It further submitted that under the Disaster Management Act, 2005, Section 12, it is the "National Authority" which is empowered to recommend guidelines for the minimum standards of relief, including ex-gratia assistance and this is the function entrusted to the authority by the law passed by the Parliament.

"It is well settled through numerous judgements of the

Supreme Court that this is a matter which should be performed by the authority, to whom it has been entrusted and not one where the Court will substitute its own judgement for the decision to be taken by the Executive.

"Any attempt to second guess may create unintended and unfortunate constitutional and administrative ramifications. It may also be noted that the term 'ex-gratia' itself connotes that the amount is not based on legal entitlement," the affidavit stated.

The Centre told the apex court that it is wrong to state that the help can be provided only through ex-gratia assistance as "it would be a rather pedantic and narrow approach".

"A broader approach, which involves health interventions, social protection, and economic recovery for the affected communities, would be a more prudent, responsible, and sustainable approach."

Sena MLA writes...

Continued from page 1

"It is better to reconcile before it is too late," the MLA said in the letter. Notably, the Sena forged an alliance with the NCP and Congress and formed the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra in 2019 after the Uddhav Thackeray-led party fell out with the BJP. In November last year, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided premises linked to Sarnaik in Maharashtra in connection with a money laundering case being probed against a security service provider company and others.

The Shiv Sena had called the raids a "political vendetta" and said the Maharashtra government or its leaders will not surrender to pressure from anyone.

Noting that municipal corporation polls are due soon in several Maharashtra cities, including Mumbai, Sarnaik in his letter to the CM said, "I believe fighting a war like Arjun, instead of sacrificing oneself like Abhimanyu or Karna."

Decline in yellow metal

Following the announcement of a new gold policy by the US Federal Reserve, the investing class has read the signals between the lines for next financial year.

signals seem to be positive, considering the fact that in the first five months of the current year, the yellow metal has recorded a decline of about five per cent. This trend is, however, momentary and subject to so many ifs and buts.

Consequently, New York gold closed at US \$ 1,763.80 (per ounce) while silver remained steady and closed at \$ 25.76 (per ounce). Platinum and palladium closed at \$ 1,030 (per ounce) and \$ 2,400 (per ounce) respectively.

Other economic parameters remained moderate. Brent closed at US \$ 73.51 (per barrel) while Crude MCX oil was quoted at Rs.5,310 (per barrel). While Gold MCX stood at Rs.46,800 (per 10 gms), MCX Silver closed at Rs.67,580 (per kg) and Copper MCX at Rs.694.10 (per kg). Sensex and Nifty 50 closed at 52,344.45 and 15,683.35 points respectively.

Leading foreign currencies' closing exchange rates were: US \$: Rs.74.14, British Pound : Rs.102.40, Euro : Rs.87.97, Singapore \$: Rs.55.14, Swiss Franc :

Australian \$: Rs.80.33, Australian \$: Rs.55.47, Saudi Riyal: Rs.19.77, New Zealand Dollar: Rs.51.42, Kuwaiti Dinar: Rs.246.09, Omani Rial: Rs.192.62 and UAE Dirham: Rs.20.19, Japanese Yen: Rs.0.67 and Hong Kong Dollar: Rs.9.55.

In local markets, after the gradual decline during the first five days, gold and silver staged a moderate recovery during the last working day. Standard gold (24 carats) depreciated by Rs.1,900 and closed at Rs.48,000 (per 10 gms).

Ornamental gold too followed suit and was quoted in the range of Rs.43,900 - 44,000 on the

closing day. Silver (0.999) declined by Rs.4,200 and closed at Rs.73,100 (per kg).

COMMODITIES The sentiment in principal wholesale commodity markets in the twin cities remained moderate due to timely arrival of the monsoon. Rythu Bazaars and the various commodity markets located in Begum Bazar, Kishangunj, Mukthiyargunj, Risala Abdullah, Mir AlamMandi, Dilsukhnagar, Kukatpally, Bowenpally and General Bazar recorded moderate trading. With the lifting of Covid-19 lockdown in Telangana, traders are optimistic about the return of happy days again.

During the week, common pulses such as tuar dal,

masoor dal, moong dal and urad dal and commodities like chillies and garlic remained unchanged at their respective last week's closing levels, while staple food grains and common edible recorded a negligible decline.

Common vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, ribbed gourd, snake gourd, lady's finger, cucumber, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, French beans and leafy vegetables eased considerably.

The NECC wholesale price of egg in Hyderabad declined by Rs.75 and closed at Rs.475 (per 100). On the closing day, the highest price of Rs.550 was recorded at Lucknow and Varanasi, while Hospet recorded the lowest of Rs.470.

Objection, Hon,ble CJI, Sir: You're 'Muddu Telugu bidida', but...

■ HC UPADHYAY

True, it is a happy occasion for the people of both Telugu States to see their beloved son of the soil occupying the coveted post of the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and there is every reason for them to rejoice and celebrate it. It is equally a happy occasion for all countrymen to welcome the new CJI. Further, there is nothing wrong in the newly appointed CJI visiting places of pilgrimage or meeting privately his kith and kin as well as friends in close circles.

Obviously, up to this stage, nobody could have any objection. But the matter gets really serious when the celebrations in the form of felicitations cross all limits of maintaining 'aloofness' by a Judge. Without any intention to belittle the importance of the incident or showing disrespect to the august post of the CJI or the person concerned Justice N.V.Ramana, it is, however, necessary to remind not only the CJI but all other judges

of the country that such a show of public appearance could have been avoided.

The 16-point 'Restatement of Values of Judicial Life', first adopted by the Supreme Court on May 7th 1997 and later made applicable to all the judicial officers in the country, clearly lays down that "Every Judge must at all times be conscious that he is under the public gaze and there should be no act or omission by him which is unbefitting of the high office he occupies and the public esteem in which that office is hailed."

Further, the said document also states: 'A judge should practice a degree of aloofness consistent with the dignity of his office.'

Among others, there are also restrictions on mingling with the people in general and keeping close association with individual members of the Bar,

besides restrictions on joining a Club, refraining from entering into public debate or expression of views in public etc., which form part of the self-drawn 'Lakshman Rekha' for judges.

In the course of his about a week's sojourn to the Telugu States, the CJI chose to meet scores of people from different walks of life such as politicians, bureaucrats, practising lawyers and businessmen. Had he kept the concept of 'aloofness' in mind, he could have avoided such a worthless public show of aggrandizement easily. Among the visitors, who know how many of them have their cases pending before the Supreme Court or other courts? But it is for certain that among the brass of the Telangana police, which included the DGP and 3 Commissioners, who, at the slightest opportunity,

come out openly in support of morals, ethics and values in judiciary.

Plea for SC Regional Benches The demand for the establishment of Regional Benches of the Supreme Court at Kolkata, Chennai/Hyderabad and Mumbai has been raised once again by the South Indian Advocates Joint Action Committee. A representation to this effect was submitted to the Chief Justice of India N.V.Ramana during his recent sojourn to Andhra Pradesh and Telangana by the Convener of the Joint Action Committee S.Nagender.

On the face of it, there is nothing exceptional in the demand of lawyers, considering the factors such as distances from different parts of the country to the seat of the Supreme Court of India at New Delhi and litigation costs involved. However, there is a strong opposition to the idea of setting up Regional Benches of

the Apex Court by some of the Delhi-based Supreme Court lawyers who think that their monopoly would end if the demand for establishment of Regional Benches is conceded.

A compendium of ST laws There is not much literature available on Adivasis, meaning the 'first inhabitants or aborigines' with official name of 'Scheduled Tribes'. Most of them are concentrated in central, eastern and north-eastern regions. These regions are witnessing a variety of ethnic, socio-political conflicts. Scheduled Tribes (STs) are one of the few sections of society in India who do not shy away to rebel against those in power whenever their rights are violated and there is a threat to their culture and self-governance.

The book entitled, 'Fifth Schedule to the Constitution', by veteran scholar, practicing lawyer and a former legislator Dr. Jai Prakash Gupta, provides

an insight into the development of ST-related laws in the country. The Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India, as the author puts, 'is a Constitution within the Constitution.' The said Schedule determines the political and Constitutional arrangements of over 108 districts in 10 states.

Published by Satyam Law International, New Delhi, the book would be of immense use particularly to lawyers, lawmakers and researchers.

TS-HC snubs State government- In a rare expression of anger, the High Court of Telangana rebuked the topmost authorities of the state government, particularly those heading the Home Department, for their crass indifference to the Court's directives.

The matter pertained to the filling of some 174 posts of additional Public Prosecutors in Criminal Courts. On previous occasions when the matter came up for hearing before the division Bench comprising the

Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B.Vijay Sen Reddy, the government pleader had sought time for conveying the decision of the government for the appointment of additional Public Prosecutors. However, when the matter came up for further hearing on June 16, the government pleader requested for some more time. At this, the enraged Chief Justice angrily asked when the work in Criminal Courts has crippled because of almost 50% vacancies of Public Prosecutors, how the top bureaucrats can take matter so lightly and threatened to initiate proceedings against top bureaucrats under the Contempt of Court Act if they failed to fill the existing vacancies within three weeks.

Indeed, it is a sad commentary on the state of affairs prevailing in the state of Telangana. Hope, the powers that be would wake up from the slumber at least after this latest dose of caustic warning from the High Court.

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Life returns to normal in T'gana after 39 days of Covid lockdown

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After 39 days, normal activities resumed in Telangana from Sunday with the state government lifting the lockdown totally, following the drastic drop in the number of Covid-19 positive cases.

The government has issued unlock orders, allowing all activities that were permitted prior to the imposition of the lockdown.

The full impact of unlock will be seen from Monday when government offices and other establishments will re-open with 100 per cent employee strength.

The state cabinet, at its meeting on Saturday, decided to lift the lockdown totally after examining the report



submitted by the Medical and Health Department that number of Covid positive cases have drastically come down and the pandemic situation is now under control in the state.

It instructed officials from all the departments to lift all the restrictions imposed during the lockdown in the state.

Stating that decision was taken for the people's benefit

and to ensure that the livelihoods did not further incur losses, the cabinet sought people's support and cooperation.

It made it clear that lifting of the lockdown should not lead to negligent behaviour.

Following the Cabinet decision, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar issued unlock orders. According to Government Order (GO), wearing of face mask shall be compulsory in public places, in work places and in means of transport. Failure to wear face mask will attract a penalty of Rs 1,000. Individuals must maintain social distancing.

All shops, offices and establishments have been directed to ensure that all Covid norms with respect to physical dis-

tancing, sanitisation etc, are scrupulously followed. "Failure to observe these norms will attract action under relevant Acts and orders issued under Disaster Management Act, 2005," reads the GO.

All educational institutions and coaching institutions have been permitted to re-open. Government schools and colleges can re-open from July 1.

Lockdown was imposed in the state on May 12 due to surge in Covid-19 cases. Initially only a four hour relaxation was given to enable people to buy essentials. Subsequently, relaxation hours were extended to eight hours and later to 12 hours.

On Saturday, Telangana recorded 1,362 new Covid cases and 10 deaths.

RTC inter-state services resume from today, MMTS in one week

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) is gearing up to run interstate bus services as the state government of Telangana has lifted the lockdown without any restrictions in the state. The TSRTC is making arrangements to operate buses to Andhra Pradesh and other states from June 21 in tune with lockdown restrictions and relaxation timings in other states.

Accordingly, the TSRTC would run its bus services to AP from 6 am to 6 pm. Similarly, the TSRTC will operate bus services from 5 am to 7 pm in all areas of Karnataka, barring Bangalore. In view of the weekend curfew prevailing in Karnataka, the bus services to the state would remain suspended from Friday evening to Monday morning.



The TSRTC said that the passengers can reserve seats on the inter-state bus services. Meanwhile, the Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy, quoting the department of railways, said that the Multi-Modal Transport System (MMTS) in Hyderabad will be back on rails from next week for the benefit of petty vendors, employees and people from various sections of the society living not only in Hyderabad but also around the city and to provide safe transport facility.

These categories of people have to shell down Rs 100 per day towards transport charges instead of paying Rs 5 or 10 per head to travel in Hyderabad. The MMTS services, which were not available to the residents for the last one year due to Coronavirus pandemic, will be operated adhering to Covid rules.

He thanked Union Minister for Railways Piyush Goyal for taking a decision to run the MMTS services, responding to his request, keeping in mind the problems of the poor.

Cops bust inter-state human trafficking racket, arrest five

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALKAJGIRI

The Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) of Rachakonda police busted an interstate human trafficking racket that was being operated from Vanasthalipuram and arrested five persons involved in the case. A victim who hails from Mumbai was rescued by the police.

The arrested persons were identified as J Naga Chandra Sekhar, 26, a resident of Dilsuknagar, B Guraiah, 37, a resident of Vanasthalipuram, Shilpi Barman, 29, a resident of Madhapur, Nampally Rameshwar, 40, a resident of LB Nagar and G Ram Mohan, 48, a resident of Bhongir District.

"The four persons had formed into a gang and were organising prostitution at a lodge in Vanasthalipuram. The gang collected huge amounts from the customers and after



retaining a major part of it handed over a few hundred rupees to the victim," said Mahesh M Bhagwat, Rachakonda Commissioner of Police.

On receiving a tip off, the Anti Human Trafficking Unit (AHTU) and Vanasthalipuram police officials under Rachakonda Police Commissionerate led by S Chandrasekar jointly conducted raids on Manohar Lodge at Vanasthalipuram and nabbed the accused organisers.

According to the police, Naga Chandra Sekhar and

Guraiah used to send the pictures of the victim to the needy customers through WhatsApp and called them to Manohar Lodge by collecting Rs 11,000 from each customer. The victim was paid Rs 500 and the remaining amount was shared between the accused persons.

All the arrested persons are being produced before the court while the victim is shifted to a rescue home.

The police appealed to the people to pass on any information pertaining to illegal activities on 9490617111.

Security guard killed as truck runs over bike

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A security guard died in a road accident in Gandhinagar in the city on Sunday morning.

The victim identified as K Sudharshan who worked at Singareni Bhavan in Khairatabad was going to his workplace on his motorcycle when a truck hit and ran over him at DBR Mills early on Sunday.

Sudharshan sustained serious injuries and died on the spot.

Soon after the incident the driver of the truck ran away from the spot while the cleaner was detained by the Gandhinagar police officials.

The body is shifted to Osmania Hospital mortuary for postmortem examination. A case is registered by the Gandhinagar police and investigation is going on.

TCA secretary hits out at Azharuddin

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Cricket Association general secretary Dharam Gurava Reddy hit out at the Hyderabad Cricket Association president Mohammed Azharuddin, claiming that the former Indian captain has no right to conduct cricketing activities in districts.

Gurava Reddy said the HCA officials have to take the permission of BCCI if they intend to take up cricketing activities in the districts.

"Azharuddin is no more HCA president as per their apex council and HCA cannot associate itself with district activities without the BCCI's

'Azhar is behaving like dictator'

Alleging that the former Indian Cricket team skipper and HCA President Mohammed Azharuddin is behaving like a dictator, former HCA secretary Shesh Narayan expressed anger over him.

Azharuddin has been destroying the HCA, Narayan said predicting that a day would come when the BCCI would intervene in HCA activities only

due to the attitude of Azharuddin. Speaking to the media on Sunday, Narayan said that the HCA Apex Council has removed Azharuddin alleging that he acted as a mentor to a team for the unofficial T-10 tournament held at UAE. Azharuddin also submitted falsehood information about his retirement date, freed HCA accounts, appointed an ombudsman, intervened in team selection and failed to attend the HCA meetings, he said. Narayan said that playing cricket is different from administration.

It is ridiculous on the part of Azharuddin as he has been continuing as the president of HCA even after removing him from the HCA president's position by the Apex Council. He alleged that Azharuddin failed to follow rules and regulations of the HCA in appointing District Cricket Associations' presidents. He demanded Azharuddin to show accounts for the Rs 47crore received from BCCI in the regime of Azharuddin. He said Hyderabad cricket would improve if the BCCI dissolved the HCA members.



written consent. The TCA has been organising cricketing events in the districts since the

last seven years and the same was established through courts and BCCI meetings. HCA

does not have its presence outside Hyderabad for the last 75 years," he said.

Row over wedding card leaves 4 hurt

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

An argument over details in a wedding invitation card ended up in attack with knives and bleeding injuries for four persons at Tukaramgate in the city. The condition of the injured was stated to be critical.

According to the police, the argument started over names of some of the family members not being printed on a wedding card. Sarvesh and Shraavan had an argument with their relative Yadagiri four days ago as the names of their parents were not printed on a wedding invitation. The marriage of their relative was performed on June 16 and since then, the issue started.

"On Sunday, Yadagiri along with three of his relatives went to the house of Sarvesh and Shraavan to resolve the issue. An argument ensued during which the duo took knives and attacked Yadagiri and three others," said SHO Tukaramgate Police Station.

The police rushed to the spot and shifted the injured persons to hospital where they are undergoing treatment. A case is registered by the Tukaramgate Police under Section 307 (attempt to murder) and investigation is ongoing.



RESPIRE AFTER LOCKDOWN

Tourists in large numbers visited historic Charminar on the first day after lifting of lockdown on Sunday. While everyone is excited to go out, people are also aware that the pandemic is far from over.



3.06 cr Covid vax doses still available with states and UTs

Continued from Page 1

Of this, the total consumption, including wastage, is 26,04,19,412 doses, according to data available at 8 am on Sunday, the ministry said.

It said that "3,06,34,638 COVID-19 vaccine doses are still available with the states and UTs to be administered."

"Furthermore, more than 24,53,080 vaccine doses are in the pipeline and will be received by them within the next three days," the ministry said. It said that as part of the nationwide vaccination drive, the government of India has been supporting states and UTs by providing them Covid vaccines free of cost. Vaccination is an integral pillar of the comprehensive strategy of the government for containment and management of the pandemic, along with 'test, track, treat' and Covid appropriate behaviour, the ministry said.

TS govt seeks vaccine testing facility in Hyd

Continued from Page 1

"For the projected capacity of a billion doses in Hyderabad between August to December 2021, having a testing center in Hyderabad could result in accelerated throughput of about 8-10 crore additional vaccine doses per month in the country's overall supply," Rao said.

Referring to experts' predictions on the third wave in India between September and December 2021, he said vaccines are the only solution for this fight against covid, and hence increasing the rate of vaccination is even more critical. Minister KTR assured that the state government will provide its complete support in establishing the facility on a fast track mode.

The testing center could be established in an existing set up like the National Animal Resource Facility for Biomedical Research, Central Drug Testing Laboratory, Hyderabad to address the immediate requirement while a state-of-the-art full-fledged facility can be built in parallel



to cater to testing requirements on a long term to ensure uninterrupted national and global supply of vaccines, he opined. KTR said that setting up a second vaccination testing centre in the country at Hyderabad can expedite manufacturing of vaccines.

The Centre should realise the need for setting up the testing centre in Hyderabad to produce more vaccines in the shortest time to provide required doses available for the biggest vaccination programme in history, he said.

Rama Rao also stated that the Telangana government will be able to provide land as required in the Genome valley cluster of Hyderabad which has emerged as the vaccine hub.

MLA hails Cabinet nod to set up super speciality hospitals

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

LB Nagar MLA Sudhir Reddy on Sunday welcomed the Cabinet decision to build super speciality hospital in LB Nagar and described it as a great decision. He said that the state government was urged to shift the fruit market at Gaddi Annaram in the city to Koheda.

As luck would have it, the state government has decided to set up the super speciality hospital at Gaddi Annaram fruit market site, he added. Similarly, he hailed the Cabinet decision to upgrade the vegetable market at Kothapet into the most modern veg and non-vegetarian market. He appreciated Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for taking decisions for the good of the posterity.



Two injured as car overturns on ORR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two persons sustained injuries when a car fell off the culvert at Rajendranagar Outer Ring Road

(ORR) service road early on Sunday.

According to the police, the car was being driven at a high speed when it overturned near

Chennama Hotel at ORR service road and fell off the culvert. On information the police reached the spot and shifted the injured persons to the nearby

hospital for treatment. The police reportedly found a few liquor bottles in the car and seized it. A case is registered and an investigation going on.

TS reports 1,006 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana has reported 1006 new Covid infections and 11 fatalities on Sunday pushing the cumulative number of deaths to 3567 and the total number of positive cases to 6,13,202. The number of active cases in Telangana, as on Sunday evening, is 17,765.

Between Saturday and Sunday, authorities conducted 87,854 Covid rapid tests of which test results of 1319 samples are awaited. On Saturday, 1798 individuals have recovered with a recovery rate of 96.52 per cent. So far, a total of 1,75,25,639 Covid-19 tests have been con-

ducted in the State out of which 6,13,202 have tested positive and 5,91,870 persons have recovered.

The Covid-19 positive cases reported from the districts included 50 from Bhadradi, 141 from areas under GHMC, 17 from Jagtial, 12 from Jangaon, 11 from Bhupalpally, 10 from Gadwal, four from Kamareddy, 62 from Karimnagar, 88 from Khammam, three from Asifabad, 21 from Mahabubnagar, 28 from Mahabubabad, 26 from Mancherial, nine from Medak, 58 from Medchal, 8 from Mulugu, 64 from Nalgonda, five from Narayanpet, nine from Nizamabad.

Sale of government lands in Telangana kicks up row

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After failing to raise resources through sale of lands for last two years, the TRS government has finally initiated the process for e-auction of identified lands to realise its ambitious Budget for 2021-22.

The non-tax revenue for 2021-22 was estimated at Rs 30,557 crore, including Rs 20,000 crore from sale of land.

It had set a target of mobilising Rs 10,000 crore in 2019-20 and Rs 14,515 crore in 2020-21 but the government could not even begin the process for sale of land due to the slowdown of the economy amid Covid.

Though the country's economic recovery has received a setback and prospects of get-

ting good price for lands do not look bright, this time the state government is desperate to raise resources.

The pandemic has hit hard the state's finances. It suffered a revenue loss of about Rs 50,000 crore during the first wave and another Rs 4,000 crore in the second wave.

Facing a severe fund crunch, the state is looking to raise additional resources to meet its financial commitments, especially for Rythu Bandhu, the investment support scheme for farmers. Under this scheme, the government will be crediting Rs 7,509 crore to bank accounts of farmers.

The government is also facing an additional financial burden of Rs 1,000 crore due to revision of salaries of govern-



ment employees and for payment of arrears to them.

The government also requires more funds to improve health infrastructure. It already announced plans to spend Rs 10,000 crore over next two years to improve infrastructure facilities in government hospi-

ties. Taking swift actions, the State Cabinet constituted a Sub-Committee headed by Finance Minister T. Harish Rao on resource mobilization and also set in motion the process for sale of government lands. Harish Rao asked all the departments to prepare a list of

properties, land parcels and other properties belonging to the government.

The minister justified the government's decision, saying that lands were being sold for the state's development and to implement various welfare schemes. A GO was issued on June 10 prescribing SOP for nodal agencies for sale of government land parcels under control of various departments which are not required for any public purpose located in various prime areas scattered throughout the state by open public auction.

According to the GO, since land parcels in prime locations scattered across the state are prone to encroachments, the government permitted for disposal of government land

parcels which are not required for any public purpose by open public auction. The government formed different committees to execute the process in a transparent manner, follow all norms and to ensure that it get good price for the land.

Nodal department will be delegated powers to approve the special terms and conditions and tentative schedule for conduct of e-auction and for fixing of upset price duly considering the prevailing market rates with due diligence.

The government also granted permission to engage MSTC as service provider to conduct e-auction on online platform. The auction will begin with the prime lands in Hyderabad. This is expected to fetch the best price in the country.

KCR to visit Warangal today

PNS ■ WARANGAL

All arrangements have been made for the visit of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Monday, Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Errabelli Dayakar Rao said on Sunday. Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Minister for Tribal and Women Welfare Satyavati Rathod inspected the new integrated collectorate building complex in Warangal on Sunday.

The Chief Minister would participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for a super speciality hospital in Warangal and inaugurate the Kaloji Narayan Rao health University and also new integrated collector complex. Extending his gratitude to the Chief Minister on behalf of the people, Dayakar Rao said the state government was striving for the development of Warangal.



New collector-building complex to be inaugurated

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao will inaugurate the Warangal integrated collector complex which was built with modern technology on

Monday. The officials made all arrangements at the new collector-building complex constructed at a cost of Rs 55 crore. All the government offices belonged to 35

departments would be accommodated at the new complex. Constructed in a sprawling seven-acre land, the integrated collector complex would be a role model for other districts.

Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar, MLC Pochampalli Srinivas Reddy, MLAs Challa Dharma Reddy and

Tatikonda Rajaiah, Zilla Parishad Chairman Sudhir Kumar, District Collector Rajiv Gandhi Hanumanth, Mayor Gundu Sudharani, Chairman Dr K Vasudeva Reddy, DRO Vasuchandra and others were present.

Collector Sharman calls for making plantation a habit

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

District Collector L Sharman has exhorted the people to make plantation a habit at least even during important events like birthdays.

The Collector planted saplings at the camp office here on Sunday on the eve of his 59th birthday Sunday. He suggested the officials who arrived to greet him plant at least one sapling on their birthday. The plant would remain as a sweet memory and in turn, it gives healthy air, fruits and makes the environment clean, he said. He said people could protect the ecological balance by planting trees if everyone



made plantation a habit. Additional Collector P Srinivas Reddy, DRDA Project Director Narsing Rao, Red Cross district Convener Ramesh, Collector

CCs Narayana and Gowtham and others participated in the plantation programme along with the Collector. The district officials greeted Sharman on his birthday.

Maoist leader clarifies on Covid deaths

PNS ■ MULUGU

The campaign launched by the police that Maoists died of Covid in huge numbers was false and concocted, CPI Maoist Central Committee Official spokesperson Abhay said in a statement.

Stating that the state and Central governments have failed to combat the Covid pandemic, Abhay said in a bid to divert the attention of people on the pretext of the corona, the police launched a malicious campaign. The Maoist party condemned the police for fabricating Goebbels propaganda that Naxals were affected with corona. The policies of the state and central governments were to be held responsible for a rise in the cases during the second wave of the corona, Abhay said.

He dispelled fears that none of the Maoists has fallen prey to the corona and they were safe and it was all a ploy of the police. On the pretext of the corona, Maoist leaders Gangalu and Shobha Roy were caught when they fell sick and killed.

Stating that the general elections in the five States were caused for the surge in corona cases, the Maoist Party said election rallies, roadshows and public meetings were organized without caring about the people's health.

Abhay lashed out at the corporate hospitals for fleecing the corona-affected people and left them with empty hands. Both the governments did not take any steps to control the corporate hospitals.

Child marriages on the rise in Medak district

PNS ■ MEDAK

Child marriages are going on unabated in rural Medak as the state machinery is preoccupied with reining in Covid. In 2020, the child protection authorities have foiled 42 child marriages and registered FIRs in respect of two cases. However, so far in 2021 the authorities have foiled 17 child marriages.

The state governments Kalyana Lakshmi and Shadi Mubarak scheme have curtailed child marriages to a great extent. But, closing down schools and colleges as part of reining in the Covid-19 is fuelling an increase in child marriages. The ICDS and Child Protection department authorities have been counselling parents and children. The authorities, according to a preliminary investigation, observed that the child marriages are more in Narsapur, Chilapched, Kaudipalli and other mandals.

As the girls are confined to their homes due to closure of educational institutions, poor families find them to be a burden. Therefore, these families are inclining towards celebrating child marriages. Families which are relatively poor and those that have many girls in the family are deciding to celebrate marriages secretly.

Plan to develop Manyamkonda in line with Yadadri temple: Minister

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Minister for Excise, Sports, Cultural and Tourism Dr V Srinivas Gowd on Sunday said the Manyamkonda Sri Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple would be developed in line with Sri Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple at Yadadri.

The Minister participated as a chief guest in the foundation of a dhvajastambham (Flagpole) and Kalasam at the newly built Sri Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple at Obulayapalli near Manyamkonda on Sunday. Stating that the temples would improve the devotional atmosphere giving peace to the people, Srinivas Gowd said double-bedroom houses would be constructed near Sri Lakshminarasimha Swamy temple.

Later, he laid the foundation stone for 64 double-bedroom houses near the temple. Mahabubnagar MP Manne Srinivas Reddy, District Collector S Venkat Rao, District SP R Venkateswarlu, district Library Association Chairman Rajeswar Gowd, DCCB vice-chairman Venkataiah, ZPTC Venkateswaramma, vice-MPP Sudha, temple chairman Madhu, Endowments Assistant Commissioner Srinivas Raju, Alampur temple EO Prem Kumar, temple trustee Chandramouli and others were present.



Later, speaking after inaugurating the fire station office and fire centre at Mahabubnagar built at a cost of Rs 1.5 crore on Sunday, Srinivas Gowd promised that Mahabubnagar would be developed in all sectors.

Stating that the fire station at Mahabubnagar has a long history, the Minister said people of the district had suffered a lot for drinking water and electricity in the past, but it was developed manifold as it has a district hospital, integrated new collector complex and a huge new hospital would be built in the place of existing collector-building. He further said a residential school would also be established at Veerannapet at Rs 100 crore and there were proposals to develop a ring road in the TD Gutta area, the Minister said.

Mahabubnagar MP Manne Srinivas Reddy said the state



government was striving for development in all spheres. Fire Department ADG Narayan Rao, Regional Fire Officer Papaiah, District Fire Officer Sudhakar and others spoke.

District Collector S Venkat Rao, SP R Venkateswarlu, Municipal Chairman K Narasimhulu and others were present.

'Vax only weapon to combat Covid'

PNS ■ MULUGU

District Medical and Health Officer Dr Appayya said the people need not hesitate to have the vaccination and it was only weapon to combat the dreaded coronavirus. He said some people have some misapprehensions about the vaccine, but they should not worry about the vaccine doses and said people could call him on his number 90591 94146 to get clarification on the inoculation.

Dr Appayya on Sunday inspected the vaccination programme for the second dose of Covishield and Covaxine at Mulugu Area Hospital.

Later, he also visited the Covid ward in the area hospital and inquired about the health conditions of those receiving treatment there. He gave some suggestions to the patients.



At the paramedics' ward, he observed the performance of the health staff and inspected the records. He also visited stores where the oxygen cylinders were kept.

The DM&HO said that the state government had brought down the number of Covid

cases by imposing a complete lockdown. Stating that in view of the current pandemic situation, he had taken two doses of vaccine, he cautioned the people not to be careless and follow Covid guidelines even after the relaxation of lockdown, especially do not

go out without a mask. He cautioned people that they should not visit crowded places and maintain a physical distance of at least six feet and sanitize hands frequently with soap or sanitiser. The state government issued directives to provide vaccine to all. Dr Appayya also cautioned people against the outbreak of infections during the rainy season and said they should be vigilant, use mosquito nets and cover the food with lids. People should avoid eating rotten food and advised to take hot food as much as possible. People should be aware of the possibility of diseases during the rainy season, especially water-borne diseases, such as malaria, chickenpox, dengue, encephalitis and filariasis. Appropriate precautionary measures should be taken against mosquito breeding, he said.

Water level in Krishna rising

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Under the impact of the South-West monsoons, heavy rains are experienced in Western Ghat increasing inflows into River Krishna, if the increased flow of flood water into the Almati reservoir in Karnataka is any indication.

On Saturday, the reservoir recorded inflows of 1.18 lakh cusecs, which is unprecedented during the third week of June. During the past decade, such inflows into the reservoir were unheard of.

On Saturday, Mahabaleshwar, which is the birth place of River Krishna received 200 mm of rainfall.

CLP leader demands action against police

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka alleged arresting a woman named Mariamma and beating her till death by the Addagururu police officials in an atrocious act.

Speaking to the media at Chinthakakani in Khammam district, Bhatti alleged that the torture against the poor and weaker sections by the police officials is increasing day by day. Alleging that the police officials are adapting such atrocious acts only because of the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's negligence attitude, Bhatti said that

the Chief Minister is not caring about the police excesses to protect himself.

Mariamma died three days ago but there are no efforts to bring out the facts. He demanded the government to initiate action against the persons, including police officials, for death of Mariamma.

Bhatti warned that they will take up state wide agitations if the officials concerned failed to file an SC, ST Atrocity case against the persons responsible for death of Mariamma. He said that he will address letters to the SC, ST State and Central Commissions and HRC through the SC Department.

Gang selling spurious seeds, pesticides held

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Ramagundam police have busted a gang involved in sale of spurious seeds and banned weed pesticide and arrested six persons besides seizing Rs 13.77 lakh worth fake seeds and weed pesticides from them.

Producing the accused before the media in Peddapalli on Sunday, Commissioner of Police V Satyanarayana explained the modus operandi of the gang. Based on reliable information, local police along with mandal agriculture officials conducted checks on the outskirts of

Rangapur of Basanthnagar police station limits and found three persons carrying the banned US-341 variety chili seeds. As part of their task, police carried out searches in Aaradhana pesticides and fertilizers, Mahadevapur of Bhupalapalli district and seized

660 liters of glycol weed pest worth Rs 77,000. Cops also conducted raids in RK seeds, Vetapalem of Andhra Pradesh. Its owner, Deshabakthuni Ramakrishna informed that he procured seed from Nagendra Babu, sales manager in SASF company.

Distribution of Rythu Bandhu going on smoothly: Singireddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Agriculture Minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy has stated that the distribution of Rythu Bandhu funds has been going on smoothly without any trouble. He said that the government deposited Rs 5,145.87 crore till date in the accounts of 54.37 lakh farmers. He said that the government deposited Rs 1,050.10 crore on the fifth day of the distribution of Rythu Bandhu funds in the accounts of 4.90 lakh farmers. In a statement issued on Sunday, the Agriculture Minister said that the government is distributing Rythu Bandhu funds to a total of 102.92 lakh acres of land. He said that the 3,97,260 Nalgonda farmers had received the highest Rythu Bandhu amount Rs 401.92 crore funds till date and 27,819 farmers from Medchal district received



the lowest amount of Rs 19.68 crore. However, 2,35,549 Nagarkurnool farmers received 254.62 crore and stood after Nalgonda district. Sangareddy farmers of 2,66,797 farmers received 247.67 crores and stood in third place.

Niranjan Reddy said that the Telangana state reached to a level to feed the entire nation with increased cultivation of land with the support of Rythu Bandhu funds and the farm produce is the evidence for it. He said that the state changed as an Annapurna from crying Telangana. Telangana has 4

lakh metric tons capacity godowns, however, the state now reached 29.26 lakh metric tons capacity. The Minister said that the government has been stocking food grains produced by the farmers of the state in godowns, rythu vedikas, cotton mills and every possible place. It could all be possible with the importance given to the agriculture sector by the Chief Minister, Niranjan Reddy added.

Lashing out at the BJP, Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy challenged the party's State leaders to persuade the Centre and resolve the long-pending issues in the State in a time-bound manner.

He stated that the BJP had done nothing for Telangana since it came to power, and instead had shelved many projects sanctioned by the previous governments.

TS to have another district Huzurabad as headquarter?

PNS ■ WARANGAL

As the administration became easier after the formation of 23 new districts in addition to the existing ten districts in Telangana, the State Government is reportedly making moves to form one more new district and renaming two districts. Telangana has a total of 33 districts now and after the resignation of former minister Eatela Rajender, the Huzurabad district came to the fore. Speculations are agog that Huzurabad district may be announced as a new district and it would be named after former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao. It is felt that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao is likely to announce Huzurabad as a new district as it will fulfil the long dream of the people and at the same time chances for Eatela will be badly diluted with the decision.

It may be recalled that the Telangana Government was conducting PV Narasimha Rao centenary celebrations in a big



way and it is widely circulated that considering his birth anniversary on June 28, it may announce its decision on the same day. People wanted Huzurabad as a separate district and a people's movement had been spearheaded in the name of Zilla Sadhana Samithi during the establishment of new districts demanding

from Warangal urban including Bhimadevarapalli, Yelkaturti and Kamalapur and some mandals like Huzurabad, Jammikunta, Illandukunta, Veenavanka, Sankarapatnam, Saidapur and Chigurumamidi from Karimnagar district are likely to be added in the new Huzurabad district.

PV's native village Vangara and Kothakonda where Veerabhadraswamy temple was located may be announced as new mandals. The Huzurabad district is likely to be formed with a total of 12 mandals. In addition, the Warangal urban and Warangal rural districts may be renamed. If it is considered, there would be seven districts in the combined Warangal district along with six existing districts such as Warangal urban, Warangal rural, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulug, Mahabubabad and Jangaon districts. However, there is some confusion with regard to Warangal urban and Warangal rural as the government is yet to announce their headquarter.

All the rural officials are being accommodated in the offices of Warangal urban limits. Proposals have been made earlier that rural district headquarters would be constructed on the premises of Ajamzahi Mills and it was also proposed to acquire lands in the Parakal constituency. But none of these plans could be materialized.

Another news is going rounds of late that Warangal urban district may be named as Hanmakonda and Warangal rural district may have remained as Warangal district. According to reliable information, Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has already decided to christen urban district as Hanmakonda or Ranirudrama Hanmakonda. Minister Dayakar Rao also mentioned it with his close associates. He said the urban district would be renamed Hanmakonda. As part of his tour in the districts, Chief Minister KCR is visiting Warangal on Monday and he is likely to announce the new names for these districts.

CENTRE'S INVITE FOR TALKS

Farooq begins deliberations with party leaders

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Sunday started the process of consultations with senior leaders of the party over the invitation for talks from the Centre to mainstream political parties of Jammu and Kashmir.

Former chief minister Abdullah met senior leaders of the party, including NC general secretary Ali Mohammad Sagar and provincial president of Kashmir Nasir Aslam Wani, a party leader said.

He said the others who attended meeting were Chowdhary Mohammad Ramzan, Sheikh Mustafa Kamal, Mian Altaf, Mubarak Gul, Sakina Itoo, Khalid Najeb Suhurwardy and two Members of Parliament – Mohammad Akbar Lone and Hasnain Masoodi.

The party leader said Abdullah had called the leaders for consultations over the issue of the invitation for the meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 24.

"The consultations are on. After the party president is done talking to party leaders, a meeting of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) will take place where the member parties will discuss the issue and take a collective decision," he said.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the NC's Kashmir provincial president Wani said the process of deliberations over the Centre's invite has been started by Abdullah.

"The party president has started the process of consultations with the senior party leaders and



"The consultations are on. After the party president is done talking to party leaders, a meeting of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) will take place where the member parties will discuss the issue and take a collective decision," he said.

these meetings will continue till tomorrow. The consultations with few senior leaders took place today, he (Abdullah) will meet few more in the evening and some tomorrow morning. I think, we will be able to give a clear picture to you by tomorrow," he said.

Wani, however, said the NC has not so far called any "structured or organised meeting" to take a decision over the issue.

The party leader also said he does not know if and when the PAGD will meet, but if it does, "the issue may be discussed there".

The PM's meeting with all political parties from Jammu and Kashmir on June 24 is part of the Centre's initiatives to bolster political processes, including holding assembly elections in the Union Territory.

Invitations were sent out to 14 political leaders from Jammu and Kashmir, including four former chief ministers, for participa-

tion in a high-level meeting to be chaired by the PM, which is expected to set the road map for holding assembly elections in the UT.

The invited leaders of eight political parties -- the NC, PDP, BJP, Congress, Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party, CPI(M), People's Conference, and the Jammu & Kashmir National Panthers Party -- were telephonically invited by Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla for participation in the meeting to be held at the prime minister's residence at 3 pm on Thursday, June 24.

This will be the prime minister's first interaction with all the political parties of Jammu and Kashmir since August 5, 2019 when the Central government abrogated the state's special status and bifurcated it into UTs. The erstwhile state has been under the Centre's rule since June 2018.

Petrol crosses ₹97 in Delhi, diesel nears ₹88 after another price hike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol price in the national capital crossed Rs 97 a litre and diesel neared Rs 88 after fuel prices were raised yet again. Petrol price was hiked by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 28 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

The hike -- 27th in seven weeks -- pushed fuel prices across the country to new historic highs. In Delhi, petrol hit an all-time high of Rs 97.22 a litre, while diesel is now priced at Rs 87.97 per litre.

Fuel prices differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT and freight charges.

Senior BJP leaders in UP again to review party's functioning from today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The BJP's national general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh and Uttar Pradesh in-charge Radha Mohan Singh will be here on a two-day visit from Monday to review its programmes, their second this month as the party sets in motion preparations for the crucial assembly polls next year.

During their earlier visit from May 31 to June 2, Singh had shot down speculation of a leadership change in the state and had defended the Yogi Adityanath government's handling of the COVID situation.

An aide of Radha Mohan Singh told PTI that Santhosh and Singh will be on a two-day visit to Lucknow beginning Monday. "During his visit to Lucknow,

BL Santhosh will review the various works of the organisation including 'seva hee sangathan', vaccination and other ongoing programmes," a senior UP BJP leader said and added that the working committee (Karya Samiti) of the party is likely to meet by June 30.

Another party leader said that a few days before Deepavali (in November), the party will come into "full election mode" for the 2022 UP Assembly elections.

Besides a few BJP lawmakers expressing resentment openly on the handling of the second COVID wave, the major opposition parties -- the SP, the BSP and the Congress -- are planning to make it a major issue in the state Assembly polls, which are only months away. The visit by Santhosh to

Lucknow comes after the Uttar Pradesh unit of Bharatiya Janata Party appointed its state MLC A K Sharma, a former IAS officer, the party's state vice president.

Sharma, considered a trusted aide of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was handed over the new assignment amid speculation that he would be inducted into the Yogi Adityanath government in a senior ministerial position ahead of the next year's assembly elections. Sharma's appointment as the vice president of the BJP's state unit negates the chances of his induction in the state Cabinet because of the BJP's larger principle of one-man-one-post, a party leader said.

Archana Mishra from Lucknow and Amit Valmiki from Bulandshahr were appointed as

secretaries of the state unit.

The BJP on Saturday also announced the appointment of Pranshudatt Dwivedi from Farrukhabad as the chief of BJP Yuva Morcha, Geeta Shukla of Auraiya as party's Mahila Morcha chief, Kameshwar Singh of Gorakhpur as Kisan Morcha chief. During his previous visit to Lucknow, both the deputy chief ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Dinesh Sharma, and the UP's Law Minister Brijesh Pathak had met Santhosh.

On June 1, Santhosh had praised the UP government's handling of COVID-19. In a tweet, he had said, "In five weeks, @myogiadityanath's Uttar Pradesh reduced the new daily case count by 93%... Remember it's a state with 20+ Cr population.

MVA alliance for 5 yrs, not permanent fixture: Congress

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The three-party MVA alliance, comprising the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress, was formed in Maharashtra for five years and is not a permanent fixture. Every party has the right to strengthen its organisation and the Congress has always given priority to providing relief to COVID-19 affected people by making available blood, oxygen and plasma at various places," Patole said.

His remarks came after Chief Minister and Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said people would "beat with footwear" those who only talk about contesting polls alone without offering solutions to people's problems.

Talking to reporters here, Patole said there was no clarity in Thackeray's speech about who he was referring to.

Even the BJP has spoken of contesting elections independently, Patole said, noting that previously all the four parties - Congress, NCP, BJP and Shiv

Sena - had contested local bodies and Assembly polls independently.

"We formed the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA-in 2019) for five years to stop the BJP. This is a not a permanent fixture. Every party has the right to strengthen its organisation and the Congress has always given priority to providing relief to COVID-19 affected people by making available blood, oxygen and plasma at various places," Patole said.

The Sena and Congress, adversaries for decades, formed government in Maharashtra along with the NCP after the Uddhav Thackeray-led party fell out with the BJP in 2019.

In a veiled swipe at local Congress leaders, Thackeray on Saturday said people would "beat with footwear" those who only talk about contesting elec-

tions alone without offering solutions to people's problems.

All political parties should keep ambitions aside and focus on economy and health, the CM had said.

Patole said Thackeray made the comments on the occasion of the Shiv Sena's 55th foundation day as the party president and not as chief minister.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday said his party has always fought all battles of self-respect and pride of Maharashtra and the party on its own strength.

"The Shiv Sena's path ahead is clear. Let others come out of their chaos as one leader of another party speaks of going alone, and another leader from the same party says it was not the party line," the Rajya Sabha member told reporters.

Rajbhar in talks with AAP, TMC to form front to counter BJP

PNS ■ BALLIA

President of the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Om Prakash Rajbhar, on Sunday said that he is trying to bring TMC chief Mamata Banerjee, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal and Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray on a common platform, and form an effective front to counter the BJP.

The SBSP had contested the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections in alliance with the BJP but later parted ways.

Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh are slated for early next year.

"Yesterday, I met Aam Aadmi Party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, and his approach was positive. He has given in-

principle approval to be a part of the Bhagidari Sankalp Morcha. The final decision about joining the morcha will be taken by Kejriwal. In this regard, there will be a meeting with Kejriwal in Delhi next week," Rajbhar told PTI. When asked whether Kejriwal is ready to join the morcha despite the presence of Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM, the SBSP chief said, "The need of the hour is to stop the BJP. If the BJP can join hands with Mehbooba Mufti, then Kejriwal and Owaisi too can come on the same platform to stop the BJP."

Rajbhar said his "effort will be to bring TMC chief Banerjee, and Shiv Sena president Thackeray on a platform, and form an effective front to counter the BJP."

Ldweep moots shifting of HC jurisdiction from Kerala to Karnataka

PNS ■ KOCHI/NEW DELHI

The Lakshadweep administration, which has been facing widespread protests from the islands' people over some of its policies, has mooted a proposal to shift its legal jurisdiction from the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court, officials said.

The proposal was initiated by the administration after several litigations were moved before the Kerala High Court against the decisions taken by the islands' new administrator Praful Khoda Patel.

These decisions included revising standard operating procedures for Covid appropriate behaviour, introduction of the 'goonda act' and demolishing hutments of fishermen for widening of roads. Patel, who is the administrator of Daman and Diu, was given the additional charge of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep in the first week of December last year, when the former administrator Dineshwar Sharma died after a

brief illness.

This year, as many as 23 applications, including 11 writ petitions, have been filed against the administrator of Lakshadweep and also against the alleged high-handedness of either the police or the local government of the islands.

However, for reasons best known to the island's administration, which is under the spotlight over its handling of these issues, it has made a proposal for shifting its legal jurisdiction from the high court of Kerala to Karnataka.

Efforts to seek comments from the administrator, A Anbarasu, and Collector of Lakshadweep S Asker Ali did not fructify.

Mails to their official e-mails and WhatsApp messages did not elicit any response to a question asking the rationale behind mooted of the proposal for shifting of legal jurisdiction.

The jurisdiction of a high court can be shifted only through an act of Parliament, according to the law.

Low intensity earthquake hits Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A low intensity earthquake of magnitude 2.1 struck the national capital on Sunday.

The quake had its epicentre in Punjabi Bagh area at a depth of 7 km. It struck at 12.02 pm, according to the National Centre for Seismology. No loss of life or damage to property has been reported so far.

The NCS has deployed additional earthquake recording instruments for close monitoring of seismic activity in and around Delhi after the NCR region witnessed a series of tremors from April to August last year.

Based on the analysis of satellite imagery, the signatures of active faults have been observed at various locations like Wazirabad, Timarpur and Kamla Nehru Ridge in Delhi; Jhunjhunu and Alwar district of Rajasthan; Sonapat, Sohna, Gurgaon, Rohtak, Rewari and Nuh districts in Haryana; and Baghpat district in Uttar Pradesh.

The National Capital Region of Delhi and its surroundings had experienced minor and small magnitude earthquakes during April to August 2020.

Bengal plans more Covid beds for women amid third wave threat

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The West Bengal government is planning to allot more hospital beds for women as it prepares to deal with the possible third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a senior health official said on Sunday.

The state is planning to reverse the gender ratio in the 26,000 COVID beds at state-run and private hospitals, Director of Health Services Ajay Chakraborty told PTI.

"The gender ratio for COVID-19 beds in West Bengal at present is around 60:40 for males. We are planning to reverse this by reducing the number of beds for male patients and increasing those for the females and make it 40:60," he said.

The plan is being formulated to cope up with a possible increase in the demand for beds for children during the third wave, Chakraborty said.

"The new COVID variant (Delta) is affecting all in a family. So, there will be high possibilities of children getting infected as well as their mothers. We have planned to keep them together even in case the mothers are negative or they have recovered," he said.

The government is consulting health experts to chalk out the plan, the official said.

"We have set a September deadline to be battle-ready for the possible third wave," he added. "The admission rate of children was much less compared to the

adults since the outbreak of the pandemic. But, it went up during the second wave and going by the warnings of the doctors and scientists, we presume that it will go up by two-fold in the coming months," Chakraborty said.

In view of this, the state government has decided to reserve at least 5 per cent of the critical care unit beds and another 10 per cent of the high dependency unit (HDU) beds, he said.

Chakraborty said the Health Department is planning to scale up paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) beds to 500 and HDU beds to 1,000.

Six new PICUs are being set up in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, Purulia, Rampurhat and Diamond Harbour, he said.

Kerala seeks moratorium on repayment of loans

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has approached the Centre to put in place a moratorium on repayment of loans till December 31 in order to provide relief to individuals in the unorganised sector, MSMEs, agriculture and others adversely affected by COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

Kerala has sought a moratorium of loans without accrual of interest and penal interest during the moratorium period. Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal, in a letter to Union Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, said the impact of the second wave induced lockdown has adversely affected the economic and social well-being of all sectors of the society. "...it is felt that the burden of repayment of the loans taken by individuals, especially those in the unorganised sector, MSMEs and agriculturalists is particularly onerous at this time, and these sections need some relief by way of moratorium on the repayment of loans at least till December 31, 2021," Balagopal said in a letter dated June 16. He said the state government has taken all steps

to ameliorate the hardships faced by the people, especially the vulnerable sections. "I request your kind intervention to put in place a moratorium on repayment of loans at least till December 31, 2021 without accrual of interest and penal interest during the moratorium period," he said in the letter. The Finance Minister pointed out that the economy of Kerala has been under considerable stress since 2018 due to successive natural disasters including the massive floods which lashed the state wreaking havoc in most of the districts.

'Covid result of degradation of natural areas, species' loss'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic is a result of degradation of natural areas, species' loss and exploitation, UNEP country head Atul Bagai said, underlining that countries, including India, must intensify their efforts to prevent and reverse ecosystem degradation.

He also highlighted that climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity are three crises facing the entire planet and India, and are interconnected. India has taken the path of short-term economic interest over decades and this has diminished the ability of ecosystems to provide and support both humans and other life forms, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) official said while speaking to PTI.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a result of the degradation of natural areas, species' loss and exploitation. India is already making a concerted effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and be part of the global effort to reach net-zero emissions by 2050," he said.

"India must intensify these efforts and participate actively in the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration that was launched on the World Environment Day, 2021, to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems," Bagai said.

Several actions on this front are relevant for India, which include taking policy and legislative action, raising awareness and making smart choices, he said. "For a better future, India must work towards creating food sys-



tems that work with nature, reduce waste, and are adaptive to change and resilient to shocks. This could also take the form of halting purchases of products that are not certified as sustainable or pledging and donating for

restoration initiatives," the UNEP official said. Bagai said that a barrier to restoration is limited awareness of negative effects of ecosystem degradation. "This can be rectified in many

ways that include discussions on the value of ecosystems, campaigns that draw attention to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, empowering small-scale farmers and women farmers, changing patterns of consumption, challenging social norms and business practices, and capacity building and education, he said.

"We need to inculcate in India a culture that respects nature and cares for it. A healthier respect for nature will give us a healthier country and healthier people," Bagai said. On the role of the youth on the climate change issue, he said they are part of the larger international youth movements demanding drastic and visible action in the face of global warming and climate justice, biodiversity loss,

and development at the cost of the environment.

"My best advice to young people who are concerned about environmental issues is two-fold -- get informed and get involved. There is a wealth of opportunities to make a difference. Often the best place to get started is in your local community. There is much to be done, and we need everyone involved," he added.

In recent years, he said there has been a surge in global attention on marine litter and plastic pollution. "However, scientific knowledge on marine plastic litter and effective countermeasures remains insufficient. Keeping this in mind, the UNEP is implementing two major projects in India that focus on plastic waste management and reduction of marine plastic pollution," Bagai said.

INDIA CORNER

Cracker unit blast: TN asked to conduct carrying capacity study



The National Green Tribunal has directed the Tamil Nadu government to conduct a carrying capacity assessment of an area in the state's Virudhunagar district where a blast at a firecracker factory in February killed 19 workers. The concept of 'carrying capacity' addresses the question of how much natural resources can be drawn from an area without the risk of degrading the environment there. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel ordered the director of Industrial Safety to conduct the study in three months in coordination with the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The report submitted to the Tamil Nadu chief secretary for further action. "There is a need for a study of the carrying capacity of the area to sustain the extent of such activities having regard to the potential for accidental, occupational and environmental hazards. The study may include the number of units to be allowed, size of operation of such units, the quantity of material to be used, siting criteria for the location of the units, arrangement for fire management and health services," the bench said.

Chirag announces yatra across Bihar from father's birth anniversary



LJP leader Chirag Paswan on Sunday announced the launch of "aashirvaad yatra" from July 5, the birth anniversary of his father and party founder Ram Vilas Paswan, from Hajipur in Bihar, as his faction takes the fight with a rival group to the streets. Paswan's

announcement came following a meeting of the LJP national executive which endorsed his leadership and hit out at a faction headed by his paternal uncle Pashupati Paras for its work against the party's constitution. He asserted that over 90 per cent of the national executive members were in the meeting. The decision to launch the yatra from Hajipur is significant because Ram Vilas Paswan was elected to Lok Sabha from here a number of times and Parass represents the seat now in the House. Chirag Paswan said Hajipur had been "karmabhoomi" of his father.

Woman goes to old age home as son refuses to look after her



An elderly woman has been forced to stay at an old age home in Maharashtra's Aurangabad district after her son expressed his inability to take care of her because of his financial constraints due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown. Kiran Pardikar, aged around 60, lost her husband many years back and brought up her son by taking up tailoring job. Her son later set up a book stall near a court in Pune to earn a livelihood, but his business came to an halt last year amid the lockdown, Pundaliknagar police station's assistant police inspector Ghanshyam Sonawane told PTI. Due to differences with her daughter-in-law, Pardikar started staying separately since some time and her son arranged a room on rent and food tiffins for her. "The woman approached us recently seeking help to be sent to an old age home after realising her son's financial condition. We got new clothes for her and gave a letter to the 'Matoshri Vriddhashram' here to accommodate her," Sonawane said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Afghan landmine

All stakeholders are busy formulating plans so as to have the most power once the US exits

Afghanistan is a worsening quagmire of confusion with the immediately involved parties working towards their own individualist goals. The United States is singularly focused on vacating the military bases and moving tones of equipment as a prelude to the withdrawal of its troops before September 11. The Taliban, working to a post-withdrawal plan, are intent only on bringing maximum territory under their control because that alone would give them leverage in the future to either negotiate or grab power. The Afghan Government is caught between a withdrawing ally and an aggressive rival, looking for every scrap of support to be able to wield power after September. There is no dearth of friends for the Afghan Government in the region, but none with the clout to nail a permanent peace agreement with the Taliban. The primary, and only, concern of the world is the prospect of the return of terrorism to Afghan soil once the Americans leave. Even with them around, the US never once felt satisfied that the threat to its national security from terror groups in the country has abated. On the one hand, the Taliban are only waiting to turn the country into an Islamic State and, at worst, what they call a "Caliphate". They are already flashing their religious identity as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, intent on taking the country back into the dark ages with their irrational social codes. On the other, they have convivial relations with terrorist groups active in Afghanistan, including Al-Qaeda, and that makes their peace overtures suspect.



Despite signing the Doha Agreement with the US in 2020, the Taliban never attempted to formally distance itself from the terrorist group. India is at the forefront of nations wanting to ensure that terrorism does not raise its head in Afghanistan once again. It has no formal communication links with the Taliban and the word is that it may be reaching out to sections of the Taliban leadership that consider themselves nationalist and not under the influence of Pakistan. Much of the terrorist leadership is currently holed up in Pakistan; so is the orthodox and aggressive Taliban leadership for that matter. Having invested a lot in Afghanistan — it gave nearly \$2 billion in reconstruction aid already — India wants to have a greater say in the country's return to democracy. However, it will have to contend with Pakistan which to date played a subdued role because of the formidable American presence, and now plans a more direct role because of its links with the Taliban and the protection it extends to some terrorist groups. It is to be seen if the signs of a bilateral thaw in the India-Pakistan ties do not face rough weather because of their clashing positions over Afghanistan. An indication will be available at the meeting of the National Security Advisers of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan — virtual or in person — at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting next week.

We in India have a long and enormous experience of being ruled by Muslim sultans and, of course, coexisting with them for centuries. This led to serious and prolonged oppression in the 50-year reign of Aurangzeb, which ended in 1707. There was a serious emotional parting of ways. In 1887, the then most prominent Islamic leader Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh fame declared in a public speech that the Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. He repeated his contention the following year. The next eminence to pronounce the same sentiments in the early 20th century was Justice Syed Ameer Ali. Then in 1930, poet Mohammad Iqbal voiced

Brutal tactics to keep the Uyghurs in check



PRAFULL GORADIA

Why can't the Hans of China learn from the example of Indian Hindus towards Muslims and be considerate enough to let the Uyghurs be?

Reports about the treatment of Uyghurs in general and their pregnant women in particular in Xi Jinping's China sound barbaric. If the purpose is family planning, fair enough, but it should be implemented by law and not by force. Cases were reported in this journal from Istanbul which mentioned several women who were up to six-and-a-half months pregnant being forcibly aborted, evidently posing a threat to their lives. True, Muslims are reputed to procreate much more prolifically than other people but that does not mean that the Government should resort to violent means to achieve smaller families.

According to the Hadith (Traditions), Prophet Muhammad once asked a man whether he was married. On being replied in the negative, Muhammad reacted by saying: "Then you are a brother of the Devil." In Islam, even ascetic orders are expected to marry rather than remain single. One of the Prophet's companions, Usman ibn Maz'un, wished to lead a life of celibacy; Muhammad forbade him. Normally such consent is given on condition of the celibate becoming an eunuch. In the same context, the Prophet exhorted his followers to marry women who will love their husbands and be very prolific: "For I wish you to be more numerous than any other people." (Mishkatul Masabih book XIII)

We in India have a long and enormous experience of being ruled by Muslim sultans and, of course, coexisting with them for centuries. This led to serious and prolonged oppression in the 50-year reign of Aurangzeb, which ended in 1707. There was a serious emotional parting of ways. In 1887, the then most prominent Islamic leader Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh fame declared in a public speech that the Hindus and Muslims were separate nations. He repeated his contention the following year.

The next eminence to pronounce the same sentiments in the early 20th century was Justice Syed Ameer Ali. Then in 1930, poet Mohammad Iqbal voiced



that Muslims should have a separate homeland even if inside an Indian confederation. Most Hindu leaders, Gandhiji downwards, ignored these statements and continued to believe that the Congress Party represented all communities. Rightly or incorrectly, because the Congress had members of all communities, the leaders presumed that all of their communities followed the Party. Eventually, Mohammad Ali Jinnah had the Pakistan Resolution passed by the Muslim League at its Lahore session on March 23, 1940. Yet, the Hindus took only limited notice. Nor did the British realise how serious was the Muslim desire for a separate homeland, a New Medina.

On August 16, 1946, Bengal Chief Minister HS Suhrawardy directed a massive pogrom, later called the Great Calcutta Killing; which over three days saw the bloody end of thousands of people. This was Jinnah's way of proving particularly to the British that Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist in the same country. India had to be divided. This is also based on the Islamic theology that Muslims need a Dar-ul-Islam, wherein the law laid down by Sharia is



INDIA STILL HAS MORE MUSLIMS THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY EXCEPT INDONESIA. THIS IS AN UNUSUAL PARADOX. IF SO MANY MUSLIMS CAN HAPPILY LIVE IN INDIA, WHERE WAS THE NEED FOR PARTITION? YET, THE HINDUS HAVE ACCEPTED THIS CONTRADICTION WITHOUT A PROTEST

the only land wherein Muslims can flourish and fulfil themselves. Today, India still hosts more Muslims than any country except Indonesia. This is an unusual paradox. If so many Muslims can happily live in India, where was the need for Partition? Yet, the Hindus have accepted this contradiction without a protest. My question is if the Hindus can be so tolerant, why cannot the Hans of China be considerate enough to let the Uyghurs be?

After all, China has to coexist with many other peoples and countries. There are 57 Islamic countries and they have not yet protested because of what? Possibly sheer fear or business interests. But for how long? Sooner or later, the Islamic fury must explode. In any case, I appeal to the Han race for tolerance in the cause of peace.

In a spirit of freedom and brotherhood, we allowed the Ayodhya litigation to go on for nearly a century, waiting for a court judgment. Then only we have begun to build a temple for lord Ram whom poet Iqbal had described as "Imam-e-Hind". The Muslims of Ayodhya were in favour of building the temple because it would multiply pilgrimage

and consequently bring prosperity. The fight was about an edifice which had no minarets, no woovu for washing hands and feet before proceeding to prayers. In fact, it must have been meant as a mazar in Babar's memory after he died.

India has had three Muslim Rashtrapatis, Zakir Hussain, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and Abdul Kalam, plus several judges including Supreme Court Chief Justices and election commissioners appointed by, of course, Hindu Governments.

When it comes to elections, all adult citizens have the right to vote. There is no discrimination. In the bargain, Muslims in earlier elections voted en masse for one party and it won. The others were slack in casting their votes. But this was tolerant and no solution was applied to stop this practice. The easy solution was compulsory voting; that would have neutralised the en masse voting. But the Hindu ethos was too liberal for a drastic measure although nearly a dozen countries, led by Belgium and Australia, practise it.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

PICTALK



Girls perform yoga ahead of the International Yoga Day, in Surat

PTI

The third coming

There is an urgent need for our citizens to heed experts and desist from reckless behaviour in public

The third wave of the COVID-19 virus is rapidly stealing upon us, if one were to go by either expert opinion or by the insouciant behaviour of our fellow countrymen in crowded public places. Barely has the nation's nose emerged from the sinking feeling that was the second wave of the Novel Coronavirus and its myriad variants, what with the accompanying horrors of the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and ancillary medical supplies, the scary prediction now comes that the third wave could be far closer to us than we had imagined. Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences director Randeep Guleria has said in no uncertain terms that the third wave is inevitable in the "next six-eight weeks" if people don't adhere to COVID-appropriate behaviour. The virus can make a comeback within two months, much earlier than the trend noticed in India so far, if the unlocking process is not measured. Even though the vaccination drive is going on in full swing, with both the Centre and the State Governments doing their best



to make amends for the earlier oversight and the time lost because of it, there is still a disconcertingly huge window during which the virus can stage a dreadful comeback before the effects of the inoculation drive kick in.

So far, India has been able to fully vaccinate only about five per cent of its 950 million eligible population, leaving the other teeming millions vulnerable to infections and deaths. Needless to say, there is an urgent need for aggressive surveillance strategy in the COVID hotspots and even to again order lockdowns in case of significant surge in any particular area. Meanwhile, while the number of cases is still declining in the country, this is the right time to reflect upon past mistakes and take lessons for the future: Remember how the second wave took the complacent nation by surprise and swept the healthcare system off its moorings in many States? The drop in the infection rate in India surely is a positive sign, but that should be no reason for us to slacken our vigil. If there is a sudden jump in the numbers, god forbid, no healthcare system in the world can deal with such a large number of people simultaneously needing intensive care. We need to utilise this time to strengthen our healthcare facilities; each life is worth fighting for.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Sir — In the first political engagement since the August 5, 2019, move by the Centre to end J&K's special status, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on June 24 give an audience to the region's mainstream leadership, including those who were incarcerated for opposing the Centre's move. Modi will chair the meeting. All the leaders have been asked to go for a RT-PCR test before attending the meeting.

It will be the second major peace move in J&K after the successful renewed ceasefire agreement in February this year with Pakistan, which has been demanding a roadmap on J&K to expand the engagement with New Delhi. The sudden move by the Centre also comes in the wake of pressure from the international community, especially the United States, to restore democratic and electoral processes in J&K, which remains under the Centre's rule since 2018. It is a step in the right direction but how far this move will succeed remains to be seen.

CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai

SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL YOGA DAY

Sir — Yoga means "to add"; to add to the good habits in life, to add to peace and prosperity. In the current scenario, the COVID pandemic has devastated almost everything but one thing remains that has helped life move on smoothly, and that's HOPE.

During the troubled days, yoga can be a step towards positivity, relaxation of mind and physical strength. The United Nations gave its nod to the idea on December 10, 2014, and from June 21, 2015, the entire world started celebrating the International Yoga Day. The theme for 2021 is "Yoga for the wellbeing". India has contributed a lot but the patent of that invention was in the hands of the white-skinned developed nations.

We have contributed zero, decimal and a lot more to the world. Several inventions by Indians were being taken away and credited to foreigners. However, we never criticised such moves because we wanted peace and prosperity, unity in diversity. Yoga is not

Let Telangana schools remain shut



The Centre has advised the States to ease the COVID-19 curbs carefully since we are still living with the virus; it is not fully eradicated. All the States are accordingly easing curbs. In Tamil Nadu, the places of worship have been shut for a long time. Those who believe in God, seek peace and solace by visiting temples. I request the Government to open the temples for the public observing all the norms and COVID protocols.

Meanwhile, the Telangana Government has lifted the lockdown completely. It is shocking that the State has asked the education department to open all categories of educational institutions beginning July 1. Playing with the lives of students

in these times of the pandemic is a matter of serious concern.

The first wave was severe. The second was ferocious and claimed many lives. The third wave is said to be round the corner. It is likely going to affect children the most. Our vaccination strategy is slow. Only 30 crore people have so far been inoculated. Another one crore are in the queue. Our wards, who are below 18 years of age, are yet to be included in the inoculation drive. It may take another few months to inoculate them since the vaccine supply is not commensurate to the population of India. Without masks or maintaining social distancing, people are seen moving around.

At this point, the move to reopen educational institutions seems to be worrisome, problematic and unproductive. It amounts to inviting trouble. It is hard to enforce discipline among students to adhere to the standing protocols against COVID. The heavens will not fall if schools are not opened right now, when the third wave is likely to hit the nation with more severity in a few weeks. The Telangana Government should roll back its decision of reopening of educational institutions.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

of any particular religion but it's for the goodness of the entire humanity. Therefore, we all need to add yoga as an irreplaceable part of our daily routine and life. This will not only make us physically, but also mentally and spiritually, stronger.

Aman Jaiswal | New Delhi

WEAR FACE MASKS TO SAVE LIVES

Sir — As India prepares to battle the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccinating as many citizens as possible with both doses is unquestionably the most rational way of countering the virus. However, it is equally important for each one of us to prove our pertinacity by wearing face masks.

A face mask is a crucial protective gear to safeguard ourselves. Scientific evidence goes deep into the containment of the Novel Coronavirus by wearing face masks. When

a person expels droplets into the air, they quickly evaporate and shrink to become tiny airborne particles, called "droplet nuclei".

But in a moist atmosphere, between a person's mouth and the mask, it takes nearly a hundred times as long for a droplet to evaporate and shrink into droplet nuclei. This means that nearly any kind of simple cloth mask is great for source control. The mask creates humidity, and prevents the virus-containing droplets from turning into droplet nuclei, allowing the fabric of the mask to block the droplets. Studies suggest that if 80 per cent of people wear masks in public, the COVID-19 transmission can certainly be halted.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

SOUND BITE

The Congress believes that grant of full statehood to J&K as also holding elections... instead of a rule by Delhi, is the only way forward. so that people are able to elect their representatives



Congress general secretary — Randeep Singh Surjewala



The Government is in no rush to reopen the country's international borders.

Australia's Trade Minister — Dan Tehan



I look at it this way — I want my beard also to tell a story, to define me.

Actor — Arjun Kapoor



Psychologically, I think it (the draw) is a big boost and it definitely will put England on the back foot.

India women's cricket team skipper — Mithali Raj



Over the last two years, Shri @ombirakota Ji has ushered in a series of steps that have enriched our parliamentary democracy and enhanced productivity.

Prime Minister — Narendra Modi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

PEOPLE NEED TO TAKE INITIATIVE

World leaders keep meeting on climate change issue but there is no genuine commitment to the cause



VK BAHUGUNA

The Covid-19 lockdown last year had one positive fallout - the sky regained its brilliant blue as the perennial haze of pollution lifted and one could see the Himalayan range from far-off places like Delhi and Chandigarh. Metros like Delhi and Mumbai became pollution-free, wild animals started foraging for food in cities and towns, and rivers became cleaner. This is, however, a grim reminder that humanity must change its materialist, extravagant lifestyle and establish equilibrium with nature. That is the special message of the pandemic.

When the air pollution levels came down, there was a perceptible decline in respiratory diseases. One study said the improved air quality index on account of reduced human activities in Chennai was similar to that of European countries. The forests got a reprieve with reduced instances of forest fires, illegal felling of trees, and poaching. This writer noticed how migratory birds which normally returned home during February-March stayed back till May end. In zoos sans tourists the animals regained their natural composites and behaviours. In the Satpura Tiger Reserve of Madhya Pradesh, tigers, which had got used to regular movement of tourists, started liking their isolation and fretted upon seeing forest guards on patrols. According to Central



Pollution Control Board, the Ganga, Yamuna, and Gomati rivers' water became cleaner. Dolphins were sighted in the Ganga near Meerut.

These examples tell people to adopt climate-friendly behaviours in their day-to-day lives. Look at Jadhav Payeng from Jorhat, Assam who got the 'Forest Man of India Award' in 2010 for turning 550 hectares of barren land into a lush green forest.

National Governments the world over started climate change negotiations after the Kyoto Protocol came into being in 2005. However, there is no genuine commitment to climate change even though world leaders meet every now and then because of never-ending politics. In India too, despite good initiatives like the solar alliance, the bureaucracy is unable to stem the rot in the field of environmental conservation.

Let us consider some citizen's initiatives which can make a big difference to the environment. Let us go for water harvesting and recharging in every home. Climate change was responsible for about 74 per cent of flash floods and droughts in the last 20 years. In cities 90 per cent of rainwater goes waste because of excessive construction activities. In contrast, 90 per cent of the rainwater gets absorbed in forests, recharging the aquifers, streams, and rivers. Every household having a 200 sq. mt. area can recharge around two lakh litres of rainwater every year.

Second, each tree gives oxygen for 10 people to survive. Everybody should plant a tree every year. A big tree absorbs 21 kg of carbon dioxide (CO2) and in 100 years reduces one tonne of CO2.

Third, food wastage is the biggest environmental problem as it wastes water and food grains. In 2019, nine billion tonnes of food was wasted in the world, releasing 70.41 lakh tonne methane gas. If we stop this wastage, eight percent reduction in greenhouse emissions can be ensured. Four, we must stop the use of paper cups to save at least 65 lakh trees and billions of gallons of water. Five, we need to use electricity carefully because 40 percent of carbon emissions are due to electricity production. If we can switch off the wi-fi and laptops we can reduce the emissions by 16 percent. Six, cars contribute to huge carbon emissions and if we limit the car speed to 70 kmph, it will reduce emission by 8 percent. The principle is at the speed 100 kmph the emissions increase by 28 percent.

(The writer is Chairman, Centre for Resource Management and Environment. The views expressed are personal.)

Dealing with Delhi CM Kejriwal's 'ration mafia'



UTTAM GUPTA

The scheme mooted by the Delhi Government will only create more avenues for the middlemen to make money at the cost of the taxpayer

Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi has justified his much-trumpeted scheme for door-step delivery of ration on the ground that this will help rein in what he describes as 'ration mafia' while ensuring that every grain of the subsidized food reaches the person (read: the poor) for whom it is intended.

Who is this 'ration mafia'? How does it plunder the subsidized food? Can the scheme prevent it?

Under the National Food Security Act, 2013, the Union Government directs the Food Corporation of India and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and organize its distribution to a mammoth population of 800 million people through an elaborate network of fair price shops (in common parlance, these are called 'ration shops') at the subsidized price of ₹2, ₹3 and ₹1 per kg for wheat, rice, and coarse cereals, respectively. Each person is eligible to receive 5 kg of cereals per month.

Considering that the cost of procurement, handling, and distribution is higher (in fact, many times more) than these ridiculously low selling prices, the Centre reimburses the excess amount as 'food subsidy' to the FCI and other agencies and is paid from the Union Budget.

During 2020-21, a total of ₹463,000 crore was paid to FCI. Apart from regular payment of ₹215,000 crore, this included about ₹150,000 crore towards free food given to all the 800 million beneficiaries as also to the migrant labour during April-November, 2020 under the Aatmanirbhar package. The balance amount was used for paying off a good slice of the loan taken by FCI from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF) to finance the shortfall in subsidy reimbursements by the Centre in the past. Additionally, Rs 40,000 crore was paid to other state agencies under decentralized procurement (DCP).

During 2021-22, payment to FCI is expected to be about ₹302,000 crore including ₹202,000 crore being the budget allocation and an additional about ₹100,000 crore to provide for free food under Aatmanirbhar till November 2021 (announced subsequently to mitigate the impact of the second pandemic wave). A further ₹40,000 crore is available for DCP.

The scheme is pan-India, covering all the 28 states and eight union territories including the NCT of Delhi. The stuff unveiled by Kejriwal is merely an improvisation of this scheme. Unlike the latter wherein the beneficiary has to go to the ration shop for collecting 5 kg of cereals per month, under the former, the State Government will arrange for delivery of 4 kg of wheat flour and one kg rice at his/her doorsteps. Hopefully, he/she need not pay extra for getting 'wheat as flour' or receiving ration at home.

However, the delivery will be at a huge cost to the state exchequer by way of the Government having to pay vendors for picking up wheat from the ration shop, process it into flour and deliver back to the shop in round one, and then lifting the wheat flour plus rice and delivering the packet to each of the millions of beneficiaries at their homes in round two. This cost will have to be funded by the state as an 'additional subsidy' over and above what is given by the Centre.



THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM CANNOT BE SEEN IN ISOLATION FROM ITS SOURCE. IT HAS TO DO WITH PLENTY OF FOOD AVAILABLE 'VIRTUALLY FOR FREE' WHICH IGNITES THE GREED OF STAKEHOLDERS LEADING TO PILFERAGE AND OTHER ILLS. THIS FREE CULT HAS TO STOP

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)



Fundamentally, the Delhi scheme being the same as the Centre's, if the charge (read: 'ration mafia') leveled by Kejriwal holds for the latter then this will also hold for the former. Let us examine.

When the owner of a ration shop has in his stock wheat/rice meant for distribution to ration card holders (RCH) at ₹2/₹3 per kg, he may get a strong temptation to divert it to the open market where they can fetch a minimum of ₹25/₹35 per kg. He will take deliveries from the FCI godown in the name of a 'fictitious' RCH and sell all those quantities in the market raking in a clear bonanza of ₹23 and ₹32 per kg on wheat and rice, respectively. This indeed is happening on a massive scale all over India and has been recognized by the Prime Minister too.

To stem the rot, the Modi Government has taken several measures including the One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC) scheme which has at its core, the e-POS machine at all ration shops. Under this modus operandi, supply of the subsidized food to the beneficiary is made conditional upon him/her authenticating - using Aadhaar - taking delivery with the sale getting registered on the e-POS machine. This is uploaded onto the web portal on a 'real time' basis which should help in detecting

dubious sales if any.

Since 2014, reportedly, the Government has weeded out close to 44 million bogus ration cards which are equivalent to 176 million beneficiaries (assuming four persons on a card) or nearly 20 per cent of 800 million covered under NFSA. This is a creditable achievement. However, considering the large-scale diversion which in some states could be as high as 50 per cent, there is still a long way to go.

The menace of bogus ration cards is only a part of a larger problem in the public distribution system (PDS) as pilferage could be happening even at other levels in the supply chain; for instance, at the rake unloading points and godowns of the FCI. Reports of the disappearance of food stocks worth about ₹20,000 crore in Punjab in 2016 is a glaring example. The misuse of budgetary resources also manifests in other forms such as inefficiencies in handling operations of FCI/other state agencies and inflated claims (including bogus claims) towards various expenses.

All this happens because, under the existing system, the agencies get reimbursement for the costs on an 'actual' basis. This indeed is the most serious flaw in the scheme. Camouflaged under the noble banner of 'food subsidy',

albeit, for the millions of poor, this often goes unchallenged even when irregularities are pointed out by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

The scheme mooted by the Delhi Government does nothing to address this flaw. It will only create more avenues for middlemen to make money at the cost of the taxpayer. What is the way forward?

The solution to the problem cannot be seen in isolation from its source. It has to do with plenty of food available 'virtually for free' which ignites the greed of stakeholders leading to pilferage and other ills. This free cult has to stop.

The Government should unshackle the food supply and distribution chains. It should put the subsidy currently built into the sale price of food, say, ₹32 per kg on rice (cost: ₹35 per kg minus subsidized price: ₹3 per kg) or ₹160 per person per month (under the NFSA, he/she is eligible to get 5 kg in a month) in the account of a beneficiary who can use it to buy from wherever he/she chooses. This is the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of subsidy. While fully protecting the poor, it can help in curbing the colossal loot and wastage of public money that is germane to the existing dispensation.

Will Prime Minister Modi bite the bullet?

POINT COUNTERPOINT

I HAVE REQUESTED THE LOK SABHA SPEAKER TO REVIEW HIS DECISION (OF ACCEPTING PK PARAS AS THE LJP LEADER IN THE HOUSE).
— LJP LEADER CHIRAG PASWAN



WE HAVE FORMED A NEW NATIONAL EXECUTIVE OF THE PARTY. ALL OTHER PARTY WINGS HAVE BEEN DISBANDED.
— LJP FACTION LEADER PASHUPATI KUMAR PARAS

Re-inventing privacy in the digital market

Digital markets that emerged as State's attempts to ensure safety for lives of citizens now shape up benefitting organised and powerful corporates

The Covid-19 pandemic has facilitated the rapid expansion of e-commerce and digital trade, commerce, and financial transactions. At the same time, it put paid to socially interactive marketplaces and face-to-face contacts. Safety is the key concern that confines citizens to digital platforms and shrinks the space of personal liberty, social interaction, and human collectives and communities. One is reminded of Benjamin Franklin's warning, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."

If in the name of safety, the 'social contract' is relinquished and it is replaced by the authority of the State to gov-



PRAZENJIT BISWAS

(The author is a philosopher and political analyst based in Shillong. The views expressed are personal.)

ern the lives of private citizens in exchange for safety and security, it ends up benefitting the minions of the digital markets that set up a new normal for citizens.

What philosopher Michael Sandel characterized as a transition from market relations in socially necessary fields like health, education, and human security to an overall 'market society' is seemingly taking a digital turn during the pandemic. This picture of digital markets restrains choice-based consent and limits it to partially-informed advantages. Digital economy tweaks choices, restrains access to essential resources, and dilutes ethical practices to market sentiments, even if it creates moral hazards. An AI-controlled collusive



behaviour on the part of human traders and customers is the outcome of uncontrolled digital deals that might tamper with the sovereign individuals.

A moral hazard of such a digital marketplace is the way the bot called Tay on Twitter, which learned abuses from the trolls, heaped it back upon a

feminist activist. Both State and non-state actors use botnets to surreptitiously control infected devices to hack, spy, and disable targets. As botnets cannot be attributed with intent, it helps to distance the actus reus of the perpetrator and allow them to escape with impunity. As a result, botmasters enjoy economic incentives to spread these bot networks that can be used for mining cryptocurrency, credit card fraud and distributed denial of services, etc. The bots can further position themselves as autonomous agents (AA) by camouflaging their point of origin, while they can feed their masters confidential information so that the targeted victim suffers definitive harm in multiple socio-economic parameters.

Given this default and design difficulty in fixing liability on cyber-attackers, there is a greater risk for liberty and freedom of speech of internet users. In a sense, cyberspace itself can be used to curtail and abridge various freedoms like privacy rights and the right to dissent by deploying surveillance and secret watch. Digital marketplaces facilitated a direct connection between cyberattack and surveillance, as personal data breaches are the route through which these actions are carried out. Though cyberattacks are illegal, surveillance assumes both legality and legitimacy by subjecting users to irrevocable meta consent as the new social contract in digital, virtual, and

cyberspaces. The ecosystem of the digital market, therefore, constructs the human agency and utilizes underlying technological structures to give meanings to both security and surveillance mechanisms. Digital markets create contested information spaces where the defense of users' rights versus the powers of governmental institutions remain locked up in a battle of legitimacy. The digital marketplace makes it possible to reduce the human being to a node, or better, into datasets on its networks. The digital life of such a reduced person is endowed with nominal rights of privacy and liberty, as such rights are subjected to the arbitrary ordeal of policing, profiling, moralizing. This is how digi-

tal marketplaces make it impossible for the marginalized segments of society by making them 'illegible' in political and economic affairs, if not completely 'ineligible'.

In the name of safety and security concerns, privacy breaches have been normalized by thinning down the line between legal surveillance and illicit attacks. The growth of digital trading and the increase in economic transactions in cyberspace now provides both the final reason and justification for increased control by both state and non-state actors. Once the right to privacy is breached in this manner, the resultant insecurity defeats all ethical-legal injunctions that could have given healthy immunity to digital markets.



Sebi reconstitutes Takeover Panel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has reconstituted its Takeover Panel, which looks into the applications seeking exemption from the mandatory open offer that an acquirer needs to make to minority shareholders. The regulator has appointed N Venkatram MD and CEO, Deloitte India as the new member of the Takeover Panel, latest update with Sebi showed.

The panel, chaired by N K Sodhi, the former chief justice of the high courts of Karnataka and Kerala, makes its recommendations to Sebi on such applications after which the regulator gives an opportunity to concerned parties before passing an order.

Govt open to more measures to boost economy, says CEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is open to coming out with more measures to boost the economy which has been hit by the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, says Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) K V Subramanian.

He, however, added that the demand for a fresh stimulus package has to be considered against the backdrop of a host of initiatives taken by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget for 2021-22 presented in February.

The Chief Economic Advisor was responding to a suggestion made by some industry bodies that the government needed to come out with a Rs 3 lakh crore stimulus package to boost the economy which was badly hit by the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in April-May.

According to an assessment by the Reserve Bank, the second wave has cost the nation about Rs 2 lakh crore in terms of output lost.

"Like last year, we do remain very open to coming up with more measures as well...but I think it is really important to take into account the big differences between last year and this year when we talk about stimulus," he told PTI in an interview.

Elaborating his point, the CEA said that unlike the previous budget which was framed before the pandemic, the 2021 budget was presented amid the pandemic and had already incorporated significant fiscal expansion.

The focus is particularly on infrastructure spending which leads to construction activity and subsequently creation of jobs in the informal sector and demand generation, he

said. It was witnessed during the January-March quarter of the last financial year, he added.

The significant capital spending by the government led to a 15 per cent increase in the construction sector in the fourth quarter and the gross fixed capital formation to GDP surged to 34 per cent, the highest in the last six years.

Emphasising that the final objective is to ensure that the economic recovery gathers pace, he said, the government will do whatever is necessary to ensure that. With regard to food security for the poor, he said, the government has already extended the free food programme for 80 crore population till November.



CEA K V Subramanian speaking at a podium during a press conference.

DISINVESTMENT

Draft cabinet note for 100 pc FDI in oil PSUs okayed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce and industry ministry has floated a draft cabinet note seeking inter-ministerial views on a proposal to allow up to 100 per cent foreign investment under automatic route in oil and gas PSUs, which have an 'in-principle' approval for disinvestment, sources said.

The move, if approved by the union cabinet, would facilitate privatisation of India's second biggest oil refiner Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL).

The government is privatising BPCL and is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in the company.

Sources said that as per the draft note, a new clause

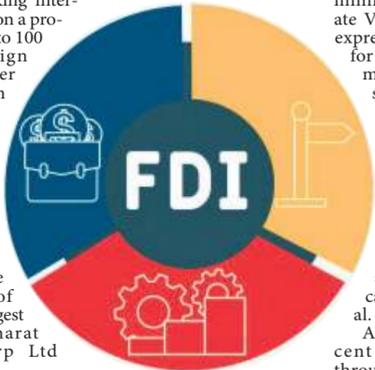
would be added in the FDI policy under the petroleum and natural gas sector.

approval for disinvestment of a PSU has been granted by the government.

For BPCL privatisation, mining-to-oil conglomerate Vedanta had put in an expression of interest (EOI) for buying the government's 52.98 per cent stake in the PSU. The other two bidders are said to be global funds, one of them being Apollo Global Management.

After collating the views, the commerce and industry ministry would seek approval of the union cabinet on the proposal.

At present, only 49 per cent FDI is permitted through automatic route in petroleum refining by the public sector undertakings (PSU), without any disinvestment or dilution of domestic equity in the existing PSUs.



According to the proposal, foreign investment up to 100 per cent under the automatic route would be allowed in cases where an 'in-principle'

MONEY MATTERS

Four of top-10 firms add Rs 68,458.72 cr in m-cap

Four of the 10 most valued companies together added Rs 68,458.72 crore in market valuation last week, with Hindustan Unilever Limited and Infosys emerging as the biggest gainers. While RIL, TCS, Infosys and HUL were the gainers from the top-10 list. HDFC Bank, HDFC, ICICI Bank, SBI, Bajaj Finance and Kotak Mahindra Bank witnessed a cumulative erosion of Rs 43,703.55 crore from their market valuation last week. The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) zoomed Rs 26,832.3 crore to reach Rs 5,82,874.25 crore. The valuation of Infosys jumped Rs 24,628.79 crore to Rs 6,41,108.34 crore. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) added Rs 9,358.6 crore to its valuation to stand at Rs 12,19,577.24 crore, while the market capitalisation of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) climbed by Rs 7,639.03 crore to Rs 14,10,557.79 crore. In contrast, State Bank of India's valuation diminished by Rs 14,948.73 crore to Rs 3,68,407.96 crore and that of HDFC declined Rs 12,796.03 crore to Rs 4,49,176.18 crore.



SAIL postpones commercial production of HH rails

State-owned Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) has postponed its plans to begin commercial production of head hardened (HH) rails at its Bhilai Steel Plant in Chhattisgarh, as the foreign experts involved in the trials left India in the wake of the second Covid wave.

In April when cases of coronavirus infections were on the surge in several parts of the country, the experts from Europe left for their respective countries. Replying to a query on its production plans for HH rails, SAIL said that cold commissioning of HH rails has been done and hot trials were taken in March this year. "The entire process was going on with the help and support of foreign experts...but it had to be postponed mid way due to the second wave of pandemic. The work will resume as soon as the situation is conducive for experts to return," the steel maker said.



Vedanta emerges successful bidder for coal block

Vedanta has emerged as successful bidder for a coal block in Odisha which was put for re-bid in the second attempt of auction of blocks for commercial mining. With the successful auction of Kuraloi (A) north coal mine in Odisha, the total number of mines successfully auctioned in the first tranche of auction for commercial mining is 20 out of total 38 coal mines offered, the coal ministry said in a statement.

In the first attempt of auction under 11th tranche of auction under the CM (S) Act 2015 and under first tranche of auction under the MMDR Act 1957, out of the 38 coal mines, 19 have been successfully auctioned. Out of the remaining mines, four coal mines which had fetched single bid in the first attempt were put up for re-auction in a second attempt by Ministry of Coal with the same terms and conditions but with the highest initial offer received in the first annulled attempt of auction as the floor price for the second attempt.



BoM tops PSU bank chart in MSME loan growth in FY21

State-owned Bank of Maharashtra (BoM) has become top performer among public sector lenders in terms of retail and MSME loan growth during 2020-21. The Pune-based lender recorded a 35 per cent growth in MSME loans at Rs 23,133 crore in 2020-21, according to the BoM data. It was followed by the Chennai-based Indian Bank which posted a 15.22 per cent growth in loan disbursement to MSMEs with aggregate loans at Rs 70,180 crore at the end of March 2021. When it came to retail, BoM with nearly 25.61 per cent growth was ahead of even the country's largest lender State Bank of India, which recorded 16.47 per cent rise. However, in absolute terms SBI's asset base to retail segment was a whopping 30 times higher at Rs 8.70 lakh crore as against Rs 28,651 crore of BoM. Bank of Baroda increased its retail loan portfolio by 14.35 per cent to Rs 1.20 lakh crore during the last fiscal year, the data showed. For the full year 2020-21, BoM's standalone net profit jumped nearly 42 per cent to Rs 550.25 crore. In the previous year, the profit was Rs 388.58 crore.



Leather, its products' export jumps to \$641 mn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's export of leather, its products and footwear has jumped to USD 641.72 million in April-May 2021 from USD 146.79 million in the corresponding period last year, the Council for Leather Exports (CLE) said on Sunday.

The CLE, the apex trade promotion organisation of the leather & leather products industry, also said that there is an expectation that this growth trend would continue in the coming months. CLE's newly elected chairman Sanjay Leekha said that after a prolonged period of market slow-down caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, which led to 27.72



per cent decline in the exports during 2020-21, the sector is back on the growth track with the outbound shipments showing impressive resurgence during the current fiscal so far. "As per latest data, export of leather, leather products and footwear increased from USD 146.79 million in April-May 2020 to USD 641.72 million in April-May 2021. This is a very good beginning for us, which we hope to sustain in the coming months, as India is viewed as a favourite sourcing and investment destination," he said in a statement. Leekha, Managing Director of Alpine Apparels Pvt Ltd, Faridabad took charge

Rapid digitisation fuelling mkt demand in India and overseas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Digital networks integrator Sterlite Technologies Ltd has said that rapid digitisation is fuelling demand for solutions, both in India and overseas, despite the COVID pandemic. STL Group CEO Anand Agarwal said running operations in the backdrop of pandemic gives the company confidence that processes have been strengthened to the extent that it is now better prepared to navigate through the situation on ground. STL further indicated that it is planning solution hub -- involving some element of downstream manufacturing

and assembly -- closer to its customers although modalities for the same are yet to be worked out. Asked about the business impact of recurring waves of infections sweeping across nations, Agarwal said: "From client side we had lesser issues. The demand continues to be strong because people continue to see a shift happening towards digital". In India, he said, the demand scenario remains strong when it comes to Indian telcos and ecosystem. The same is the case with the overseas markets like the US and Europe, where clients are looking for faster deployment of solutions, as economies open up.

Global trends, vax, pace of monsoon to drive markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With no major domestic macroeconomic data to be released this week, the equity market trend will be determined by global cues, pace of monsoon and the vaccination drive, analysts said. The expiry of monthly derivatives contracts may add to volatility, they added. "Markets are likely to spend some more time in a range and we expect volatility to remain high due to the scheduled derivatives expiry of June month contracts. With no major event, participants will be closely eyeing the global markets for cues. "Besides, the progress of monsoon and updates on the vaccination drive will also be in focus," said Ajit Mishra, VP Research, Religare Broking.



Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said, "Going ahead, monsoon and the pace of vaccination would decide the further direction of the market." During the previous week, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 130.31 points or 0.24 per cent. Global equities were caught off guard last week after the US Federal Reserve signalled earlier-than-expected rate hikes.

FPIs invest Rs 13,667 cr in Indian markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pumped in a net Rs 13,667 crore so far in June as Indian markets continued to remain attractive to overseas investors. However, market experts noted that FPIs withdrew money from Indian equities this week. According to depositories data, FPIs invested Rs 15,312 crore in equities between June 1 and June 18. "The US Federal Reserve has signalled that it will start raising interest rates in 2023. This caused a sell-off on a global level that caused some money to be withdrawn from Indian equities," said Harsh Jain, co-founder and COO at Groww.

Labour Min mulls extending ABRY deadline till March to boost hiring

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Labour and Employment is considering extending the timeline of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY) till March next year from the existing June 30, in a bid to boost fresh hiring in the country amid the pandemic, said sources.

Under the ABRY approved by the Union Cabinet in December last year, the government pays mandatory employees provident fund contributions of workers as well as employers for new recruits for a period of two years.

Under the scheme with an outlay of Rs 22,810 crore, workers recruited from



October 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, were covered. "The Ministry of Labour and Employment is in the process of circulating a Cabinet proposal for extending the timeline for ABRY till March 2022," sources told PTI. The source explained that about 21 lakh new recruits are benefitted so far which is far

less than government's expectation of 58.5 lakh. Therefore, the labour ministry would push for extending the deadline of the scheme till March next year as the allocation of funds for the scheme was done keeping in mind the 58.5 lakh beneficiaries, the source added.

During the pandemic, the government took a series of steps to boost employment generation and to give relief to workers grappling with job loss and pay cuts.

The ABRY was one of those measures. Government had allocated Rs 22,810 crore for the entire period of implementation of the scheme from 2020 to 2023.

Easing of rules: Automakers initiate production ramp-up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With COVID-19 situation easing across various states, leading automobile companies in the country have initiated steps to ramp up production to "normal levels" to meet pent-up demand, clear backlog and reduce waiting periods on their products.

Auto firms, which were forced to down shutters temporarily due to lockdowns and curfews, expect business activity to pick up going ahead with the opening of dealerships across states.

"With the easing of the lockdown in various states, production is gradually ramping up and likely to stabilise to normal levels by the end of the month," Tata Motors Passenger Vehicle Business Unit President

Shailesh Chandra told PTI. He noted that production at the company's passenger vehicle plants operated at about 50 per cent capacity during the lockdown period in April and May, constrained by pandemic restrictions and compliance to safety protocols as also shortfall in supplies from vendor partners located in auto clusters across various states.

Yamaha to press ahead with retail expansion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese two-wheeler major Yamaha is seeking to leverage on the 'drastic shift' in consumer behaviour, with preference for personal mobility over public transportation brought about by COVID-19, and press ahead with its plans to expand retail footprint in India despite the pandemic-induced disruptions, according to a senior company official.

Yamaha Motor India Group, which had suspended manufacturing operations at its factories at Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu and Surajpur in Uttar Pradesh from May 15 to May 31 when the second wave of the pandemic hit the country, has started production at the two locations from the beginning of the month to gradually get back to business.



Mahindra Logistics eyes sharp growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra Logistics saw a "significant" impact on its business in the last two months due to lockdowns in various states, but now it is back on "stronger" recovery path and expecting this momentum to further consolidate during the second half of this fiscal, a top company official has said.

With Covid lockdowns and restrictions being eased in various states, the company is optimistic of carry on the positivity in business outlook gathered in June to the third and fourth quarter of FY2022.

As far as its preparedness for the likely third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned, the company has taken up several programmes internally to tackle and mitigate the impact of a new wave of coronavirus infections.

CII suggests measured opening up of activities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry chamber CII President T V Narendran has suggested that the government should follow a cautious approach in opening up of all activities with a view to avoid a possible third wave of the COVID pandemic.

The focus of opening up in the immediate run, he said, should be on economic activities including restarting the supply chains as they are essential for reviving the growth and ensuring livelihoods to the vast majority of the workforce.

"We should prioritise what activities should be allowed, rather than opening up everything. Avoid the avoidable



activities. There are many things which do not need to happen. There are many things which need to happen like economic activities...but social events etc... can wait for a few months, let them wait for a few months. Why increase the risk," Narendran told PTI in an interview. He cautioned that one should be "very" watchful

before unlocking so that "we do not open up sooner than required and create a (coronavirus) wave three".

Several states and union territories have announced easing of curbs on account of decline in the number of coronavirus infections.

The Delhi High Court Friday took cognisance of the violation of COVID-19 protocols in various markets in the national capital and observed that such breaches will only hasten the third wave of coronavirus which cannot be permitted at all.

The new CII president said that economic activity has shrunk in May and to some extent in April and everyone

was impacted by multiple local lockdowns, disruptions to supply chains and demand. "The fact that economic activity has come down is obvious, it has also reflected in the GST (Goods and Services Tax) numbers...The second wave has derailed economic recovery," he added.

He also advocated for appointment of a "Vaccine Czar" for speedy vaccination coverage, stating that there should be a minimum 71.2 lakh average daily vaccination doses from now till December 2021 to cover the entire adult population. Vaccination is here to stay and the country needs to be ready for the long term, he said.



In view of World Music Day, we talk to Kadence, a music brand, and award-winning singer-songwriter Shayan Italia about how music has become more personal, over performances, and the trends in music back in our humble abodes, amid the pandemic.

YOGA SE HI HOGA



On International Yoga Day today, child prodigy Ishwar Sharma, who is a three-time world Yoga champion, talks to *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA about how he fell in love with the practice at such a tender age, how it helps him, what makes him teach this lifestyle to many, and more.

Keeping the current pandemic, and the lockdown and isolation it called for, in mind, yoga has become a powerful tool that many claimed helped deal with the stress of uncertainty and isolation, as well as to maintain physical well-being. One such beneficiary is a British-Indian yoga boy who won the Global Child Prodigy Award, and many such laurels for his contribution to the field. 11-year-old Ishwar Sharma, from Sevenoaks in Kent, had been practicing yoga since he was three. He saw his dad wake up every morning to practice yoga before he began his day. That eventually became a habit, then a hobby, and now a part of him, that he can't miss for anything.

Talking about yoga helps him, Ishwar tells us, "Yoga helps me concentrate, it helps me focus on various things better. Apart from that, it's so much fun, it's another hobby I absolutely enjoy doing, yet, it's a big part of my everyday life. Yoga also helps me relax." Ishwar day starts with yoga and ends with it.

"On a normal day when I've school, I wake up at 5 am, practise yoga for about 20 minutes. It lifts and wakes me up early in the morning, and charges me up for the day. And just before it's time to hit the bed, I practise yoga again for another 20-30 minutes, it relaxes and calms me down. Also, it's good for my eyes, helps me deal with my autism and ADHD," Ishwar shares.

With the many medals and awards he's received, ask what he wants and wishes to contribute, he replies, "I want more and more people to take up yoga as part of their daily lives. I want them to taste the benefits of this and be able to lead a better life." Ishwar, who had led daily yoga classes for 40 children across 14 countries during the coronavirus lockdown, says he wishes to continue teaching to as many as possible.

Ishwar, who also has the skill to chant up to 50 shlokas from the Vedas and Bhagavad Gita says his favourite yoga postures have to be *Ashvamedhasana* or the eight-angle pose, which comes with a hoard of benefits. "This basically is the hand-balancing asana dedicated to the sage Astavakra (who had 8 deformities), the spiritual guru of King Janaka," Ishwar explains. He also tells us about his recent favourite *Vrischikasana* or the scorpion pose, which is an inverted asana that combines a forearm balance and backbend, which he had mastered only last year.

Recently, I think that's where I'll head someday, maybe!"

Nickelodeon, one of India's leading kids' entertainment channel that has characters like Motu Patlu, Shiva, Rudra, and Dora which eventually emerged as role models for children by providing life lessons to them, has onboarded Ishwar Sharma for their *#YogaSeHiHoga* campaign, this year. The channel has pioneered in celebrating International Yoga Day year on year and spreading the message of a healthy lifestyle amongst the kids through yoga practice. Talking about how he relates to the campaign - *Yoga Se Hi Hoga* and why yoga is beneficial for strengthening any individual, Ishwar shares, "I am extremely delighted to have associated with Nickelodeon for *Yoga Se Hi Hoga* campaign. Yoga is so much fun and has helped me in so many ways and it's great to know that the campaign is reaching out to kids like me and encouraging them to take up yoga as a practice. While I have personally not consumed Nickelodeon cartoons, I have heard so much about Motu Patlu, Shiva, and Rudra through my cousins. I just hope now everybody understands the benefits of yoga."



MUSIC IN '20-21 CREATED, CURED, AND COMFORTED

RACHEL DAMMALA
SHIKHA DUGGAL

Throughout 2020 and until now, people across the globe have turned to various things to find solace in, and art has been the biggest of those. But music beat it all and turned comfort cushion that has something for everybody and every situation. Reels on Instagram and quick, short musical covers on TikTok are proof of this.

Explaining this phenomenon, Indian-born, international multi-award-winning entrepreneur, pianist, songwriter, musician, and global traveller, and 'Global Indian Of The Year' - Shayan Italia said, "Music has always been the world's universal language and always will be. This last year has caused a lot of suffering, a lot of pain to many — loss of loved ones, loss of livelihoods, and more. Music is a solace for many, a go-to where one can for a moment lose their sense of reality and seek hope and comfort. This need rises beyond excellence. It is an expression of self so to speak. Instagram Reels is modelled on

TikTok and allows one to create uplifting, fun, and sometimes insightful videos that capture the attention of another and for a moment make them laugh. Smile, and feel good, that's all that matters. These social tools that use musical expressions as their backbone only help us connect with each other in ways we never thought possible. It also demonstrates the power of music as a medium globally."

Also, have you noticed that most of these short covers had one thing in common — their cute little guitars called Ukuleles! They emerged as very popular instruments since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. The trend continued well into 2021, with over 70-80 thousand ukuleles sold since January 2021! "While the ukulele trend was largely supported by the lockdown, and people picking up fun hobbies, this year it has been more about wanting to pursue something interesting in their own time. The trend, started by the lockdown, has evolved into something more — playing a musical instrument for fun! Ukulele was commonly referred to as a 'chota' guitar by people and till 2019 not many understood its real essence and qualities. Till the pandemic hit

in March 2020, we used to sell quite a few ukuleles. However, with the lockdown, there were a lot of people who wanted to try something different. The ukulele is a perfect combination of 'easy' and 'fun'. Learning a musical instrument makes one feel accomplished — and that was a big draw. Sales have risen by 300 percent since the pandemic started and are consistent in 2021 as well," informs Yash Gupta, entrepreneur in residence, Kadence, one of India's leading music instrument brands.

But why has the ukulele received much love these days? "The ukulele is a perfect companion for several situations. It will be an ideal travel companion. Small, light, and portable and fits perfectly into the travel backpack. It is something you can play at home, to your child, pet dog, or just to yourself. It is something that you can play at a party to entertain people," opines Yash Gupta.

The demand is here to stay. People, today, realise that playing an instrument can be fun and simple. Manufacturers are so sure, that Kadence recently set up their first manufacturing unit in Bengaluru, which will also be manufacturing ukuleles. They hope the demand

will grow. Apparently, the quirky and charming ukulele caught the attention of people from almost all age groups. Retired senior citizens, kids, working adults, and hobbyists between the age group of 20-60 years are also buying the Ukulele and learning to play it! Yash informs that Bangaloreans and Hyderabadis loved the uke the most, followed by Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai.

"The ukulele is one of the easiest instruments to port around, and on average, not as expensive as a guitar. I've used the Ukulele in many of my studio recordings and it brings back great memories. Its sound is playful, fun, uplifting, and joyous, so it would connect with the youth instinctively. One of my favourite songs of all time

Somewhere Over The Rainbow by the great Israel Kamakawiwole is a masterpiece using this instrument. Not only is the song legendary, but his vocal and ukulele performance is sheer magic. I think it still stands as the most famous ukulele song perhaps of our generation," reminisces Shayan Italia.



In connection with World Motorcycling Day, *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE speaks to some of the heroes of the riders' community on how they are making a difference and bringing a smile to people's faces in Telangana.

In this difficult phase, while the city dwellers still manage to have timely access to essential commodities, many who live in villages and remote parts of the country aren't that lucky, they barely manage a single meal a day and have to walk for kilometers at a stretch, only to procure a few bags of ration to provide for their families. During the lockdown period in Telangana, some good Samaritans in the riders' community have been trying to make a difference. Many riders took individual initiatives and helped in social distancing and raising funds during the pandemic.

Recognising and empathising with the agony of such people, several Royal Enfield riders from Hyderabad have come forward to extend a helping hand. They are doing their best to give back to

Riding high on selfless love and care



society whether it is by delivering essential items like medicines and groceries or by distributing homemade masks to the ones who are in dire need. Many of them have also volunteered in helping manage traffic check posts, verifying and fulfilling food requests from migrant workers, patrolling interior roads to help maintain social distancing, painting markers for social distancing in front of shops as well as ensuring that people are wearing masks at all times when stepping outside. These riders are no less

than frontline heroes and we wanted to share some of their stories with you.

Speaking about the current situation on the roads, Joshua Daniel Putti aka Rider Josh, a well-known social worker running an orphanage and feeding street children, tells us, "The situation has been worse as people are unable to step outside. Several people have been suffering because of the lockdown. 99 percent of the people have strictly been following the rules, and we try to educate people about the vaccine

and teach them how to wear a mask, wash their hands, stay home, and not to come out unnecessarily."

This young social worker has helped more than 1000 families with grocery, cooked meals, distributing sanitizers and face masks for the police officials in Hyderabad. Joshua feels that humanity is the only religion and is glad to help the homeless people in times of need. His only dream is for more bikers from the biking community to come forward to contribute to a noble cause. "Motorcycling really has a positive impact on my physical and mental health. It helps me commute with no hassles, in case of emergency," says another biker Dr Roshan Reddy, Director of Anaya Hospitals in Hyderabad. The young doctor has been providing free audio/video consultations/counseling sessions for Covid positive patients and their families, helping patients find bed/oxygen/ventilators/drugs through his sources. A simple "thank you" from his patients is what keeps him motivated. Though there is a decline in the number of Covid cases post lockdown, which is good news, Roshan feels that people not following protocols should be punished by law. "Humans can only be safe when Covid safety measures are implemented from within," he adds.

Ravi Nair, an event manager by profession, who has been contributing to the community by distributing home-cooked food, delivering

medicines required for the affected individuals, helping people reach the hospital in an emergency, sourcing oxygen cylinders for those in need, ensuring a ritual and traditional cremation for the deceased due to Covid, explains to us how he is trying to bring about the difference in the community through riding: "My motorbiking is helping me reach out to people in distress at the prescribed moment when required. Unlike a four-wheeler with my RE 500 Classic, I can reach people faster, which is a must in emergencies. I have never kept count of the people I have been helping, but to give a rough count, I might have helped around 200 families or more," says Ravi who feels rallying about Covid norms can create better awareness in the community. "The only way to make the society a safer place is to ensure proper distancing. The most effective way for that would be imposing section 144 under which people can't gather or move around in groups," he adds.

Jayesh Nair, a Hyderabad-based businessman is another good Samaritan distributing homemade food to the needy and Covid affected families.

Since April this year, after witnessing the conditions/situations of the Covid affected families, Jayesh has served around 50 families by distributing food and buying medicines and essentials for them.

PANDEMIC REDEFINING, FINE-TUNING FATHERHOOD

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Anyone can father a child but being a dad takes a lifetime! Fathers play a vital role in every child's life that cannot be filled by others. Following the outbreak of the coronavirus, we saw a completely new outlook of a father toward the child because they're spending every waking hour with their kids! A father faced with the new challenge of being both dad and teacher at the same time, the virus brought with it feelings like anxiety, stress, uncertainty which was being felt strongly by kids of all ages, for which a father had to be there while balancing work from home situations. A poll at a parenting platform found that over 53% of parents felt more engaged in their child's learning compared to before lockdown! With no physical classes and uncertainty due to postponement/cancellations of exams, fathers had no choice but to become more involved than ever before in their child's learning! For many dads, this Father's Day was very different. Sure, they have always loved their kids and valued being a parent but never before have so many fathers spent so deep moments in the parenting trenches. Dr. Sufla Saxena, a consultant pediatrician feels during such times, fathers supported the whole family, in a way they tried to take away some of the loneliness and despair that children may feel. "From making kids aware about the pandemic and safety precautions, discussing with them the possibility of one or more family members going into isolation, being supportive if they come up with any queries, setting up a daily routine for the child for online school work, monitoring what the child does

online, doing fun exercises, keeping the kid's morale high by praising them from time to time for their work, etc. — a father is doing it all!" Even Dwayne Johnson mentioned that the most important thing that he learnt about raising kids in the pandemic was to just be there! "As social beings, children in their formative years require greater opportunities for extracurricular activities and interactions. Lack of this can hurt their cognitive and emotional development. This put immense pressure on fathers to keep their children engaged through activities



Dr. Sufla Saxena



while juggling extended work hours. It was thus no surprise that for some children, screen time shot up as much as they looked to keep themselves entertained. Despite mothers sharing the duty, kids predominantly expect their fathers to take charge of extracurricular activities like sports, travel, and gaming among other things. Such activities are essential bonding exercises between fathers and children and at the same time crucial for improved wellbeing and emotional development," asserts Dr. Subi Chaturvedi, a distinguished public policy professional and former member of the United Nations, Internet Governance Forum, Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group.

Dr. Subi Chaturvedi



Sarvesh Sahni with his son Atharva. She further adds how online gaming with multiple players is coming up as an interesting alternative to outdoor sports and activities while acting as a good mediation between dads and kids — "We aren't talking about playing video games in isolation

for hours anymore. Online, multiplayer games provide opportunities for interaction, engagement, and fair competition. As we belong to the golden age of social gaming, young dads are certainly making the most of it. As online gaming is a de-stressor for older age groups too, fathers are engaging with their children through a well-chosen skill-based game. There is a popular trend in the west where parents have been playing online games with their children and other than sharing commands and strategies in-game, they have been talking to their children about school, their friendships, and everything that is going on in their lives. This gave birth to the popular

'Dad Gaming League' too that has seen a considerable growth during the pandemic." We see a welcoming transition in how fathers are more physically present in the home these days, it indirectly affords a change in how we perceive the conventional gender roles of parenting now. Child counsellor Saakshi Singla shares, "Coronavirus has been unrelenting and there is growing uncertainty in all of us. But this time it is even harder for fathers with young children. Managing children's challenging behaviours along with an increase in work from home hours and added care responsibilities have been very hard and exhausting on them. It was impor-

tant that as fathers, they keep their sanity through self-care and invest in their own self-regulation skills also since they can never pour love on their kids from an empty heart cup. It's like, behavioural issues in children are growing and the patience of parents is wearing thin. But here's what we need to remember instead of worrying about children giving a hard time with their problematic behaviour — that children could be having a hard time themselves — and it's important to shift our gaze to that."

From having more meaningful conversations with kids, getting to know them better, sharing anecdotes with them about their own life, appreciating the child more, discovering new interests with them — this way of tackling kids in the pandemic could also be a watershed moment for gender equality in the home. A father from the city, Sarvesh Sahni reports how the lockdown has taught him to appreciate every little moment with his son. "Wouldn't it be nice if children came with instructions? This thought often crosses my mind when I see my 3.5-year-old son. Though he is not an infant anymore, I realised children always need undivided attention. My son, Atharva is a powerhouse of energy and keeps me on my toes throughout! Mostly, mothers are seen as the ones who do more of the caregiving when it comes to children. However, I was active in the caring journey of my son and found it fun and exciting. The lockdown with the work from home meant that not only was I present but more involved and connected. The sheer bliss of clapping when he chanted those nursery rhymes, putting a chocolate smiley on his tumbler of milk were moments that made our bond even stronger."



How celebrity fathers are doing it right!

From taking paternity leave to be with his wife Anushka Sharma who was due to deliver the baby to hilariously giving an ad which shows fathers from across the country giving the ace cricketer tips on how to be a hands-on dad, Virat Kohli has done it all. Hardik Pandya's picture feeding milk to his newborn son Agastya has been loved by his millions of fans. Cricketer compensated for the days he missed being with his son when he had to go to the UAE for Indian Premier League. Tusshar Kapoor had once shared that parent-hood nourishes his soul. He had said how he wanted to nurture his child with all the love he can and he enjoys it. He loves taking

him to the park and playschool. It doesn't feel like work. Telugu star Nandamuri Balakrishna recently paid tribute to his father on his birth anniversary, calling him a source of inspiration. In doing so, he highlighted that one's *nannagaru* is always one's first hero. While talking about his way of parenting in an interview, Mahesh Babu revealed that he is the one who pampers his kids while his wife Namrata known to be a strict mom. Several times, actor and a dotting father admired how his son Gautam growing up as his carbon copy and he fondly calls his daughter 'Sita papa'. The actor was also seen taking a selfie with his daughter Sithara! The little diva was smiling with her dad.

FUN

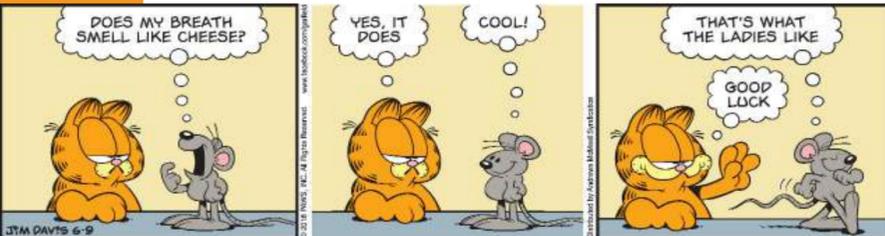
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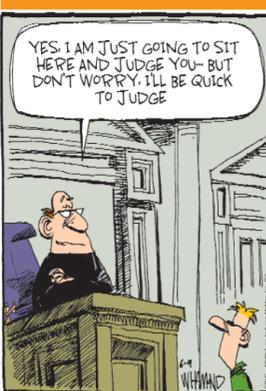
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GARFIELD



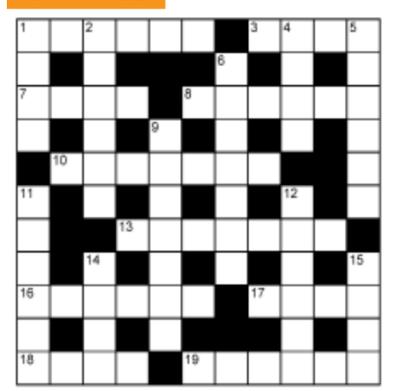
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Mend
- Very thin metal sheet used in the kitchen
- The line where material is joined
- Murdered
- Tales
- The later part of the day
- Wanting food
- Money someone has to pay as a punishment
- A fruit from a palm tree
- A light wind
- These birds hunt at night
- A climbing aid with rungs
- Birds that fly back home
- Courage
- Shoved
- Ask to come
- A tangle in your hair
- At this place

DOWN

- Have a lie down
- Braided lengths of hair

SOLUTION

L	I	G	H	T	I	N	I	N	G
C	U	O	T						
G	O	I	N	G	R	I	G	H	T
E	G	G	S	W	H	E			
T	H	R	E	A	D				
T	A	R	S	E	T	A			
D	I	N	E	R	A	N	G	R	
C	H	I							
C	H	O	C	H	O	L	A	T	E

GINGER MEGGS





Ravi Teja's killer stunts in *Khiladi*

Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja-starrer action drama *Khiladi* was supposed to release in theatres on May 28. However, due to the lockdown and the second wave of Coronavirus, the film's release was postponed to a later date. Recently the makers of *Khiladi* reconfirmed that the film will release only in theatres and not on OTT platforms. The team of *Khiladi* shot for some high-octane action sequences, which are said to be one of the major highlights of this action drama. A video of Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja performing a stunt on a bike is now going viral on social media. Ravi Teja is seen chasing someone on his two-wheeler and pulling off a crazy stunt. Mass

Maharaja's fans are excited to watch the movie on the silver screen.

The first look teaser of *Khiladi* was launched in the second week of April. The teaser showed Ravi Teja in dual roles. Apart from Ravi Teja, *Khiladi* also has actresses Meenakshi Chaudhary and Dimple Hayathi as the female leads. Arjun Sarha, Unni Mukundan, Nikitin Dheer, and anchor-turned-actress Anasuya Bharadwaj will be seen playing crucial roles.

Khiladi is helmed by Ramesh Varma, who is known for directing *Rakshasudu*, the Telugu remake of *Ratsasan*. The film has music by Devi Sri Prasad.

RAASHI KHANNA: SOUTH HAS A BANK OF GREAT ACTRESSES



Actress Raashi Khanna, who works predominantly in Telugu and Tamil films, feels roles for actresses in the South are no longer just about being pretty.

Raashi made her mark with Telugu films such as *Tholi Prema*, *Venky Mama* and *World Famous Lover*, after making her acting debut with Shoojit Sircar's 2013 Hindi film *Madras Cafe*.

"It's still a male-dominated industry but I think women are making their way ahead considering the new kind of films that are coming," Raashi shares.

"When I started my career, I was very lucky to do it with *Oohalu Gusagusalade*, which was a Telugu film and it established me as an actor, but post that, everything that I got was very

commercial. *Tholi Prema* was a film that changed things for me because people then said that 'she can act also,'" she claims.

"If you want to stay for long in the Telugu film industry, you have to be a good actor like Anushka Shetty or Samantha Akkineni. These are the women who are changing the way people are looking at actresses down South, which wasn't the case earlier. Before all you had to do was just look pretty and do great in songs. Now you have to be a good actor and I think we have a bank of great actresses in the South as well. It is starting now and I still feel we have a long way to go," says Raashi.

The actress who will soon be seen in *Thank You* alongside Naga Chaitanya, adds: "Everything is changing, everyone is going pan-India and everyone is going into different languages."

Liger first lookposter sets new record

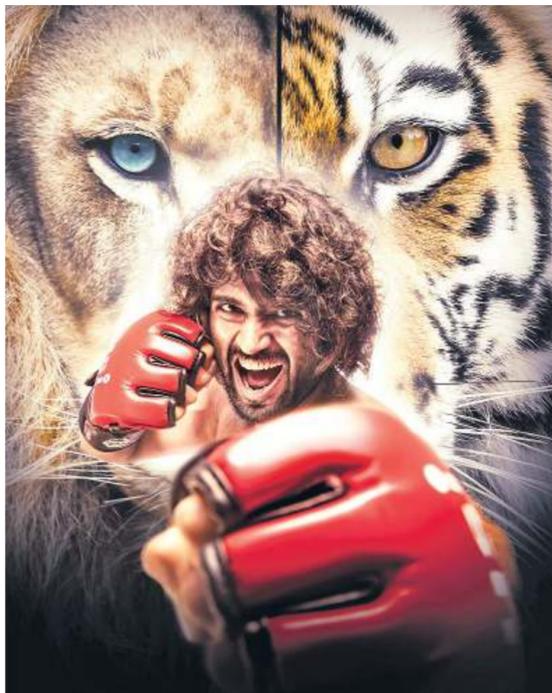
In January this year, the makers of upcoming sport-based action drama *Liger* launched the first look poster that featured Vijay Deverakonda as a 'cross-breed' between a lion and a tiger. The pan-Indian project *Liger*, which has Anyana Pandey in the female lead role, is being helmed by Puri Jagannadh of *Temper* and *Ismart Shankar* fame. Meanwhile, *Liger* has registered a record on Instagram and its first look poster has clocked a whopping 2 million likes on Instagram!

This is the first time a poster of a south Indian movie has clocked a sensational number of likes on the photo-sharing app — Instagram. This rare feat indicates the popularity of Vijay Deverakonda. *Liger* marks the young

and happening actor Vijay Deverakonda's foray into Bollywood.

The movie in which Vijay plays the role of a mixed martial artist, is being simultaneously shot in Telugu and Hindi, and it is co-produced by Karan Johar under the banner of Dharma Productions. The upcoming drama *Liger* is not Puri Jagannadh's maiden Bollywood venture. Exactly ten years ago, Puri made an action film called *Buddah... Hoga Terra Baap* with Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan.

Apart from the lead pair, *Liger* also has Baahubali fame Ramya Krishnan, Vishu Reddy, Aali, Makarand Desh Pandey, Ronit Roy, and Getup Srinu in the supporting roles.



Offers pour in for Santhosh Sobhan

After the release of *Ek Mini Katha* on Amazon Prime Video, young actor Santhosh Sobhan has been getting good offers from top filmmakers.

Currently, he is acting in two films - Prem Kumar and a project under Maruthi Dasari's direction. Now according to the latest buzz in the film industry, Santhosh Sobhan's next project will be with Megastar Chiranjeevi's daughter Sushmita.

Sushmita is going to bankroll a film in which *Ek Mini Katha* fame Santhosh Sobhan will play the lead role, it is being said. It is known that Chiru's daughter Sushmita earlier worked as a costume designer for her father's films.

Sushmita already turned producer with her husband Vishnu and they are bankrolling the projects under the banner, Gold Box Entertainment. Insiders now tell us that Sushmita is turning producer on the big screen and is planning to remake Tamil crime thriller *8 Thottakal*. The star daughter is planning to rope in Santosh Sobhan in the remake.



Sri Ganesh, the young Kollywood director who helmed *8 Thottakal*, will also be directing the Telugu version. An official announcement regarding Santhosh's *8 Thottakal* remake is expected to be out soon. Along with the above projects, the young actor Santhosh Sobhan has yet another project under the direction of Nandini Reddy of *Oh Baby* fame.



Tamannah to star opposite Yash

Actress Tamannah Bhatia of *Baahubali* fame is said to have been approached to play an interesting role opposite Kannada star Yash in the yet-untitled film, which will be helmed by Narthan.

Recently during an interview, director Narthan opened up about writing a script for Yash and said, "I have been in talks with *KGF* star Yash for two years now, but the time for the movie launch is not fixed yet. The upcoming project will be announced once everything is finalised. I am writing the story for Yash. When it reaches a stage, I will narrate it to the actor."

Now we hear reports coming

that makers approached the actress of *Happy Days* fame to play the female lead in Yash-starrer.

Sources say that the upcoming film will be an army-based action thriller, in which Yash will be seen as a powerful army officer. However, an official announcement regarding the inclusion of Tamannah Bhatia is still awaited.

If everything goes according to the plan, the upcoming project will go on the floor by the end of this year. Meanwhile, Tamannah Bhatia has quite a few movies in her kitty. She will be seen in Anil Ravipudi's directorial venture, the hilarious drama *F3* and *Gurthunda Seethakalam*. The actress is also in talks for a few web series.

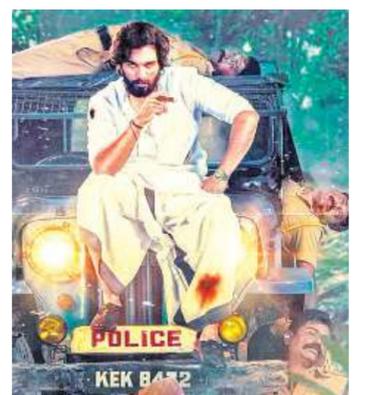
Pushpa 2 to be shot in China?

We know that Icon Star Allu Arjun and Coorg beauty Rashmika Mandanna's much-awaited film *Pushpa* is slated to release in two parts. We now hear that the makers are planning to shoot *Pushpa 2* in the forests of China. The multilingual action-thriller chronicles the red sanders heist in the hills of Andhra and depicts the convoluted nexus that unfurls in the course of the narrative of a man who is taken by avarice.

It is directed by Sukumar and is bankrolled by Naveen Yenruti and Y Ravi Shankar under the banner of Mythri Movie Makers. Malayalam actor Fahadh Faasil has been roped in *Pushpa* to play the main villain.

It is being heard that *Pushpa 2* will have another villain. According to the producers, the first part of the movie is slated to release on August 13, 2021, whereas the second installment will release in 2022.

Recently during a media interaction, the producers had said that the storyline and the characters of *Pushpa* took on lives of their own and grew to a span that required the



movie to be released in two parts. They are looking forward to giving movie lovers a memorable experience in the theatres through this story.

Spain face threat of early exit

AFP ■ SEVILLE

Luis Enrique admitted he expected more from Spain at Euro 2020 after a 1-1 draw with Poland on Saturday left his team facing a fight to reach the last 16.

Gerard Moreno missed a penalty and Alvaro Morata squandered the rebound as Spain's scoring woes struck again, with Robert Lewandowski's header earning Poland a valuable point in Seville.

After starting with a stalemate against Sweden, Spain sit third in Group E and may well now have to beat Slovakia in their final game on Wednesday to avoid an embarrassing early exit.

"I was expecting more," said Luis Enrique. "I was expecting six points and zero goals conceded. But this is the reality."

"We're coming into the crunch match now and if we want to progress we need to win. If we win, we'll go through. If not, we'll be out. That's the reality."

Morata poked in from close range to put Spain in front but Lewandowski's 60th goal of the season pulled Poland level before Moreno's penalty hit the post.

The rebound came quickly to Morata but with Wojciech Szczesny committed down to his right, the goal was open for the striker to score his second.

Instead, the whistles that accompanied Morata against Sweden last week were saved for the whole Spanish team at the final whistle.

Poland, meanwhile, formed a huddle on the pitch before going to over to salute their supporters, after the deadly Lewandowski came up trumps again to keep his own team's hopes of progress alive.

Luis Enrique had launched



Poland's Robert Lewandowski, right, celebrates after scoring his side's first goal against Spain at La Cartuja in Seville

a passionate and prepared defence of Morata on Friday as he said the team would be "Morata and 10 others".

But he also replaced Ferran Torres in the starting line-up with Moreno, the Villarreal striker whose 23 goals was second only to Lionel Messi last season in La Liga.

Morata's best moment came in the 25th minute and it could hardly have been easier, even if a little shuffle put him in the right position to poke in Moreno's shot from the right.

The offside flag went up and Spain's players appeared to expect the cancellation but instead the goal stood.

Poland came again though and twice went close before half-time, Karol Swiderski hitting the post with a curling shot that came back for Lewandowski, but he smashed

at Unai Simon, who saved. Lewandowski made no mistake nine minutes after half-time, peeling to the back post, nudging Aymeric Laporte to make the space and glancing a deft header into the corner.

Spain should have restored their lead after being gifted a dubious penalty for Klich leaving a late foot on Moreno.

Moreno stepped up but drove his penalty against the post and the goalkeeper on the ground, Morata could have scored too but scuffed the rebound wide.

Moreno was taken off not long after while the openings kept coming for Morata as Torres chested down to him but Szczesny smothered the finish and the collision caused Morata to hobble off with four minutes left. He was applauded this time but the whistles came shortly after.

'Bubbling' Germany back on track: Müller

AFP ■ MUNICH

Thomas Müller said confidence is now sky high in the Germany camp after getting their Euro 2020 campaign back on track with a 4-2 thumping of holders Portugal on Saturday.

"We are allowed to feel a little euphoria," said Müller after Germany moved second in Group F, level on three points with Portugal and a point behind leaders France.

"It's just fun playing in this atmosphere. The cauldron is boiling."

Germany now need to beat Hungary in Munich on Wednesday to be sure of reaching the knock-out stage.

"Now we have the three points, we are well in the tournament and have it in our own hands," added Müller.

"We mustn't get carried away and become arrogant — but we must believe in our quality."



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen reacts after winning the French F1 Grand Prix at the Paul Ricard racetrack in Le Castellet on Sunday

Max wins French GP to extend c'ship lead

AP ■ LE CASTELLET

F1 championship leader Max Verstappen overtook Lewis Hamilton on the penultimate lap to win the French Grand Prix on Sunday and extend his lead over his title rival to 12 points.

Verstappen used the DRS system to catch Hamilton on Lap 52 and pass him on the inside before zooming off to clinch his third win of the season and 13th of his career. A bonus point for the fastest lap made it a great day for Red Bull, which had never beaten Mercedes on the Paul Ricard circuit in southern France.

It was a close call, though, with Red Bull's gamble on a two-stop strategy for Verstappen countered by a one-stopper for Hamilton as Mercedes kept him out on the same tires.

With five of 53 laps left, Hamilton was only 3.5 seconds ahead.

Verstappen quickly ate into that lead, kept calm and then positioned himself perfectly to attack on a long straight in the

way Hamilton has done countless times in his record 98 wins. "When we made the call to do a two-stop, luckily it paid off," Verstappen said. "We had to work hard for it."

Verstappen, who won by 2.9 seconds, has 131 points to Hamilton's 119 after seven races. Red Bull's Sergio Perez sneaked past a dejected Valtteri Bottas to take third place and strengthen Red Bull's lead in the constructors' championship: 215 points to 178.

"We pulled the trigger and we went with the two-stopper (for Verstappen) and it worked. And great job from Sergio making the one-stop work," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said. "It's a team effort, the strategy guys are working the numbers and they go for it."

Verstappen has already matched his career best for a season with three wins and is emerging as a massive rival for the defending champion Hamilton, who is trying to win a record eighth F1 title to move one ahead of Michael Schumacher.

Shafali will be very important for us in all formats: Mithali

PTI ■ BRISTOL

Shafali Verma's spectacular debut has caught the imagination of the Indian women's team Test skipper Mithali Raj, who feels the teenager would be a key member of the side in all the formats of the game in future.

The 17-year-old, who had smashed a stroke-filled 96 in the first innings, made 63 in the second, to become the youngest woman and fourth overall to score twin half-centuries in her debut Test and was rightfully adjudged player-of-the-match.

"She will be very, very important to the Indian batting unit in all formats. She beautifully adapted to this format," Mithali said in a virtual media interaction after India, following on, salvaged a draw in the one-off Test against England.

"She didn't go like how she would go bonkers in the T20 format. She played sensibly against the new ball and it's great to have her."

Asked what prompted the Indian team management to hand Verma a Test debut in England, Mithali said: "She has great range of shots, and she



Shafali Verma receives her Test cap from Indian skipper Mithali Raj before the start of first day play of Women's Test match against England in Bristol

can be very, very, effective in a format like this if she gets going. In no time, we could see that the score would be somewhere else if she gets going.

"Once we knew that it's a used wicket and there won't be much of a movement, we thought it would be a good time to give her a Test debut and she lived up to it."

Mithali rated the young opener's knock in the second

innings ahead of her first innings score of 96 as the teenager showed utmost composure and maturity.

"The (second innings) fifty came with a little more sorted head and a little bit more experience. Those sweetly-timed drives, it was beautiful to watch her. I'm sure she will grow from strength to strength from here on."

Knight supports 5-day Test match

PTI ■ BRISTOL

England captain Heather Knight has hailed the one-off Test against India as a great advertisement for the women's game and said she would support five-day matches, instead of the current four-day contests.

"What a brilliant game of cricket. It was unfortunate it didn't have the dramatic and exciting finish that it could have done but what a game of cricket," Knight said after the match.

"It's been a great advert and shows that women's Test cricket has a place in the game... Maybe even play a five-day Test match."

Asked if she would be open to women playing five-day Tests, Knight said, "I would definitely be open to it. There has been a lot of draws in women's cricket, so it's definitely something that should be looked at."

"(We were) almost robbed of that finish because there wasn't an extra day and we didn't have the time in the game. So, yes, something I'd definitely be open to."

"I think if there was another day what a great finish it would have been," said Knight who hit 95 in England's first innings and took three Indian wickets in the match.

Jamieson 5/31 holds India to 217

PTI ■ SOUTHAMPTON

Kyle Jamieson continued his love affair with the Indian team, tormenting the star-studded line-up with disconcerting bounce and swing as New Zealand bowled out the opposition for 217 on day three of the World Test Championship final here.

Jamieson decimated India with marvellous figures of 22-12-31-5 as New Zealand took control of the Test match by reaching 36 for no loss at tea. Openers Devon Conway (18 batting) and Tom Latham (17 batting) negotiated the Indian pace attack pretty well.

However, it was 6 feet 8 inch tall Jamieson, who after last year's series in New Zealand, has once again turned into a nightmare for the Indian batsmen.

Having removed Rohit Sharma on Saturday morning, Jamieson was relentless with his length and the bounce did the rest with clever traps laid for skipper Virat Kohli and the dangerous Rishabh Pant.

Kohli and his deputy Ajinkya Rahane walked into a nicely laid trap as India failed to reach 250, a good total in the prevailing conditions as per batting coach Vikram Rathour.

The overcast conditions made batting difficult and the likes of Jamieson, Trent Boult



New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson, right, appeals successfully for the wicket of India's captain Virat Kohli, left, during the third day of the WTC final in Southampton

(21.1-4-47-2) and Neil Wagner (15.5-40-2) indulged in a 'who blinks first' game with the Indian batters and came out trumps with some incisive seam, swing and short pitched bowling.

Kohli (44, 132 balls) couldn't add a single run to his overnight score as his RCB teammate Jamieson made life

difficult for him. Boult and Jamieson kept bowling outside the off-stump channel and Kohli kept on leaving before the lanky seamer went slightly wide off the crease and got one to aim at rival skipper's boot laces.

Rishabh Pant (4) didn't score a run for 19 balls and

then got a boundary with a flick through mid-wicket. Two balls later, he took the bait when Jamieson angled one to the imaginary fifth off-stump. He went for an expansive drive only to be snapped in the third slip by Tom Latham.

Once the 61-run stand with Kohli had ended, Rahane (49, 119 balls) sensed that the scoreboard needed a move on and started playing a few shots.

But perhaps, the milestone was working on his mind and despite playing a mistimed pull-shot one ball earlier, Wagner with his signature short ball prevented him from reaching a well-deserved fifty.

Rahane's disappointment was evident as he fell into the trap to play the pull-shot despite knowing that Wagner had kept a deep fine leg and long leg for the shot.

Ravichandran Ashwin (22, 27 balls) threw his bat around and got some useful runs but was never going to last long as Tim Southee (22-6-64-1) took care of him just before lunch break.

Post lunch break, Jamieson removed Ishant Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah off successive deliveries but Mohammed Shami prevented him from completing a hat-trick.

TOCOG working on safe stay & training of Indian athletes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Tokyo Olympic organisers are working on how to ensure safe stay and seamless training of the Indian athletes inside the Games Village, according to a letter they have sent to the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

The Indian athletes and officials travelling for the Olympics have been asked by the Japanese Government to undergo daily Covid-19 tests for a week prior to their departure and not to interact with anyone from another country for three days upon arrival, strictures that have left the IOA fuming.

Stricter regulations have been put in place for all travellers — including athletes, coaches and support staff — of 11 countries, including India,



Seiko Hashimoto, left, president of the Tokyo Olympic Organizing Committee, and Saburo Kawabuchi, mayor of the Olympic Athlete Village, pose for a photo during a media tour at the Olympic Village for the Tokyo 2020 Games

where different variants of Covid-19 have been identified, within 14 days of their arrival

Termining the rules as "unfair and discriminatory", the IOA

had written to the Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (TOCOG) to

ensure that mechanisms to prevent Covid-19 do not have any "adverse and detrimental impact" on performance of athletes.

In reply to the IOA letter, TOCOG said: "Tokyo 2020 is working to define how athletes of your NOC as well from other 10 countries and all other 195 NOCs can stay safe in the Villages and have training. "We hope to provide you with those information and discuss together as soon as possible we develop it," the Games organisers said in a letter to the IOA.

The IOA, on its part, said that its president and secretary general were in discussion with TOCOG and seeking clarifications on the conditions imposed on the Indian contingent for Tokyo Olympics.

Uganda Olympic team member tests +ve on arrival in Japan

AFP ■ TOKYO

A member of the Uganda Olympic team has tested positive for coronavirus on arrival in Japan, just over a month before the pandemic-postponed Games, officials said.

The first group to arrive from Uganda — a nine-strong party, including boxers, coaches and officials — landed at Tokyo's Narita airport on Saturday. They are the second team to arrive after Australia women's softball squad on June 1.

But one of the African nation's delegation tested positive during screening at the airport, a Government official told reporters. The person tested twice but their condition



Members of Uganda's Olympic team prepare to leave for Osaka

remained unknown, reported local media.

"I heard the person has been isolated based on regulations," Hidemasa Nakamura, the Tokyo 2020 Games delivery

officer, told reporters, renewing a pledge to take strict measures against infections.

Public broadcaster NHK said the group had all been vaccinated and tested negative in Uganda before they came to Japan.

The team was originally due to have arrived in Japan on June 16, but their flight was cancelled following a surge in Covid-19 cases in Uganda, local media said.

The other members of the Ugandan party have already left the airport for Osaka, western Japan, where they will train ahead of the Games.

This was the first case showing positive Covid test results among Olympic arrivals from overseas, local media said.