

SHORT TAKES

NLCIL gets Union coal ministry award

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

NLC India Limited has bagged the award instituted by the Union coal ministry for implementing the 'Swachhata Hi Seva Programme' by transforming entire Neyveli into a plastic-free, clean and green campus.

The NLC India Limited will set up an Industrial Training Institute at a cost of Rs 6.50 crore in Neyveli township in Cuddalore district. R. Vikraman, director, human resources, NLCIL laid the foundation stone in Neyveli on Friday.

You can be 'High Commissioner for a Day'

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

The British High Commission (BHC) has invited applications from women aged 18-23 to be 'High Commissioner for a Day'. The winner will experience a wide range of UK-India works, meet with senior stakeholders and partners to discuss the collective response to Covid-19, and launch a new BHC Gender Charter reaffirming the commitment to gender equality.

In a release, British High Commission, New Delhi requested women applicants to record and upload a one-minute video on 'what global challenges and opportunities do you see for gender equality in the age of Covid-19'. The video must be shared on either Twitter, Facebook or Instagram by tagging 'UKinIndia' and using the hashtag '#DayoftheGirl'. The last day to apply for the competition is September 13, 2020.

Sterilite probe report may be ready by Jan.

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, AUG. 28

The one-man panel probing the situation leading to the May 22, 2018 police firing that resulted in the death of 13 anti-sterilite protesters, is expected to submit its report to the government by coming January, said sources.

The panel headed by retired high court Judge Aruna Jagadeesan, constituted on May 24, immediately after the tragedy in 2018, has been extended twice. Having held 21 phases of enquiry till Friday (August 28) here, the panel questioned 517 witnesses including activists, political leaders, journalists and photographers, since its first phase of enquiry on June 4, 2018 and submitted 676 documents. The next phase scheduled on September 3, will have revenue officials and fire personnel who were present at the riot spot, said a commission source. As the enquiry is delayed by five months due to the pandemic, the commission is said to speed up the probe process, and finalise its report by January 2021.

The probe into the tragedy, initially said to be completed in six months, dragged on to more than two years by getting two extensions. The Covid spread also further delayed it.

Kidnapped 15-yr-old boy rescued within 6 hours

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

The police on Friday rescued the 15-year-old son of a businessman kidnapped from near his house at Madhanapuram in Mudichur near Tambaram.

The police cracked the case within six hours and arrested three suspects from near Maraimalai Nagar.

According to police, the boy, Nava Jeevan, son of Thangaraj and a student of a private school in Tambaram, went missing at around 9:26 am on

Police said the boy went to a nearby shop on a two-wheeler when a car intercepted him. The occupants of the car reportedly kidnapped him and drove away

Friday, from near his house. Police said the boy went to a nearby shop on a two-wheeler when a car intercepted him. The occupants of the car reportedly kidnapped him and drove away. As Nava Jeevan did not return

home for an hour, his parents lodged a complaint with the Peerankaranai police. ADSP Ashokan and the Peerankaranai police formed a special team to trace the boy and nab the kidnappers.

The team with technical assistance tracked the mobile number of the kidnapped boy. The CCTV footages from the spot were also recovered to identify the car used by the abductors. On scanning the CCTV footages, police trailed the car to Maraimalai Nagar on the city outskirts. The Peerankaranai police

team rushed there and secured the suspects at 2.30 pm.

Police said that one of the suspects, Hariharan, 21, was a former employee of Thangaraj, the boy's father. Thangaraj runs a hotel in Mudichur. Hariharan was sacked recently for his bad behaviour. To seek vengeance, Hariharan kidnapped Nava Jeevan with the help of his friend, Vignesh, 20. Police rescued the boy and seized the car used for kidnapping and its driver Sarath Kumar, 29 has been arrested. Investigation is under way.

Transmission of corona virus in womb a challenge

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

While Tamil Nadu continues to register over 5,000 Covid-19 cases every day, the vertical transmission of virus from mother to baby has become a challenge as a coronavirus-related miscarriage was reported in the country.

The other day, a young Mumbai woman suffered a miscarriage due to Covid-19 while there is no proper study on corona-related complications in pregnancy. The doctors have cautioned that it would be important to take utmost care to prevent miscarriage if a pregnant woman is infected by virus.

The Mumbai woman was infected when she was eight weeks pregnant, but had no symptoms. Four weeks later, a second test showed no trace of the virus in her nasopharyngeal tract. She was healthy, but a week later on August 22 a routine ultrasound test found that the foetus had died.

Dr Vijaya, in-charge, Women's Hospital, Egmore, who assisted as many as 526 infected mothers to deliver suc-

cessfully so far, said that they were carrying out a study on the vertical transmission of virus from mother to baby. "Though no case of miscarriage was reported at the hospital, there could be chance of transmission of virus from mother to baby as the placenta has abundant 'S protein proteases' and 'ACE2' (Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2) that can act as an entry point in the cell for SARS-Cov-2. There is a possibility of the virus travelling towards the womb. It would be a cause for miscarriage despite she testing negative. The replication of virus in the placenta, amniotic fluid and the foetal membrane could lead to the death of unborn babies. The unborn baby could also suffer from a condition called 'hydrops fetalis',

which is the abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body. But there is no detailed study about this," she said.

Dr Kavya Krishna Kumar, gynaecologist, Motherhood Hospital, said that though there was no official study on the relation between Covid-19 and miscarriage, pregnant women who tested positive should be careful and take necessary steps to avoid complications. They should take Vitamin-C without fail and drink plenty of water. If you feel breathlessness, please get admitted. Once tested negative or asymptomatic, pregnant women should strictly avoid unnecessary travelling and babyshowering parties. They have to care if they require consultation with doctors, try video conferencing or phone calls. It will help avoid unnecessary complications," she advised.

However, some early studies by ICMR-National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health (NIRRH) had found that the placenta, supposed to protect the foetus from infections, can act as a reservoir for SARS-CoV-2.



Passengers aboard a bus to Kerala at Koyambedu bus terminus on Friday arranged by Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation for Onam celebrations.

— DC

Saving waterbodies



Volunteers of Korattur lake protection movement clean Korattur lake on Friday.

— DC

New president for SICCI

Chennai: Ar Rm Arun was unanimously elected as president of the Southern India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) at its 110th annual general meeting held online on Aug. 24.

Arun, who is the Chairman of Valingro Group and Honorary Consul of the Czech Republic in Chennai, said: "While Covid has caused significant hardships worldwide, we have to be able to collect ourselves and ensure progress with the available resources at hand. Within SICCI, we have started the planning and a good amount of our way forward has been identified." V.N. Shiva Sankar, the founder of VNS Legal, was elected as VP.



Vengaivasal lake renovation has begun. A view of the lake's eastern fringes.

— DC

Gold worth ₹64 lakh seized at airport, two arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

The Air Customs officials at the Chennai international airport have arrested a gold smuggler, who flew in from Sharjah, and the receiver who was meant to collect the gold from him. Gold weighing 1.16-kilogram and worth ₹64 lakh was seized during the operation.

Based on a tip-off, a special alert was maintained to nab the smuggler who was expected to arrive on an Air India Express flight

from Sharjah.

On observing a passenger who appeared to be hurriedly rushing towards the exit with a carton box, officials intercepted the individual and checked his belongings.

The carton box had clothes, household items and a toolkit. Inside the toolkit, an 'electric wrench' machine used for opening nuts and bolts was found which appeared to be unusually heavy. On unscratching the machine one cylindrical metal piece painted black was found

concealed inside. The gold assayer removed the black paint and certified the metal cylinder to be made of gold of weighing 1.16 kg of 24 K purity valued at ₹64 lakh. The same was recovered and seized under the Customs Act, 1962.

The passenger who carried it was identified as Jahir Hussain, (54) a native of Thiruvurur in Tamil Nadu. He stated that he was handed over the tool kit by an unknown person at the Sharjah airport, with an instruction to hand it over

after reaching his quarantine facility, which is not far from the airport.

In a swift operation after getting his swab test done, an AIU team boarded the bus along with the passenger, with another team following the bus. On reaching the hotel, the passenger contacted the receiver, in order to proceed with the handover. At the time of handover, the receiver and smuggler were arrested. The receiver was identified as Mohammad Asif (33), a Chennai resident. Further investigation is under way.

Annamalai booked for lockdown violation

DC CORRESPONDENT
COIMBATORE, AUG. 28

Police has booked a case against district BJP functionaries for violating Covid-19 rules and conducting a meeting in the party office without maintaining social distancing. Sources said, former IPS

officer-cum-BJP party cadre, Annamalai, arrived at the BJP party office at the VKK Menon road near Gandhipuram here, on Thursday evening. As many as 50 party workers assembled in front of the party office here to invite him with a band of musicians, and greeted him

with garlands. Traffic in the stretch was affected for a while, party's state general secretary G K Selva Kumar, treasurer S R Sekar, vice-president Kanagasabapathy, district president Nandha Kumar, presided over the felicitation function. Kattoor police, on know-

ing about the meeting held in defiance of social distancing norms and without police permission, booked a case on Friday under IPC Sections 143, 341, 269 and 285 against the top functionaries of the party, including the guest of honour, former IPS official, Annamalai.

Examinations during Covid: Marks over life?



The Supreme Court may have tried to play King Solomon in Praneeth & Others Vs University Grants Commission (2020) on the conduct of examinations during the Covid pandemic. By granting liberty to state governments to seek postponement of final exams that were to be held by September 30, but refusing to allow the award of degrees on the basis of the overall performance during the academic year, the court may have disappointed upcoming graduates.

I respectfully disagree with the verdict. No one has a clue about when the vaccine will be available or when the situation will be brought under control. Postponement will effectively mean the loss of an academic year, missed placement opportunities and admission for higher stud-

ies in India or abroad.

The finding that the practical suggestion or decision of state governments "to promote the students in the terminal semester on the basis of previous performance and internal assessment" is "beyond the jurisdiction of the Disaster Management Act, 2005" in my opinion, reduces State Disaster Management Authorities to paper tigers. Section 18(1) confers on it the "responsibility for laying down policies and plans for disaster management in the state". Section 24 (a) and (b) of the Act empowers the executive authority to "control and restrict vehicular traffic" and the "entry" of people from "vulnerable or affected areas." Should they not have the power to take steps to avert potential cluster spread of the deadly virus at examination halls? Of what use is the overriding effect of Section 72 if decisions of State Disaster Management Authorities in public interest cannot prevail over a central educational regulatory body? At this juncture shouldn't public health come first?



The judgment also does not reflect a holistic view of provisions of the UGC Act, 1956 and the UGC (Minimum Standards of Instruction for the Grant of the First Degree through Formal Education) Regulations, 2003. Section 12 of the UGC Act makes it mandatory for it to consult Universities and other bodies for the "promotion and coordination" of education and for the "determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examination and research." Clause 6.2 of the Regulations refers to "evaluation" with due "weightage" given to "tests, seminars, presentations,

class performance, field work." Clause 6.4 provides for "continuous sessional evaluation." Clause 6.8 mentions "the student's ability to recall information memorised, but also understanding of the subject and the ability to synthesise scattered bits of information into a meaningful whole." There is also reference to "analytical and original thinking." Clause 8.1 stipulates attendance and "minimum number of credits prescribed by the University for the award of the degree." With a mandated overall assessment, what explains the UGC's obsession with a final exam during this dangerous period?

The Covid scenario is not uniform across the country. Some states have more positive cases. So instead of passing all final year students in the country, as examinations will now have to be held based on the condition in different States, wouldn't this lead to a locational advantage or disadvantage? Wouldn't this fly in the face of Article 14 of the Constitution on equality? Lives matter more than

marks. The Right to Life under Article 21 includes the Right To Precautions like 'staying at home' during a steadily escalating public health emergency. Should students be made to choose between their personal safety and their future? Examination Centres will be the biggest tinder box. Exposing them during this peak stage of transmission of a lethal virus is fraught with a serious risk and danger to their own health, that of their families and the community as they run the risk of spreading it back home to their parents or grandparents who may be at greater risk with comorbidities like hypertension or diabetes. The State has a primary duty to not just improve but also protect Public Health under Article 47 of the Constitution.

By the time examinations are conducted, a sizeable chunk of the population may be asymptomatic carriers of the virus. The Standard Operating Procedure at examination halls, will involve thermal screening of students, teachers and support staff.

Remember how many air passengers had taken paracetamol tablets to lower their body temperature before landing to beat the tests? Are we set to use a failed protocol again, this time for a much larger volume of people? Keeping students together for a few hours for many days is bound to spread the infection, especially with the inevitable use of public toilets.

Our legislative assemblies and Parliament are yet to reconvene. The re-opening of educational institutions has been indefinitely deferred. Even our courts are hearing cases through video conferencing and some slated to partially resume physical hearing in a careful and phased manner.

Why should final year students be forced to take a risk? Doesn't it create two classes of citizens and is discriminatory and violative of Article 15 of the Constitution? You need to be alive to have a career.

(The writer is an advocate at the Madras high court, columnist & author)

Indians detained in Malaysia repatriated to Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, AUG. 28

In all, 142 Indian nationals released from immigration detention camps in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, were flown back to Chennai on Thursday morning, by the Indian high commission in Malaysia, in collaboration with the Malaysian government. The group of Indians arrived on a special flight of Malaysian airline Malindo Air organised by the Malaysian government from Kuala Lumpur. Sources said the citizens were detained for allegedly overstaying their visa. In some cases, the agents had cheated them, and in some cases, the sponsors had abandoned them on arrival. Some of them had lost their travel documents

Melakottaiyur, for mandatory quarantine as per rules specified by the Centre. This is the third-largest number of Indians sent back to India by the Malaysian government since July 11 when 367 Indians were deported to India on two special flights. A group of 219 Indian detainees, mostly from Punjab, were flown to Amritsar and the second group of 148, mostly from southern states, were flown to Chennai.

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