

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 25 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34°C
Min: 22°C
Rainfall: 6%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 11
Tithi: Chathurthasi
Star: Vishagam
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam: 9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.25 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.27 pm
Maghrib: 6.29 pm
Isha: 7.46 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.40 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 5.38 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.34 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,22,409)	(+4,454)
2,69,80,220	3,08,012

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+34,867)	404
TN: 18,77,211	20,872

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,78,08,935

DEATHS

34,83,711

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES

219

worldometers.info

Lakshminarayanan to be sworn in as pro-tem Speaker

Puducherry: Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Tamilisai Soundararajan will administer the oath of office to K Lakshminarayanan, an AIINRC legislator, inducting him as pro-tem Speaker of the territorial Assembly on May 26. The swearing-in ceremony is slated to be held between 9 and 10 am at Raj Nivas, a press release from the Secretary to the Assembly R Mounisamy said on Monday.

Sushil Kumar interrogated for 4 hours

New Delhi: Two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, arrested in connection with the Chhatrasai Stadium brawl case that led to the death of a wrestler here, was interrogated for almost four hours, the Delhi Police said on Monday. Officials said they are investigating the case from different angles.

COUNTER POINT



Now, I am more worried about my hospital bills!

NEHA SURANA | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 24

A teacher at a reputed Chennai school has been accused by his students of sexually inappropriate behaviour. An online campaign was trending on social media on Monday when the school – Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan Senior Secondary School in KK Nagar – stepped in and suspended the teacher pending inquiry.

Students alleged that the teacher, accused of inappro-

priate behaviour, had taken online classes wearing a towel. He was also accused of sending lewd texts to girls and commenting freely on their display pictures and asking girls to send their pictures to him and to come on video calls during late nights.

The school's alumni association also released a statement in solidarity with the affected students revealing that the Accountancy and Business Studies teacher Rajagopalan has been with the school for two decades

WHAT THEY SAID ON SOCIAL MEDIA



ANBIL MAHESH (Minister for School Education): The CEO under whose jurisdiction the school comes has enquired with the school management about the allegations. The school has told us that they will be setting up a committee to look into the issue and inform us about it. Appropriate action will be taken.

KANIMZOHI (DMK MP): Inquiry should be conducted and action must be taken against those who are involved including school authorities who failed to act against the complaints from students. I promise to take this to the concerned authorities.



and had harassed and even touched students inappropriately.

Geetha Govindarajan, school principal and Sheela Rajendra, Dean and

Director of PSBB KK Nagar, in a letter written to the accused Rajagopalan,

said he was 'suspended with immediate effect'. "Some very serious allegations of misconduct have been alleged against you (Rajagopalan) and the same has come to the knowledge of the management from and through social media."Pending further enquiry into your conduct, without prejudice, you are under suspension with immediate effect," the letter read.

The school had earlier sent an email to the students and parents of the

school stating the school has zero tolerance towards any behaviour that adversely affects the physical, emotional and psychological well being of their students.

"Contrary to what is mentioned, these kinds of allegations have not been brought to the attention of the management in the past. However, we will take all the necessary steps to address the situation in a free, fair and transparent manner," the email read.

■ P2

City school teacher accused of harassing girls



STATE | 3

TN seeks ban on 'The Family Man 2'



WORLD | 5

Suu Kyi appears for first time in court

SPORT | 8

Gill says India well prepared for WTC final



Mamata peeved about disparity in Yaas grants

DC CORRESPONDENTS
KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, MAY 24

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday accused the Centre of "repeatedly depriving" West Bengal by allocating it funds less than the other states facing the threat of the "Very Severe" Cyclone Yaas which is now expected to make its landfall in the afternoon instead of evening of May 26 near Balasore in Odisha.

The Trinamul Congress supremo attacked the Narendra Modi government after she attended a high-level review meeting chaired by Union home minister Amit Shah with the chief ministers of two other states and the Lieutenant Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

"Amit Shah Babu held a meeting in the morning and assured us of helping with advance funds which are, however, payable to the states from their share. This is not extra. Odisha and Andhra Pradesh are getting more than ₹600 crore while it is only around ₹400 crore for Bengal. I pointed out to Mr Shah that Bengal is a bigger state than Odisha and Andhra" she said.

Ms Banerjee then won-



Dark clouds hover over the sky ahead of the Cyclone Yaas in Kolkata on Monday — Pritam Bandyopadhyay

dered, "So why are we getting repeatedly deprived despite having a thicker density of population and more number of districts than other states? We are not getting our share of funds. During Cyclone Amphan we were told that our dues would be paid. A Central team came but nothing happened ultimately... ₹1000 crore, which was allotted in advance, was our share of the contribution. During Bulbul, we also got nothing."

Quoting Mr Shah, the CM claimed, "He however told me the issue will be discussed later while asserting that it depends

on scientific views to reach a conclusion. I did not reply to him because I have knowledge about political science rather than on the topic."

Ms Banerjee said that 10 lakh people are being evacuated to 4,000 relief centres by Tuesday.

Mr Shah chaired a meeting on Monday morning to review the preparedness for Cyclone Yaas. Those present at the meeting, held through video conferencing, were Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, Ms Banerjee, Andhra CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar, D.K. Joshi.

■ P4

TN promises to fix veggie, milk distribution issues

Day 1 hiccups in delivery to people under lockdown

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 24

The week-long total lockdown in the State started with Chennai roads wearing a deserted look on Monday as police closely monitored the movement of vehicles though the project to supply vegetables and fruits at the doorstep running into trouble with not many carts sighted in most areas.

In the districts, however, the scheme took off on a better note with the local bodies, in association with the Horticulture, Agriculture and Agricultural Marketing Departments, managing to find carts that would traverse the streets and sell vegetables and fruits at nominal rates.

The vigil over movement of vehicles began quite early in the day from the police checkpoints erected all over the city with personnel from the various branches roped in. Motorists with no legitimate reason to be out on the roads were not



On Monday, the first day of total lockdown, Chennai city police check two-wheelers on PH Road, Koyambedu. — N. Sampath

allowed to continue and made to return home.

After a day of frenzied shopping, people kept indoors and followed the government imposed Covid-19 protocols and only frontline workers and those in essential services were allowed out-doors.

Speaking about the need for the lockdown, Chief Minister M K Stalin released a video, saying that Coronavirus spreads only through people and not on its own. Since the spread of the virus in the second wave was frightening, the lockdown has to be imposed.

Though the earlier lockdown with relaxations brought down the number of infections, it was not very effective and hence the government had to go for the full lockdown with the view to helping the people from the virus and also to provide treatment to those infected.

■ P2

Mid-air wedding lands crew in soup

G BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 24

A caper pulled off by a Madurai couple to have their wedding mid-air as a strict lockdown was in place on the ground on Sunday has landed the crew of the SpiceJet aircraft, used for the thali tying ceremony with a crowd of friends and relatives around, in a soup. With the video of the ceremony on the sky going viral, several questions were raised since the guests on board the Boeing 737 flight were not wearing facemasks and not maintaining social

CHARTER FROM MADURAI

distancing, as mandated by aviation rules.

Soon after the video came out, there was also a debate as to which police officer should crackdown on the errant crowd. Is it the responsibility of the police district under whose jurisdiction the Madurai airport falls, from where the plane had taken off, or that of the district covering the Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple, over which the aircraft is said to have hovered when the nuptial ceremony was held?

Though such discus-

sions raged only on social media, where someone even identified the couple as Rakesh and Dakshina, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) cracked the whip on the airline, demanding a report and also taking the crew on board off the roaster.

Initial enquiries revealed that the flight was booked by a travel agent and that it was presumed to be a jolly ride for the guests post-wedding. All the guests produced negative RT-PCR test certificates for Covid-



19, as per the aviation norms, before boarding the flight.

According to sources, the passengers were clearly told about the pre-vailing guidelines on Covid-19 prevention.

■ P4

Selvaperunthagai as CLP head resented

G BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 24

The appointment of K Selvaperunthagai as the leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) had caused widespread resentment in the party not just because he is representing the Congress for the first time in the Assembly but also because his selection is seen as a move by a senior party leader to keep the present TNCC leadership under check.

Many senior Congress leaders point out that the Sriperumbudur MLA, who had joined the Congress in 2010 in the



presence of leaders of P Chidambaram and K V Thangabalu, had shifted political loyalties several times earlier.

Initially he was with Puratchi Baratham, the party launched by Poovai Moorthy, then he

switched over to Puthiya Tamilagam of Dr K Krishnaswamy and from there he joined the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi of Thol Thirumavalavan, in whose ticket he was elected MLA in 2006 from Mangalur constituency.

Then he developed differences of opinion with Thirumavalavan and went to the Bahujan Samaj Party, headed by Mayawati and was made the State chief. Later he left the BSP and went to the Congress. Though he was given a ticket in all the Assembly elections since then, he won the seat only now.

■ P2

DELHI POLICE TEAMS LAND UP IN 2 TWITTER OFFICES

New Delhi, May 24: The Delhi Police's Special Cell on Monday served a notice to Twitter India in connection with the probe into the alleged 'Covid toolkit' matter, with two teams descending on its offices in Delhi and Gurgaon, officials said.

"The Delhi police team went to the Twitter office to serve a notice to Twitter, as part of a routine process. This was necessitated as we wanted to ascertain who is the right person to serve a notice, as replies by Twitter India MD have been very ambiguous," Delhi Police PRO Chinmoy Biswal said.

Earlier, official sources said that two teams of Special Cell had raided the Twitter India offices located in Delhi's Lado Sarai and in Gurgaon, on the outskirts of the national capital, in connection with the probe into the 'toolkit' matter. The Special Cell has sought a clarification from the microblogging site for classifying a related tweet by BJP leader Sambit Patra as "manipulative", an official said.

It appears that Twitter has some information that is not known to the police. This information is relevant to the inquiry, Biswal said. The police, however, refused to divulge the contents of the complaint or the identity of the complainant.

SHORT TAKES

'Help on way to TN from US'

ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 24

US civil rights leader Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr has assured Chief Minister MK Stalin that help is on its way to help the state in its battle against the Covid-19. He assured that necessary steps would be taken to provide vaccines produced in the US.

Speaking to finance minister Dr. Palanivel Thiagarajan, from Madurai, on a zoom call two days ago, Reverend Jesse Jackson Sr said he is personally talking to the highest levels of the Biden administration to ensure that India will equitably distribute the vaccines that USA donates. Jesse Jackson Sr also said that he will host a Zoom call early next week with the CEOs of Astra Zeneca and Johnson & Johnson in this regard.

In response to PTR's request for vaccine to the state and India, Rev. Jackson, Founder & President, Rainbow Push Coalition, said "Help is on the way. We stand by you. Keep Hope Alive. We will do our best to facilitate the State of Tamil Nadu gets its due share of Covid Vaccines soon."

Hyundai shuts operations for 5 days

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 24

Considering the prevailing pandemic situation, the Hyundai Motor India has decided to temporarily suspend the plant operations for five days, from Tuesday to Saturday. The plant operations are underway as per schedule on Monday. A release stated that the firm undertook several initiatives to help and support employees across the country during the ongoing second wave of pandemic. During these difficult times, the company has undertaken several proactive and progressive measures to safeguard the health and ensure the wellbeing of the entire workforce. Workers at Renault-Nissan's car plant in Tamil Nadu will go on strike on Wednesday because their Covid-related safety demands have not been met, a union representing the workers told the company in a letter on Monday.

NGO helps Omandurar patients' attendants

Chennai: Attendants of over 500 patients at Omandurar Hospital in Chennai are being given breakfast and dinner by Rajasthan Youth Association Metro's "Chennai Food Bank" in association with Jain Annapurna Trust. The trust also gave away 20 hot water dispensers. Meals are also being served to front line workers of the hospital. The non-profit organisation has distributed over 10 lakh meals through their project "Chennai Food Bank" during the national lockdown of 2020. "We aim to provide more meals than last year's million count in 2020 lockdown" says Kishan Jain, Managing Trustee of RYAM.

Hotel chain gets certification for hygiene protocol

Chennai: ITC Hotels achieved the milestone of being the first hotel chain to receive the Platinum level certification under 'DNV's My Care' infection risk management programme. The certification by a team of expert infection risk and hospital management professionals covers all facets of hotel operations on six different dimensions - governance, strategy, communication, actions, data analysis and continuous improvement.

Chennai's Grand Chola is part of the chain with the 'We Assure' business assurance certification as a testimonial to rigorous health, hygiene and safety protocols implemented for the safety of guests and associates across all ITC Hotels. Nakul Anand, Executive Director, ITC Ltd said, "The health and safety of our associates and guests is of paramount importance. The DNV Platinum level certification for Responsible Luxury's 'WeAssure' programme brings great sense of confidence and comfort in these difficult times." The programme adopted standards and protocols on health, hygiene, safety and infection control management.



Health minister Ma. Subramaniam opens around 100 beds with oxygen at the King Institute in Chennai on Monday. Director Dr K Narayanasamy also present.

—DC

School teacher accused of harassing girls suspended

From P1

Kripali and the students were, however, furious with the principal's response as they said they had repeatedly reported about this issue and no action was taken.

On Sunday evening, a student from the PSBB had revealed to fashion model, Kripali Samdariya, an alumna of the school, about being sexually harassed at school. "Many of my batch mates and juniors have been harassed, and it got out of hand when he recently asked one of my friends whether she wanted to go for a movie. He even sent a porn website link in a class group," the student had said in a message to Kripali, who later posted it on her Instagram. Over 1,000 students then

signed on to validate the statement.

The student, who complained about the teacher's behaviour but wishes to remain anonymous, also said a bunch of juniors had been harassed by Rajagopalan. "He commented about my size in front of the class and tried to tickle me. When I went and complained about this, no action was taken against him," his message read. The teacher was accused of slut shaming his girl students and cracking sexual jokes.

The issue snowballed after politicians began taking notice and the minister for school education also commented on it saying the school had set up an inquiry committee and would keep the government

informed about the probe.

Dayanidhi Maran (DMK MP and former Union Minister): As a parent, I'm extremely horrified by the reports of sexual harassment by a teacher in #PadmaSeshadriBalaBhavan school, Chennai. It's of utmost importance to ensure a probe into the matter & accountability from the management to provide a safe environment for the children #PSBB.

Lakshmi Priya Chandramouli: Oh, come on now!! How can the school not be aware of this kind of behaviour that has been happening for decades!! Request and trust that the relevant authorities WILL take appropriate action on Rajagopalan and the school!!

Selvaperunthagai as CLP head resented

From P1

Since there are other senior party leaders, who have been winning elections for two or three consecutive terms, the party expected one of them to be made the CLP leader. Since the southern districts of Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi have a sizable number of Congress loyalists and have been overwhelmingly voting for the party, some names from the region were recommended.

In fact when the first meeting called by the TNCC with AICC observers attending it at the Sathyamurthy ended in a deadlock, it was said two MLA from Kanyakumari districts, J G Prince representing the party from Colachel constituency and S Vijayadharani, the Vilavancode MLA, were the main contenders for

the CLP post.

Later, after the meeting was put off and the party decided to let the high command take the call, more people joined the race. One of them was S Rajesh Kumar from Killiyur, also in Kanyakumari district.

Most of the top leaders of TNCC were in favour of picking one from the district that had been returning all Congress candidates to the Assembly in the past two elections, besides electing the Lok Sabha nominee of the party consistently.

Though the general feeling was that the loyalty of the people in the southern districts to the Congress should be recognized and the CLP leader should be from there, a senior party leader is said to have influenced the high command in favour of Selvaperunthagai.

However, Rajesh Kumar was made the deputy leader of the CLP, which is seen as a half-hearted bid to assuage the feelings of the southern districts.

How much cooperation would the present TNCC leadership get from Selvaperunthagai in taking decisions relating to the Congress stand in the Assembly on various issues is a big question that bogs down many leaders.

As one leader pointed out that K R Ramasamy, the erstwhile CLP leader, and the TNCC leadership always saw eye to eye on diverse issues that enabled the Congress to work in unison inside and outside the Assembly.

But now, though the Congress has 18 MLAs in its kitty, there is always a charge of the CLP not toeing the line of the TNCC in vital issues, fear some leaders.

Kanyakumari, Thoothukudi show spike in Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUNELVELI, MAY 24

The coastal districts of Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi have registered an accelerated spread of Covid while the neighbouring districts Tirunelveli and Tenkasi have brought down daily cases below the 500 mark.

The Tirunelveli district that registered the highest

number, 744 Covid cases, on April 29, however managed to bring it down below 500. The district registered 486 new cases when Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi recorded 1,160 and 843 news cases respectively.

Despite the two coastal districts being small in terms of area and population, compared to Tirunelveli, the number of

Covid cases in Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi was higher than in Tirunelveli and Tenkasi districts.

Of the total 40,752 patients in the second wave of the pandemic, Kanyakumari district has 124 imported cases of Corona, while Thoothukudi district has 275 imported cases of its total number of 42,292 till May 23.

The Tenkasi district

recorded a very low number of cases. Having a total number of 19,341 cases, the daily tally in the district has not yet crossed 400, though it has recorded 11 Covid deaths till date against Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi that have registered six deaths each. Kanyakumari recorded the highest number of 20 Covid deaths among the southern districts.

IAF airlifts medical supplies from Delhi to Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 24

Two IAF aircrafts airlifted over three tonnes of medical equipment and other supplies amid a massive surge of Covid-19.

India is struggling with the second wave of coronavirus infection as hospitals in several states are reeling under a severe shortage of drugs, equipment, oxygen and beds. Two Indian Air Force aircraft on Monday landed in Chennai with 68 oxygen concentrators, 45 ventilators, Two lakh face masks and one lakh RT-PCR kits.

Meanwhile, 2.5 lakh doses of Covishield arrived at Chennai airport from Mumbai on Monday informed airport authorities. According to the sources, 2.5 lakh Covishield doses, were airlifted by an Indigo airlines flight from Mumbai. The vaccine doses which arrived today have been shifted to the warehouse in the Directorate Of Medical And Rural Health Services in Teynampet, from where they will be supplied to other districts of TN soon.

Pondy logs 922 new cases

Puducherry, May 24:

Puducherry logged 922 fresh coronavirus in the last 24 hours as the overall tally rose to 96,982, a senior official of the Department of Health and Family Welfare Services said on Monday.

Twenty-three more deaths were reported during the last 24 hours ending 10 AM Monday pushing the toll in the union territory to 1,382, Director of the Health department S Mohan Kumar said. He said 13 of the deceased had no comorbidities and added that the victims belonged to the age group ranging between 39 and 89 years. The Puducherry region recorded 21 of the 23 fatalities while Karaikal and Yanam added one death each.

The 922 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 7,674 samples putting the test positivity rate at 12.01 per cent.

—PTI

Nilgiris police reach out to elders

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 24

The Nilgiris district police administration, under SP R. Pandiarajan, has instructed the village-police officials to collect data about the elderly citizens who live alone and need care during the lockdown.

The SP stated that under the village-police scheme, which came into effect in Nilgiris last year, a constable rank official will take care of a village. The scheme has been implemented in about 1,020 villages across Nilgiris.

The village-police panel of the respective village would gather necessary information about the village, village heads and other particulars like important events in the village to maintain a record for easy tracking and also to keep a good rapport with the villagers to maintain law and order

and to strengthen the police-public friendship.

Now, with the lockdown under way in the state, all the village-police panels in Nilgiris have been instructed to collect data of aged people who live alone and to provide them relief and medicines. The village-police will give their contact numbers to the elderly people to keep in touch. The elderly people can also call phone numbers(0423) 2223828, 2223807 and 2224827 at the district special branch in case they need any help during the lockdown, Pandiarajan added.

Meanwhile, the cops on duty at the Kakkannal check-post at the Nilgiris-Karnataka border seized nearly 370 liquor bottles/sachets which were found hidden inside the tomato loads and being smuggled out from Karnataka. Two persons have been arrested.



With complete lockdown coming into effect, the busy Broadway area wears a deserted look on Monday.

—DC

CM urges people to stay at home

From P1

Referring to the movement of people on the streets, he urged them all to stay at home. If all of them followed the lockdown norms, the pandemic could be overcome, he said.

In the two weeks since the new DMK government took charge, 17,000 Covid beds had been added and 7,800 of them were equipped with oxygen supply, he said. The States' oxygen requirement

had been met and the government had appointed 2,100 doctors and 6,000 nurses to ramp up the medical facilities. About 17 lakh RT-PCR tests were being done daily and vaccination had been made into a movement, Stalin said.

On the supply of vegetables and fruits to the people at their doorstep, the concerned departments announced that arrangements had been made to supply 1,500 tonnes through

2,000 vehicles in Chennai city and 3,000 tonnes through 5,000 vehicles in the districts.

Efforts were being made to source the vegetables and fruits from farmers, farmers' markets and from other sellers at the grassroots level and take to the buyers through carts and other vehicles, the departments announced.

On the hiccups in taking the carts to the entire length and breadth of Chennai as

per the plan, sources said they would be sorted out by Tuesday, when the sellers would be reaching out to the people in all streets.

Otherwise, food supply was not disrupted as restaurants had takeaway services and e-commerce operators like Swiggy and Zomato were allowed to operate. Since all other establishments, including tea stalls and even petty shops, were closed, people had no reason to step out of their homes.

Off-centre

Engineer lands in trouble

When adhering to Covid-19 protocol is mandatory at worksites, a Tangedco superintending engineer, in-charge of the ongoing hydro-power project work in Kundah circle near Ooty, was found negligent at the worksite.

Last week, found not heeding Covid-19 norms and engaging many labourers at the worksite, the Nilgiris district administration slapped a fine of Rs 2 lakh on him. The Kundah taluk administration was worried over the way works were being done engaging many labourers and reported this to the Nilgiris district administration which got tough slapping the fine on the engineer.

—B. Ravichandran

Tribal girl gets tough on minister

It was an embarrassing moment for local man and forest minister K. Ramachandran when a tribal family in the flood relief camp at Ponnani village in Pandalur taluk refused to accept sari and clothes from him. When Ramachandran visited the camp almost all others accepted the gifts, except a tribal family. A tribal girl boldly asked the minister to provide her family a good house which can withstand heavy rains and floods instead of sari and clothes. Though the minister promised her that he would look into her demand, the girl's family did not accept the gifts.

—B. Ravichandran

Spare food for strays

The lockdown has put stray dogs also in trouble with the canines struggling to find food. Moved by their plight, a few activists and animal lovers have stepped in, feeding the strays daily. In Palavakkam, Nandita Reddy, an animal lover is feeding at least 200 dogs. She feeds them with rice, vegetables and chicken, home-cooked food twice a day. A mother-daughter duo in Velachery has been feeding stray dogs, even before the lockdown days. These good Samaritans take proper precautions of double masking and sanitising while stepping out to feed the dogs. Inspired youngsters are coming out to help the animals.

—Sindhiya Samuel



People aged between 18-44 after getting vaccinated in Vellore on Monday.

—K.Senthil Nathan

COFFEE-BREAK

Your day today By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



Aries: Work will be hectic. You may get overwhelmed if there is an increase in responsibilities. You might make some lifestyle changes for a greater personal satisfaction.



Taurus: Channelize your energy into a constructive project. You may have ideas to improve your productivity. It may get difficult to focus on mundane tasks.



Gemini: You may get overwhelmed by responsibilities. Ask for help when needed. Do in-depth research on your projects. You may find interesting opportunities.



Cancer: Avoid arguments. Business associates may sidetrack you. Today you will have extra work leaving you tired and exhausted towards the end of the day.



Leo: Relatives will introduce you to somebody influential who will provide a remarkable boost to your career. People at home might not appreciate your work.



Virgo: It is a good day to enter long-term financial ventures. Help a friend who hasn't been feeling well. Your loved ones will be highly understanding and cooperative today. Your love life will flourish.

You share your b'day with

Karan Kumar Johar is an Indian film director, producer, screenwriter, costume designer, actor and television personality who works in the Hindi film industry.



Libra: Do some research before making any investments. Health seems perfect despite a tiring and a stressful day. Take rest and control your diet. Don't act stubborn.



Scorpio: You might achieve the desired fulfillment in your married life. Loss of valuable possessions are indicated today. Avoid wearing anything green today.



Sagittarius: There could be minor delays with certain assignments. Use this time to find long-term solutions to your issues. Don't express your views too aggressively.



Capricorn: Be diplomatic to avoid alienating close colleagues. Those who have been sick will see a gradual improvement. You are likely to be in a happy and relaxed frame of mind. Focus on your love life.

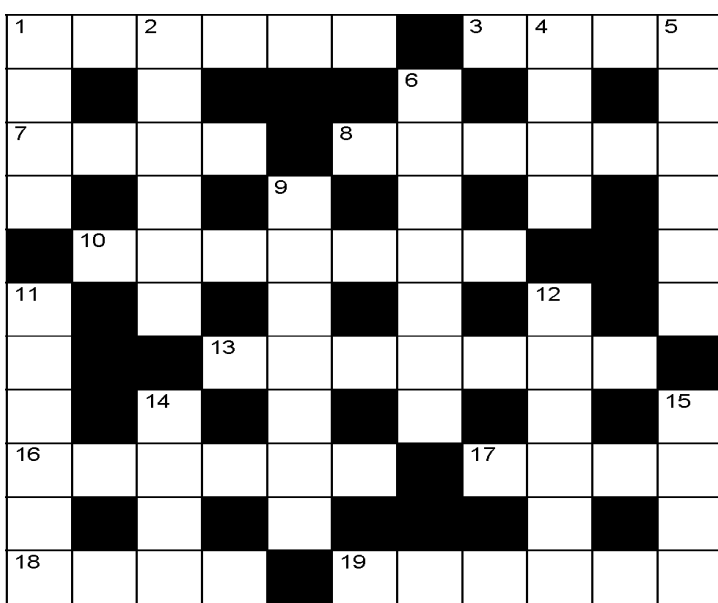


Aquarius: Give a commitment if you want to continue your love affair. Avoid alcohol. Your may see the long awaited results on the professional front. Financial situation may improve owing to a financial deal.



Pisces: A positive attitude and preventive care will bring immediate relief from health issues. Wasting time on unproductive activities could make you neglect your professional work.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

1. Option (6)
3. Fat (4)
7. Destiny (4)
8. Flag (6)
10. Revolved around (7)
13. Small waves (7)
16. Summary (6)
17. Top up (4)
18. Valley (4)
19. Pedestrian tunnel (6)

Down

1. Simple restaurant (4)
2. Clamour (6)
4. Dry (4)
5. Put on (6)
6. Dishevelled (7)
9. Home guard (7)
11. Burst (6)
12. Look at again (6)
14. Honeycomb compartment (4)
15. Stratagem (4)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Forthwith, 6. Renal, 7. Yacht, 9. Pods, 10. Tattoo, 12. Lustre, 14. Thin, 17. Exult, 18. Lance, 19. Ancestral.

Down: 2. Owned, 3. Tale, 4. Waylay, 5. Tacit, 6. Repulse, 8. Trounce, 11. Write, 13. Spurn, 15. Henna, 16. Flat.

Word Mine

U
E
F
A
S
L
L
I
D

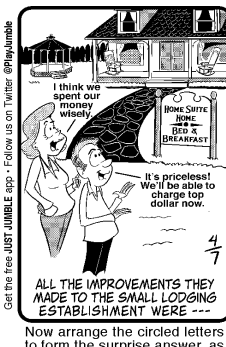
TODAY'S RATINGS: 14 AVERAGE; 16 GOOD; 18 OUTSTANDING

How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

Jumble

LI AVL
NLEUG
SBLUEH
NGEEAT

Yesterday's Jumbles: CEASE, TOOTH, PEOPLE, PASTOR
Answer: The Earth's top and bottom weren't getting along because they were — POLAR OPPOSITES

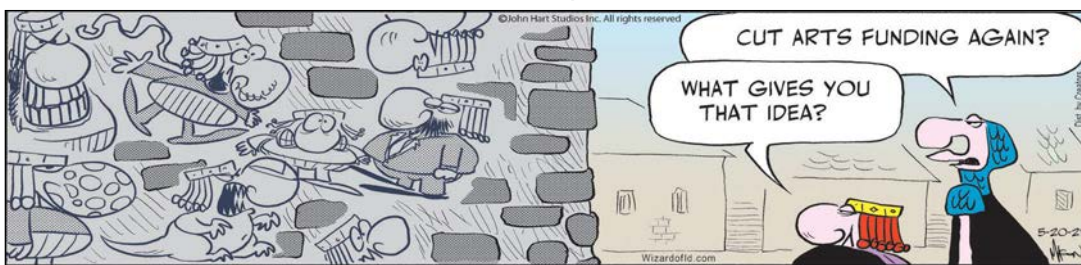


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CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



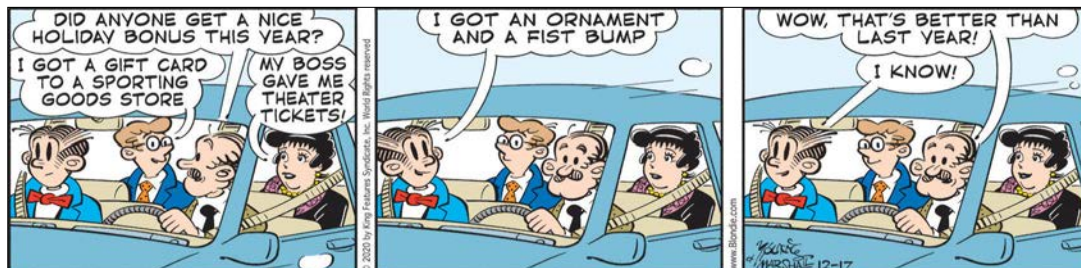
THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



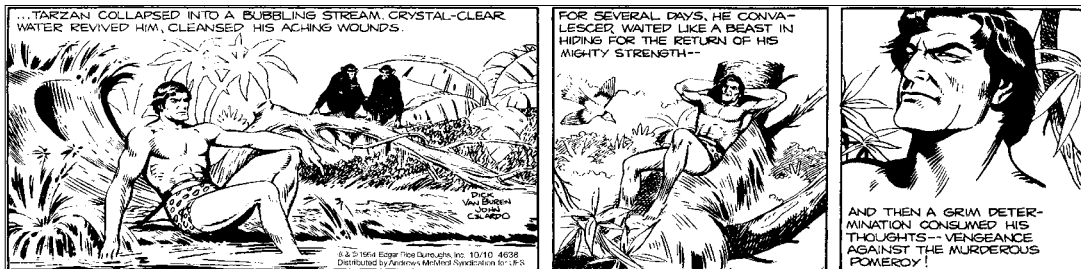
BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



IN BRIEF

Grundfos India donates ₹1 cr to CM's relief fund

Chennai: Grundfos India, a global leader in advanced pump solutions and a trendsetter in water technologies, donated ₹1 crore towards the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to help support the State's initiatives in combating the pandemic. Grundfos India through its local CSR funds, recently worked with the Rotary Club of Madras East to provide 100 micro-oxygen concentrator tanks to the Government's Stanley Hospital in Chennai.

TN seeks ban on 'The Family Man-2'

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 24

State Minister for Information Technology, Manoj Thangaraj, had urged the banning of the serial 'The Family Man-2' that is set to be released on the OTT platform, Amazon Prime as it depicted the Eelam Tamils in a highly objectionable manner.

In a letter to Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Prakash Javadekar, on Monday, Thangaraj said, 'The Trailer of the above said serial which was released in the Social Media Network is aimed at discrediting and distorting the historical struggle of Eelam Tamils in Sri Lanka.'

He said the branding of Tamil speaking actress Samatha as a terrorist was directly an attack on the pride of Tamil around the world and that no one would tolerate that kind of motivated and mischievous campaign. Not only had the trailer evoked strong and widespread opposition in Tamil Nadu.



KMC (Kilpauk Medical College) hospital Dean Dr R. Shanthimalar receives around ₹65 lakh worth medical equipment and safety kits from a private organisation on Monday.

—DC

Herbal drink supply at doorsteps: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT KARUR, MAY 24

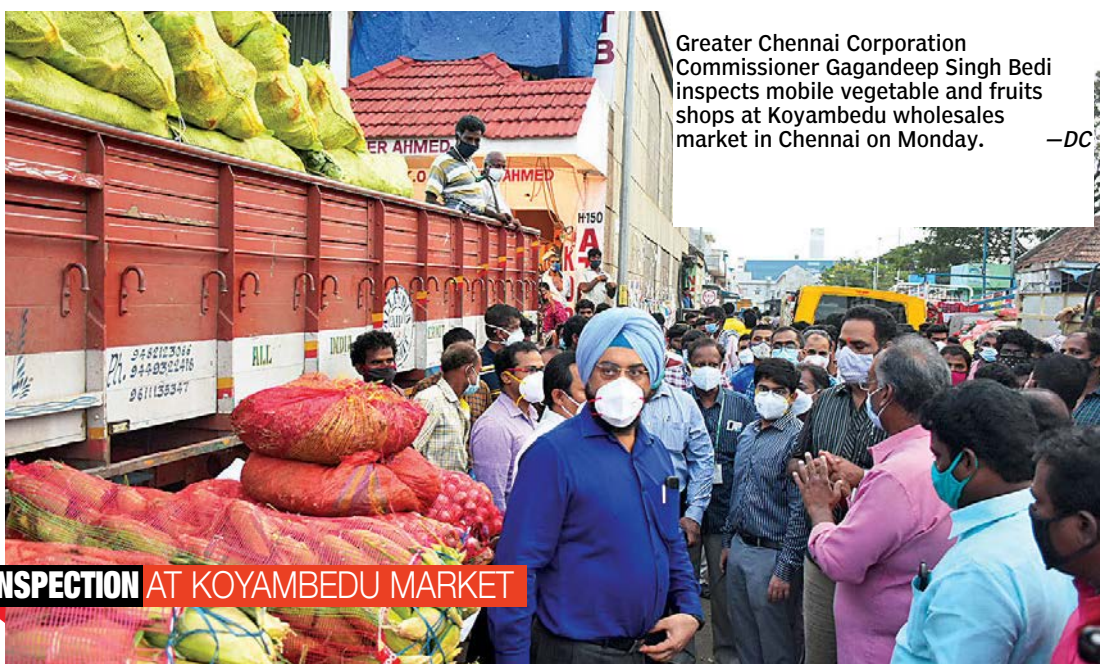
Electricity, prohibition and excise minister V. Senthil Balaji has ordered the Karur district administration to arrange door to door supply of the herbal drink powder (Kabasura Kudineer) to improve the immunity power of people.

Senthil Balaji donated Rs 26 lakh worth 4-tonne Kabasura Kudineer powder to the district from his Senthil Balaji Foundation and handed over the same to Karur collector Prashant M. Wadnere soon after visiting the Corona war room at the Karur collectorate on Monday.

Senthil Balaji inaugurated the vaccination drive for youth aged 18 and above at the primary health centres at Govindampalayam and Vangal.

He said 16,500 injection vials were received by the district administration for the first phase of administering vaccines to the 18-45 age group.

He said a 156 oxygen-linked bed Corona care centre is coming up at the marriage hall of the TNPL at Kagithapuram near Karur.



INSPECTION AT KOYAMBEDU MARKET

Doctors die of Covid in Kumbakonam

DC CORRESPONDENT KUMBAKONAM, MAY 24

Two doctors died of Corona at Kumbakonam in Thanjavur district on Monday. Dr. Sidharth (52), who was

running a diabetic clinic, and Abdul Ajim (75), an ENT specialist, passed away. Both were taking treatment after they had symptoms of fever, cough and cold. They tested positive for corona.

Covid spreading fast in Pudukkottai: CPM

DC CORRESPONDENT PUDUKKOTTAI, MAY 24

The Pudukkottai district unit of the Communist Party Of India (CPI-M) has expressed its concern over the fast spreading of the Covid-19 virus in Pudukkottai district, which resulted in rising death rate, oxygen shortage and appealed to the Tamil Nadu government to take suitable action on a war footing.

Party's district secretary S.

Kavivarman said in a release on Monday that though the pandemic is spreading fast, there is no adequate awareness among the people, and most of them are still hesitant to undergo RT-PCR tests and also have not taken the Covid vaccination.

The poor and downtrodden and middle-class people are fully dependent on the government hospitals but unfortunately, the taluk hospitals in Pudukkottai do not have ade-

quate arrangements to treat the Covid patients and they are referred to Government Medical College Hospital (GMCH). The situation at the GMCH is very worrisome as there is an acute shortage of oxygen resulting in deaths.

The Corona care centres established at Government Agriculture College, Kudumiyannalai and Government Women's College at Pudukkottai have not started functioning, he added.

27 migrant workers leave Karur for Bengal

DC CORRESPONDENT KARUR, MAY 24

As many as 27 people from Bengal, staying at Karur along with their families and employed in a private dyeing factory, left for their home state on a private omnibus from Karur on Monday.

The employees with a headload of luggage passing through the new bus stand area of Karur were intercepted by Karur inspector R. Sivasubramanian. They told him they are going to their native place due to lockdown.

Inquiries revealed that the driver will drop them at the Tamil Nadu border, where there they will catch another bus. The driver collected Rs 2,500 per head for their upward journey.

The police inspector allowed them to proceed to Bengal.

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DEAN (ACADEMIC)

SHORT TAKES

SC SEEKS REPLY
ON PLEA FOR
COMPENSATION

New Delhi, May 24: The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Centre's reply on pleas seeking ex-gratia compensation of ₹4 lakh to the families of those who have died from Covid-19 and said that there should be a uniform policy for issuing death certificates to those succumbing to the deadly virus.

A vacation bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M.R. Shah also asked the Centre to place before it the ICMR guidelines on death certificates for Covid-19 victims, saying there should be uniform policy for issuing such documents.

The apex court was hearing two separate pleas seeking directions to the Centre and states to provide ₹4 lakh compensation to the families of Coronavirus victims as provided under the Disaster Management Act of 2005, and a uniform policy for issuing death certificates.

The bench said unless there was a uniform policy for issuance of any official document or death certificate stating that the cause of death was Covid, the kin of the victims would not be able to claim benefits of any compensation scheme, if given.

Justice Shah asked Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for Centre in the matter, whether there is any uniform policy on death certificates as there are many situations of death, where reason is not given as Covid.

MAHA PROMISES
FREE TREATMENT
FOR BLACK FUNGUS

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Maharashtra government told the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court on Monday that fungal ailment mucormycosis was now covered under the Mahatma Jyotirola Phule Jan Aarogya Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana. Citizens will receive free treatment for mucormycosis at pre-identified hospitals and nursing homes across Maharashtra under those schemes.

The Maharashtra government told a bench of Justice R.V. Ghuge and Justice B.U. Debadwar that 1,000 more hospitals would be empanelled for treating mucormycosis under the above two schemes soon.

The government also said that not only anti-fungal medicines, required for treating mucormycosis, will be provided free of cost to patients admitted in these hospitals, but also private hospitals will be restrained from raising astronomical bills. The government said it was also working on capping the cost of the treatment for mucormycosis at private hospitals in the state.

The bench was also informed that citizens, even those who did not hold cards for the insurance schemes mentioned above, could avail the treatment for mucormycosis at the 130 hospitals identified by it across the state for free of cost.

SC: EXPEDITE
REGISTRATION OF
GUEST WORKERS

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Centre and the states to expedite the registration of guest workers and those working in the unorganised sectors so that the benefits of the schemes framed to mitigate their sufferings in the wake of Covid pandemic actually reach them.

"Every state has social security scheme but our anxiety is that the benefits of the schemes are not reaching the targeted section", said a bench comprising Justice Ashok Bhushan and Justice M.R. Shah while hearing a matter relating to the 'problems and miseries of guest workers' in the wake of Covid pandemic taken up by the court on its own motion.

Directing the registration of all the guest workers including those in unorganised sector, the court directed all the states and Union Territories to make operational the community kitchen for the stranded guest workers wherever they may be situated.

It further ordered that the guest workers stranded anywhere in the country should be provided the dry ration under the Atma-Nirbhar Scheme or any other suitable scheme.

AIIMS chief says recovered
patients need longer care

Says Covid-19 patients are suffering from cough, breathlessness, brain fogging

FROM PG 1

"Even though CoWIN provides for features such as registration of up to four beneficiaries with a mobile number... those without access to the internet or smart phones or mobile phones may still have limited access for vaccination. Therefore, the feature for on-site registration and appointment is now being enabled for the 18-44 years age group on CoWIN," Union health ministry said.

The Centre has left states/UTs to decide on opening of on-site registrations for the 18-44 years age group based on the local context, officials added.

Union health ministry has advised states and UTs that abundant caution should be exercised and extreme due care should be taken while opening up on-site registration and appointment for 18-44 years age group, in order to avoid overcrowding at vaccination centres.

Meanwhile, the production of Russian vaccine Sputnik V is being scaled

Lockdown extended in Raj,
Haryana, Bihar, U'khand

New Delhi, May 24: Lockdown was extended in Haryana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Puducherry, with many states already imposing Covid-induced restrictions till May-end to rein in the spread of infection and the mounting deaths which crossed the three lakh mark.

The Rajasthan government, which extended the Coronavirus lockdown by 15 days till June 8, also said the state may allow some relaxations in commercial activities from June 1 in districts where the Covid-19 situation will show significant improvement.

Extending the lockdown till May 31, the Haryana government said the posi-

up, Indian firm Panacea Biotech has begun produc-

tivity and fatality rates have to be brought down further, though it did allow some relaxations in the curbs. Haryana state chief secretary Vijai Vardhan, in an order, said the lockdown, which was earlier imposed till May 24, has been extended till May 31. However, certain relaxations were given like standalone shops have been allowed to function during the day. The other shops, except in malls, are allowed to open from 7 am to 12 pm on an odd-even basis.

Lockdown was also extended in Bihar and Himachal Pradesh till May end while Uttarakhand too decided to continue with the Covid-induced curfew, as several states said that the

tion of the Russian vaccine in the country and it

restrictions have led to an improvement in the pandemic situation.

The Nitish Kumar government extended till June 1 the lockdown that has been in force for nearly a month in Bihar. "The lockdown has had a good impact and there has been a decline in the corona contagion. Hence, a decision has been taken to continue with the lockdown till June 1", Chief Minister Nitish Kumar tweeted after chairing a high-level meeting convened to review the pandemic situation in the state.

The Uttarakhand government extended the Covid-19 related curfew period, which was to end on Tuesday morning, till June 1.

is expected that annually 100 million doses of

Sputnik V will be manufactured by this firm.

A new study by Argentina's Institute of Virology has shown that Sputnik V is highly effective against the new Manaus (Brazilian) variant of Covid-19. The study also showed 99.65 per cent of those vaccinated had IgG antibodies to Covid-19 after the second shot. According to media reports, Mumbai has got three bids from Sputnik V makers.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said the states and UTs are finding it impossible to procure vaccines from global markets as Pfizers and Moderna have refused to sell their vaccines to them. Mr Kejriwal said these two companies have made it clear that they will only deal with the Centre and not engage with other players. Earlier, the Punjab government said it was denied vaccines by these two firms.

With states struggling to meet the growing demand for vaccines, the nationwide vaccination drive will suffer further delays.

18 states report cases of black fungus; Guj, Maha badly hit

New Delhi, May 24: As many as 5,424 cases of mucormycosis or black fungus have been reported from 18 states, with a majority of them in Gujarat and Maharashtra, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Monday. Nine lakh vials of

amphotericin-B are being imported by the central government for the treatment of Black Fungus. Of this, 50,000 vials have been received and around three lakh vials will be available in the next seven days," he said. Speaking at the 27th group of ministers (GoM)

meeting on Covid-19, he said that Gujarat reported 2,165 cases, Maharashtra 1,188, Uttar Pradesh 663, Madhya Pradesh 590, Haryana 339 and Andhra Pradesh 248 cases.

"Out of these 5,424 cases of mucormycosis, we have seen that 4,556 cases have

a history of Covid-19 infection, while 875 cases are amongst non-COVID patients. Diabetes was present in 55 per cent of the patients.

"We have been warning, issuing advisories and, through our experts, it has been communicated that

indiscriminate use of steroids must be avoided and diabetes must be treated thoroughly as best as possible," he said.

Nineteen states have already declared mucormycosis a notifiable disease under the Epidemics Act, he informed. — PTI

Safety first



People wait in their cars for a Covid-19 vaccine shot at a drive-in centre in Noida on Monday. — PTI



A BMC health worker screens passengers for Covid-19 at a railway station in Mumbai on Monday. — PTI



Police officers check the commuters for e-pass during the lockdown in Coimbatore on Monday. Tamil Nadu recorded 34,867 new cases and 404 deaths in the last 24 hours. — PTI

TOUGH TIMES

People are unable to shake off memories of their hospital stay leading to worries about PTSD

Patients recovering from Covid see a long road ahead

New Delhi, May 24: Crowded wards with scarcely a doctor or an attendant in sight, patients holding on to each other to go to washrooms so filthy they gagged and, most agonising, people around them dying. For Covid patients now back home, harrowing images from their hospital stay are the hurdles on their road to recovery.

Over a year after the pandemic began and deeper into the second, deadlier wave, many of those who have been to Covid hell and back are unable to shake off the memories of their days in hospitals, leading to worries about PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and other anxiety related problems, including insomnia.

It's a "numbing experience" for many Covid-19 survivors who come out from hospital, observed Dr Samir Parikh, director, Department of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences, Fortis Healthcare, Gurgaon.

Their days in hospital are seared into the memories of Covid patients who seem to be healing but maybe only from the outside.

"Hardly any doctor attended to us for the first two days. There were six of us — women and men — in the same Covid-19 ward. We had to throw empty plastic bottles out of the door to catch the staff's attention. I watched at least three people die on the bed right across from mine," a Delhi homemaker said, requesting anonymi-

ty. The 57-year-old, who is slowly regaining her strength, spent five days at a government hospital in the city.

Cases were spiking in the national capital and hospital beds were hard to come by when she was taken ill last month. With oxygen saturation levels falling, high fever and deteriorating HRCT chest values, she needed urgent hospitalisation and the family managed that with some difficulty. She recalled her hospital stay with a shudder.

There was no one to take us to the washroom and

we, the patients, would hold each other's hands and go to that very unhygienic toilet, which was down the hall and unisex. The attendants, overburdened, exhausted and frustrated themselves, were often unhelpful.

"When the old man right across from my bed would take off his oxygen mask repeatedly, the ward boy would shout at him and say 'Uncle ji, this won't affect us. So you can keep doing this'," she recalled.

Almost a month later, she still wonders what happened to the woman who was on the bed next to hers.

As cases continue to rise and hospitals stay overburdened, sociologist Sanjay Srivastava said this is a pandemic that seems

to have no answers, causing a general rise in social anxiety, distrust and psychological instability.

There has also been a realisation about the fragile nature of what in India was always believed to be a strong idea, the state, the London-based academic added. "There is also a feeling of extreme psychological distress due to the seemingly mysterious nature of the virus, a mystery that none of the usual authorities — doctors, hospitals, the government — has any answers for," Srivastava said.

The stories of continuing patient distress are many. Several patients said they couldn't bathe for days in hospital because there was no water or use toilets that

were clogged and dirty.

Siva Shakthi, a student in Puducherry, sought an early discharge for her 57-year-old mother Alamelu from the Puducherry-based Indira Gandhi Medical College because of its unhygienic conditions. Her mother has co-morbidities such as heart issues and high blood pressure and she didn't want to take a chance.

"The hygiene was pretty bad. That's why she had to come back in just three-four days. Both men and women had to use the same toilet. It was very disturbing, Shakthi said.

"Medication was given but drips weren't. You had to take care of yourself which is the case with a lot of hospitals in the country today," she added.

According to Parikh, the patient may experience a range of emotions while in treatment for multiple complications that may arise. "They are isolated so they might feel loneliness, being around sick people and perhaps seeing death around, anguish, pain, grief their family may also go through the same," he explained. Some of these patients can get PTSD, Parikh said.

What can be done is to have a support system in place and ask them to express themselves openly every time they get worried. Be connected with people through messages, calls and video calls. When you're back, don't rush to work, or be over busy. Give time to self care," he added. — PTI



A police officer marks a shop with 'O' for 'Odd' for relaxation in the opening of shops during the lockdown in Gurugram on Monday. — PTI

MAMATA PEEVED ABOUT
DISPARITY IN YAAS GRANTS

FROM PG 1

The home minister's focus at the meeting was on operations related to Corona that should not get disrupted due to Cyclone Yaas.

Mr Shah came up with some key suggestions at the meeting and in particular stressed on the need to ensure electricity back-up in hospitals with ICUs for uninterrupted ventilator function and oxygen supply.

In its bulletin at 4.30 pm, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) in Kolkata stated that Yaas "is very likely to move north-northwestwards, intensify further into a Severe Cyclonic Storm during the next 12 hours and into a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm in the subsequent 24 hours. It would continue to move north-northwestwards, intensify further and reach Northwest Bay of Bengal near north Odisha and West Bengal coasts by 26th May early morning. It is very likely to cross north Odisha-West Bengal coasts between Paradip and Sagar islands around Balasore,

during noon of 26th May as a Very Severe Cyclonic Storm."

According to its forecast, Yaas is likely to clock its maximum wind speed at 155-165 kmph gusting to 185 kmph from 11.30 am on Tuesday for the next 24 hours. Its maximum wind speed will however drop to 105-115 kmph gusting to 125 kmph 11.30 am onwards covering the landfall till late evening on May 26.

Deputy director general of Regional Meteorological Centre of the IMD at Kolkata, Sanjib Bandopadhyay, said, "We often jump to draw comparisons in terms of strength. It has to be kept in mind that Yaas' is going over Balasore and not Bengal. So its comparison with Amphan will not be correct. There is no reason to panic for the people in Kolkata at least." At the home minister's meeting it was disclosed that immediate steps are being taken for the safety of around two dozen oxygen plants, mainly along the country's eastern coast, which supply oxygen to other parts of the country.

MID-AIR
WEDDING LANDS
CREW IN SOUP

FROM PG 1

But when the flight was airborne, the guests threw all caution to the winds and gathered around the couple, who took to the aisle to tie the thali. The guests were even teasing the couple as it happens in a regular wedding.

Not only the bride, even the guests were bedecked in glittering jewellery and draped in shimmering silk with jasmine adorning their locks — a scene straight out of any marriage hall during the normal times. And there were also television camera men and professional photographers jostling amidst the crowd on the aisle to capture the moment for posterity.

However, the leaking of a video clip on social media led to people talking about it and the airline authorities claiming that the marriage party hoodwinked them in following both the aviation and Covid-19 restrictions for flight passengers.

Since the DGCA prime facie felt that the crew had failed to stop the marriage party from violating the norms, it has ordered for taking them off the roaster.

SHORT TAKES

U.S. JOURNALIST
DETAINED IN
MYANMAR

Yangon: An American editor of a Myanmar-based news outlet was detained by authorities in Yangon as he attempted to board a flight out of the country on Monday, his employers said.

United States citizen and managing editor of Frontier Myanmar Danny Fenster “was detained at Yangon International Airport this morning,” his employers said in a statement on their verified Twitter account.

“We do not know why Danny was detained and have not been able to contact him since this morning. We are concerned for his wellbeing and call for his immediate release,” it added.

Myanmar has been in uproar since the February 1 coup, with near-daily protests and a nationwide civil disobedience movement.

ANA TURNS INTO
A POST-TROPICAL
CYCLONE

Miami (US): Ana weakened into a post-tropical cyclone late Sunday as it moved away from Bermuda after bringing rain and wind to the island in the Atlantic Ocean, forecasters said.

Ana was located about 680 miles (1,095 km) northeast of Bermuda with maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (65 kph), the National Hurricane Centre in Miami said in an 11 pm advisory. It was moving northeast at 28 mph (44 kph). Ana formed as a subtropical storm early Saturday, then transitioned to a tropical storm on Sunday. It then weakened to a depression later in the day.

The hurricane center said it would dissipate on Monday. No watches or warnings were in effect for the storm. It posed no threat to land. Ana was the first named storm in the Atlantic this year, though hurricane season doesn't officially start until June 1. Meteorologists expect the 2021 season to be busy, but not to the level of last year's the record-breaking season.

TURKEY DETAINS
I.S. BOMB EXPERT
WANTED BY U.S.

Istanbul: Turkish intelligence officers have arrested an Egyptian-born terror suspect wanted by Washington who was a top explosives expert for the Islamic State group, state media reported on Monday.

The suspect, identified as Mustafa Abdulwahab Mahmud and born in 1999, was detained with three others on the outskirts of Istanbul after fleeing Syria, the reports said.

The indictment said he joined the IS group in Syria, where he specialised in making suicide belts and various explosive devices.

The Istanbul prosecutor's office is seeking 22.5 years in prison on charges of membership of a terror group.

He was detained on a tip from US intelligence services, who have been tracking his movements, the media reports said, adding that he is believed to have been plotting attacks inside Turkey, including against US interests.

Once accused of letting jihadists pass freely through its territory, Turkey has stepped up its fight against the IS group.

OMAN SEES RARE
PROTESTS OVER
JOB LAYOFFS

Dubai: Scattered protests in Oman over layoffs and poor economic conditions drew a massive police presence on Monday in at least one city in the sultanate, with protesters throwing stones at one point and police firing tear gas.

Videos posted to social media show several dozen Omanis in the city of Sohar trailed by a long line of riot police vehicles. Other images appear to show a line of police in riot gear near a government labour office in the city, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) northwest of the capital, Muscat.

Other images appear to show Omanis fleeing and others being arrested. The images correspond to known landmarks around Sohar, the first major city people enter in the sultanate after coming over the border from the neighbouring United Arab Emirates.

Similar scattered protests on Sunday brought another mass police presence, activists said online. That demonstration was acknowledged by Oman's Labor Ministry in a tweet, which said it was aware of people gathering there to try to find new job vacancies.

3 Wuhan virology lab staff
ill before Covid disclosed

Undisclosed US intelligence may renew calls for probe into origins of virus

Beijing/Washington, May 24: Three researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology sought hospital care in November 2019, weeks before Beijing disclosed the Covid-19 pandemic, a US media report said, citing a previously undisclosed American intelligence document that could add weight to growing calls for a full scale probe of whether the Coronavirus may have escaped from China's top bio lab.

The details of the reporting go beyond a State Department fact sheet, issued during the final days of the Trump administration, which said that several researchers at the Wuhan lab, a centre for the study of Coronavirus and other pathogens, became sick in autumn 2019 “with symptoms consistent with both Covid-19 and common seasonal illness,” the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

The origins of the Covid-19 remain a widely debated topic, with some scientists and politicians maintaining that the possibility of a lab leak of the deadly virus exists. The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) is near the outbreak's known epicentre of Huanan Seafood Market in central China's Wuhan city, where the virus first emerged in late 2019 and became a pandemic.

Former US president Donald Trump was among those who supported the theory that the virus might have escaped from a bio lab in China.

“Three researchers from China's Wuhan Institute of Virology became sick enough in November 2019 that they sought hospital care,” the paper said.

The disclosure of the number of Chinese researchers, the timing of their illnesses and their hospital visits come on the eve of a meeting of the World Health Organisation's decision-making body, which is expected to discuss the next phase of an investigation into Covid-19's origins.

The paper said that current and former officials familiar with the intelligence about the lab researchers expressed differing views about the strength of the supporting evidence, with one person saying it was provided by an international partner and was potentially significant but still in need of further investigation and additional corroboration.

China, however, denied the WSJ report on Monday, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian saying the WIV released a statement on March 23 that made it clear that there were zero Covid-19 infections at the institute. —PTI



NHS staff directs public as they arrive by car to an NHS Test and Trace mobile Coronavirus testing unit in Hayes, Hillingdon in west London on Monday. Additional Covid testing was set to begin on May 24 in west London boroughs, including Hillingdon, after the identification of the variant first identified in India.

— AFP

EU takes on Astra for its
failure to give vax on time

Brussels, May 24: At loggerheads for months with the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company it accuses of failing to deliver the promised number of Covid-19 vaccine doses, the European Union's executive branch will try to persuade a Brussels court on Wednesday that the case is urgent enough to justify ordering the company to make an immediate delivery of the missing shots.

AstraZeneca's contract signed with the Commission on behalf of EU member states foresaw an initial 300 million doses for distribution among all 27 countries, with an option for a further 100 million. The doses were expected to be delivered throughout 2021. But only 30 million were sent during the first quarter.

Deliveries have increased slightly since then but, according to the

Commission, the company is set to provide only 70 million doses in the second quarter. It had promised 180 million.

While the EU insists AstraZeneca has breached its contractual obligations, the company says it has fully complied with the agreement, arguing that vaccines are difficult to manufacture and it made its best effort to deliver on time. —AP

INDIAN HIGH
COMMISSION SAYS
OFFICIAL'S WIFE
TESTED -VE IN PAK

Islamabad, May 24: The Indian High Commission in Islamabad on Monday clarified that an official's spouse, who was reported by the Pakistani media to have been tested positive for the Coronavirus, has tested “negative” for Covid on RT-PCR conducted on arrival here and in Lahore.

“In response to media reports that the spouse of an official of the Indian High Commission tested positive for Covid on RAT, it is clarified that said individual has tested ‘Negative’ for Covid on RT-PCR, conducted on arrival in Islamabad. RT-PCR in Lahore, as per reports, was also ‘Negative’, the Indian High Commission tweeted.

Earlier, Pakistan asked 12 officials of the Indian High Commission (IHC) in Islamabad to quarantine, along with their family members and drivers, after one of them reportedly tested positive for the Coronavirus since their arrival from India last week, the Foreign Office said.

A group of 12 officials and their family members crossed over to Pakistan through the Wagah Border on May 22, Foreign Office Spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri said on Sunday. —PTI

BRAZIL CONFIRMS
1ST CASE OF STRAIN
FOUND IN INDIA

Brasilia (Brazil), May 24: Brazil's health minister said that the government is concerned about the Coronavirus variant first identified in India after the first cases of it were confirmed in the South American country.

Marcelo Queiroga denied, however, that there was community transmission of the variant, which was first identified in Brazil in the northeastern state of Maranhao, where 100 people are being monitored. A case was also confirmed Saturday in Ceara state. —AP

UK confident to lift
virus curbs by June

London, May 24: British health officials expressed optimism on Sunday that the Coronavirus restrictions remaining in England can be lifted in June after an official study found that the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines offer effective protection against the variant first identified in India.

Authorities in Britain on have expressed concern in recent weeks that increasing cases of the Indian variant could jeopardise the UK's so-far successful plan to reopen its economy. More than 2,880 cases of the Indian variant have

been recorded in England, figures show.

The government has said the variant appears to be more transmissible, but there was still uncertainty about how concerning this was. Jenny Harries, chief executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said officials in England and are on track to proceed with the final stage of unlocking the country from June 21 if the public remains cautious. —AP

Trained dogs could sniff out Covid: Study

London, May 24: People who are infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19 have a distinct odour that can be detected by trained dogs with a high degree of accuracy, according to new research in the UK.

In what has been described as the most complete study of its kind to date, combining dog trial, odour analysis and modelling, the London School of

Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) led collaborative research with the charity Medical Detection Dogs and Durham University to find that specially trained dogs can rapidly and non-invasively detect the disease with up to 94.3 per cent sensitivity and up to 92 per cent specificity.

The dogs were able to detect odour from individuals who were asymptomatic, as well as those

with two different strains of Covid-19, and with both high and low viral loads, the study released last week said.

With the threat of new variants entering the country, the need for testing means we face potential continued disruption for some time to come. That's where these amazing dogs could play a role, said Professor James Logan, Head of the

Department of Disease Control at LSHTM, who led the project.

“Further research is needed to see if the dogs can replicate these results in a real-world setting, but these findings are hugely encouraging. The advantage of using this method is being able to detect Covid-19 with incredible speed and good accuracy among large groups of people, even in asymptomatic cases,” he said.

The dogs were trained by the team at Medical Detection Dogs to identify Covid using body odour samples which were sent to the research team by members of the public and National Health Service (NHS) staff. The team at LSHTM collected and processed a total of 3,758 samples and chose 325 positive and 675 negative samples for testing. —PTI

Merkel, Macron
favour WHO
improvement

Geneva, May 24: French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday were among leaders rallying around efforts to strengthen the World Health Organisation and the world's ability to prepare for and defend against pandemics.

It came as the UN health agency opened its annual assembly, with a draft resolution in the works that acknowledges missteps in the response to Covid-19.

The sweeping proposal would seek to boost pandemic response, stabilise WHO's funding and ensure greater access to health care including to vaccines, tests and treatments linked to the Coronavirus.

The European Union and Vanuatu were behind the resolution, which was to be considered during the eight-day assembly.

It would create a working group on strengthening WHO's readiness and response to health emergencies.

We have to have institutions that are up to the task, that meet our ambitions, Macron said by video during the mostly virtual meeting. WHO, he said, must be robust and

COVID SHADOW
HANGS OVER
W.H.O. MEETING

Geneva, May 24: Calls for World Health Organisation reform and steps to avert future pandemics feature high on the agenda as the UN agency kicks off its annual member states' meeting on Monday.

With the Covid-19 crisis still raging and wealthy nations continuing to hoard most doses of life-saving vaccines, the WHO's main decision-making body has plenty to discuss.

The 74th World Health Assembly (WHA) begins Monday with statements from national leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, health ministers and other high-level representatives of the WHO's 194 member states. —AFP

flexible in times of emergency and crisis. And it must be completely transparent to make sure that people trust the organisation. —AP

Suu Kyi appears for
first time in court

Bangkok, May 24: Myanmar's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, appeared in court in person on Monday for the first time since the military arrested her when it seized power on February 1. One of her lawyers, Min Min Soe, said over phone that Suu Kyi was able to meet with her defence team for about 30 minutes before the hearing began at a special court set up inside the city council building in Naypyitaw, the capital.

The lawyers also met with Win Myint, who was president of the government Suu Kyi led as state counsellor and faces some of the same charges. Suu Kyi's only previous court appearances have been by video link and she had not



Aung San Suu Kyi

been allowed to meet in person with any of her lawyers.

Min Min Soe said Suu Kyi wanted to tell Myanmar's people that her National League for Democracy party will stand by them. She said that “since the NLD was founded for the people, the NLD will exist as long as the people exist,” Min Min Soe said after the hearing. —AP

BBC to probe into
Diana interview

London, May 24: The BBC said on Monday it will review its editorial policies and governance after an independent report found one of its journalists used deception to secure a landmark interview with Princess Diana.

The British broadcaster's board said that the internal probe would be conducted by a group of non-executive directors led by Nick Serota, its senior independent director, and report back by September.

“We must not just assume that mistakes of the past cannot be repeated to day — we must make sure that this is the case,” the board of governors said in a lengthy statement.

“We think it is right that we review the effective-



Princess Diana

ness of the BBC's editorial policies and governance in detail,” it added.

An investigation by retired judge John Dyson concluded last Thursday that journalist Martin Bashir had tricked Diana's brother Charles Spencer into helping to arrange the 1995 interview, in which she spoke about her troubled marriage. —AFP

BIZ | ON HOLD

Officials rules out quake as a cause, investigation to continue

‘Shaking building’ puts traders in tizzy

Shenzhen, China, May 24: Business owners face uncertain prospects after being shut out of a skyscraper in southern China that started to shake unexpectedly last week and sent passersby running in panic.

The 300-metre (1,000-foot) SEG Plaza in the city of Shenzhen near Hong Kong began shaking last Tuesday, prompting the evacuation of the occupants and causing pedestrians to flee for safety.

Emergency management officials quickly ruled out a quake as the cause of the

wobble in the tech hub's Futian district, and a probe is ongoing into the cause.

One business owner said that he was on the fifty-third floor last week when the building started swaying. “I saw something moved, (and) when I got up I saw everything moved,” said Arman Hasanpour, an Iranian businessman based in the building.

“After that we came out very fast.” He said there has been ‘a few shakes’ since the initial wobbling of the building, which was built in 2000. “Now, we

don't know how to make business and how to cope with it... everything is not clear.” The SEG Building on Monday was sealed off with red tape covering the entrances.

But a handful of business owners from the electronics market on the ground floor were rolling trolleys packed with taped-up goods out of the shuttered tower.

Across the road, an electronics trader surnamed Wang said that he had heard people complain before that the skyscraper had swayed. —AFP



People walk past the temporarily closed of 300-metre (1,000-ft.) SEG Plaza (C) in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, in Guangdong province on Monday. —AFP

KONKAN RAILWAY CORPORATION LTD.
(A Government of India Undertaking)

E-Tender Notice No : CO-M-L206-4-E42550-TN dated 25/05/2021

Konkan Railway Corporation Limited invites open tender electronically through website www.ireps.gov.in for the following works : General Upkeep, Maintenance, Services including provision of subsidized meals at Ratnagiri Running room on Contract basis for a period of Two years. Estimated Cost: ₹ 2.14 Crore exclusive of GST. EMD: Nil. Last Date & Time of Submitting Tender in Website : 17/06/2021 up to 15:00 Hrs. Date & Time of Opening of Tender: 15.30 hrs. 17/06/2021. Other details may be viewed on the website www.ireps.gov.in

THE TAMILNADU HANDLOOM WEAVERS' CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.,
Co-optex Head Office, "Balasundaram Buildings",
350, Pantheon Road, Egmore Chennai- 600 008.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER-CORRIGENDUM

The last date for submission of the tender published in Deccan Chronicle on 12.05.2021 is extended as follows

- Name of the Work and Tender Ref. No : Supply of Manpower to Co-optex in TamilNadu on Annual rate Contract Basis.
- Last date and time for Submission of Tender : Package 1 to 4 Up to 3.00 P.M on 07.06.2021
Package 5 to 8 Up to 3.00 P.M on 09.06.2021
- The Tender document can be downloaded at free of cost from the website www.cooptex.gov.in / cooptex-corporate.com / www.intenders.gov.in
The other Terms and Conditions are unchanged.
DIPR/1610/TENDER/2021 Chief General Manager

DECCAN Chronicle

25 MAY 2021

CBSE's Class 12 exams: Choose dates prudently

The consensus among states consulted about the conduct of CBSE's Class 12 examination for the academic year 2020-21 appears to be in favour of the board's proposal for a shortened format. Facing a very tricky decision on holding the qualifying exam for higher studies in the time of the pandemic, the Centre has gone in for an exhaustive consultation process. Opinion largely favours the conduct of the exams since they are crucial in defining what courses students will take as they graduate to college. Imposing the loss of a whole year on lakhs of school-leaving students is an inconceivable penalty though students and parents may nurse different opinions. The focus has to be on the greater good.

Any risk versus benefit calculation would show that to hold the exam sometime after the second wave of the Coronavirus is forecast to dip, say in August-September, would be beneficial though it will not come without risks. The Class 12 exam is a life-defining crossroads and requires detailed planning in view of the safety of the students and their exam supervisors. States insisting on students as well supervisory staff being vaccinated is a fair call and must be heeded in the current circumstances. There are ethical boundaries to cross in vaccinating the young but since a majority of those taking the exam are likely to be as old as 17, vaccinating them will help protect them against any severe forms of the disease.

The shorter format wherein tests in one language and three elective major subjects will be spread over 45 days and held in their own schools, with marks for other subjects to be judged proportionally, seems the better option as it would also limit the exposure of students. The trickiest part would, however, be in choosing the timing of the exams. The proposition would work better the later the exams are held in the year and the new college term can be adjusted to begin accordingly, perhaps at the start of 2022. The idea of holding the exams in the same schools that they used to go to when in-person classes were held last is worth considering because the familiarity of the environment might help assuage the fears of exams in the time of the pandemic.

All this, of course, assumes that a consensus would emerge among the states on holding the Class 12 board exams and that any student suffering from Covid-19 at that time would get another opportunity. The cancellation of Class 10 exams was a prudent decision but one that was relatively easy to take. To keep politics out of the decision making will also be challenging and it will still be the Centre's call on the feasibility of holding the exams in the safest manner possible with adequate precautions against such congregations of students becoming super spreader events. We need no reminder that the current dominant virus strain in India is affecting a greater proportion of young people and it is understandable if an element of fear should enter the decision-making process. It is not only their studies and careers that are at risk but their lives.

Act against those thrashing docs

Since Covid-19 gripped the world last year and caused devastation worldwide, including in India, our doctors — who practise allopathic medicine, the core of scientifically validated therapeutics — and nurses have been in the forefront of the war against the pandemic. Much more than three lakh people may have died in India if it weren't for their dedication. And yet yoga teacher Ramdev thought it fit to traduce allopathy and by extension its practitioners, more than a thousand of whom died fighting the virus. He called allopathy "a stupid science", a "tamasha" (farce). In doing so, he mocked the national effort to fight the disease, which continues to claim thousands of victims daily. Perhaps the "Baba" is miffed that Coronil, made by the drug manufacturing units of his vast commercial empire, didn't pass the test of science and the false claims around it were exposed.

The Indian Medical Association has demanded action against Ramdev under the law for demoralising the medical community and weakening the national fightback against the disease. Options can be considered under the Epidemiology Act or Disaster Management Act. Is the government up to it? While promoting the ancient Indian discipline of ayurveda, the government regrettably ended up promoting quacks and superstition peddlers hiding behind the rubric "Hindu civilisation". It may not be easy for it to move against those publicly downgrading science.

It may be recalled that Bhopal BJP MP Pragma Thakur, once allegedly associated with a bomb blast in a minority community locality and for embarrassing the government by praising Mahatma Gandhi's assassin, has claimed she is safe from Covid as she drinks cow urine, which she touted as a cure. As a public servant, she sought to discount modern medicine and science, and backed a wholly untested belief among some Hindus about the medicinal virtues of cow urine — including for Covid — since the cow is an animal they revere. Does the Centre, the BJP or the Madhya Pradesh government propose to act against her?

The MP government, however, appears energetic about booking former CM Kamal Nath for making a reference to the "Indian" variant of Covid, now a subject of discussion in the global scientific community, including here. Mr Nath is accused of weakening the national effort in the anti-Covid fight.

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Kochi: No. 3-B, 3rd Floor, DD TRADE TOWER, Kaloor-Kadavanthara Road, Ernakulam, Ph: 0484-4039408
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Subhani



Israel & Gaza: Use truce to find a lasting solution



Sunanda K. Datta-Ray
Reflections

America's President Joe Biden did well to stress that while the United States remains committed to Israel's security, only the promised two-state formula can really solve the Arab-Israeli conflict in the long run. That might atone to some extent for what Arabs call the "Nakba", or literally "disaster", in which the Zionists destroyed over 600 Palestinian villages and forced their inhabitants into exile.

Nothing is to be gained by fawning on Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi tends to do. History, once written, cannot be erased, as I told the last Arab mayor of Jerusalem when he claimed that Israel was doomed because even the Crusaders' kingdom did not last more than 80 years. In fact, Mr Biden would have done even better to emphasise that there can be no more effective guarantee of Israel's security than a sovereign Palestinian state as envisaged in the 1991 Madrid Conference.

The ceasefire between Israel and the radical Hamas movement, which rules the Gaza Strip, ended 11 days of bitter fighting that killed about 250 people, mostly Palestinian civilians. Although both adversaries accomplished their immediate political goals, the fragile peace can collapse any moment. It is in their interest, therefore, as well as of the entire Middle Eastern region and the world at large to take advantage of this respite from violence to lay the foundations of a lasting settlement.

Such plain-speaking would certainly have denied the US President the thanks that Mr

Netanyahu tweeted to some 25 governments, but would have ensured some respect for American diplomacy. India is not of course among the 25 recipients, but it would be a mistake to gloat over the seemingly fulsome thanks of Israeli and Palestinian diplomats for the speech by India's United Nations representative, T.S. Tirumurti, at the Security Council debate.

All that their praise meant was that South Block once again passed off opportunism as diplomacy, a skill India's leaders have raised to an art form during the long years of nonalignment, which the Americans called "neutrality". New Delhi was at pains then to claim equidistance from Washington and Moscow.

Not that India, with limited resources and the geopolitical handicap of location, could have taken a lead role even if it had wanted to. An impoverished and grossly overpopulated Third World nation at odds with its western and northern neighbours, struggling desperately to battle the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, should not even pretend to global authority. Even before events reduced his stature, Mr Modi was no Jawaharlal Nehru to be listened to when he spoke on global matters. Nothing in his background or career indicated any grasp of international affairs. Moreover, his bombastic style — demanding applause for saving "humanity from a big disaster by containing the coronavirus effectively" — hardly commands respect.

India's rulers have always taken an ad hoc attitude to Israel. Only Jawaharlal Nehru's disgust with Egypt's King Farouk, then heading the Arab League, prompted

him to recognise Israel almost as tit for tat. Morarji Desai probably wanted to develop closer ties but dared not. P.V. Narasimha Rao finally did so under American influence. India wanted Israeli weapons but would not admit it. Israeli diplomats contemptuously attributed India's pro-Arab stance to the Muslim vote at home.

Not that American policy was or is any more principled. When President Harry S. Truman reneged on Franklin D. Roosevelt's commitment to the Arabs, his frank excuse was that his supporters included influential American Jews who were anxious for the success of the Zionist state. He did not have to placate a similar Palestinian lobby.

Such calculations also operate in West Asia. In the lead-up to Hamas' rocket barrage, Prime Minister Netanyahu pursued a series of flagrantly reckless policies. Many believe that he deliberately provoked Hamas in order to prevent his domestic opponents from uniting against him and establishing a governing coalition. Israel has had four elections in the last two years, and if the Prime Minister fails to hold on to power, he might have to face corruption charges and a prison term. Yet, the war that he unleashed was more of a gift to Hamas than he bargained for. Hamas, too, needed a crisis to compensate for its declining reputation in the Gaza Strip, alienation from the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas, and the political confinement

A mere ceasefire cannot address deep-seated grievances that are rooted in history. Israel's withdrawal to the borders that it enjoyed in 1967 and independence for the West Bank and Gaza, might achieve that.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

LETTERS

TENDER APOLOGY

The CM has requested all the TN citizens to follow the covid directives issued to control it and he has specially emphasised the need for wearing face masks by all to escape from contagion by droplets from sneezing, coughing etc. The CM's realisation of the importance of the face mask as the first and foremost tool to check and put the virus under control is welcome. But he should also remember the fact that the opposition parties under his lead ridiculed and condemned the measures like lockdown etc. when they were imposed on people by the Prime Minister last year during the same period. Every step and action taken by the Central Government to contain the pandemic was ridiculed and condemned by the TN opposition with Stalin in the forefront. CM Stalin should realise he had condemned the PM mindlessly. He should tender an apology for what he spoke about Modi.

Kooduthuraiyan, Coimbatore

REASONS TO CHEER

Finally, there is hope in the air. Stringent measures taken by various governments to fight the pandemic seem to be paying off, with most states in the country reporting a decline in average weekly fresh cases of Covid-19 infection and test-positivity rates. That's indeed reason for cheer. Covid-19 is a reality that most of us are living through across homes in India. But beyond the desperation of finding hospital beds, procuring oxygen and calling for an ambulance, there are small things that help us get through the difficult days. The role of front line workers needs to be appreciated during the crucial time. Again, over 420 doctors died in an effort to keep afloat our hopes of survival. Further, the role played by the persons holding the charge of crematoriums and burial grounds needs to be mentioned at this juncture as a superhuman effort. Last but not the least, the sentimental feelings of relatives and friends of the persons who lost their lives in the fight against Covid is monumental.

Manick. Ramani, Chennai

SHAME ON OLYMPIAN

It is a shock and a matter of shame that a two time wrestling Olympic medal winner for India (bronze at Beijing Olympics and silver at 2012 London Olympics) Sushil Kumar has been arrested for allegedly killing another wrestler Rana at Chhatrasal stadium after a brawl among friends. What a disgrace that he has stooped to such low levels without sportsmanship. It is a shame for India and Indians that a sports personality who won medals for the country and was seen wrapped in Indian tricolour flag after every victory was arrested by the police and taken with a towel covering his face. A sportsman who was a 'bride' for India has now become 'shame'. A thorough and unbiased investigation into the brawl and subsequent killing of another wrestler (Rana) is necessary to find the truth.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Aakar Patel



Why Twitter's action on BJP 'manipulation' is rattling govt

Twitter has marked tweets by Bharatiya Janata Party figures, including its spokesman Sambit Patra, as "manipulated media". The BJP leaders had publicised what it said was a Congress toolkit to defame India. But the fact checking website Alt News showed that this content that the BJP was showing was fake. The BJP said on its letterhead that the All-India Congress Committee had distributed instructions to Congress workers, volunteers and supporters to use the term "super spreader Kumbh", "not comment on Eid gatherings", "use dramatic pictures of funerals and dead bodies which is already being done by the foreign media". This turned out to be bogus and even the letterhead was forged, as Alt News quickly showed.

Twitter believed the fact-checking website, which is based in Ahmedabad, more than it did the Government of India, and branded the content fake. The BJP is upset and has sent another threatening note to Twitter saying that it should remove the "manipulated media" tag because the govern-

ment was investigating the matter. The problem of course is that the government first defamed the Congress, then it got caught peddling a lie and now it claims it is checking its own claim — amplified by all its ministers through their official accounts — to see if it is true. That is why a small news operation has more credibility today than the government of the Republic of India.

Twitter has a transparency centre where it puts up the data on take-down and information requests. These are legal notices from the Government of India asking Twitter to either block an account, take down some content which the government does not like or reveal the identity of a particular user.

From January 2012 to June 2014, it rarely received requests from the Indian government except for one or two. In the second half of 2016 it received 151 requests. This doubled to 306 between January and June 2018. It doubled again to 662 between July and December 2019. Between January and June 2020, the latest period for which the data is available, the Narendra Modi

government sent 2,367 requests, including those to reveal identities, those it wanted blocked and those whose content it did not like and wanted to be taken down.

The question is why is the government now sending thousands of "requests" to Twitter to comply? The answer is that the social media is reflecting a reality that the BJP does not want communicated. More people are saying things on the social media that are upsetting the government.

One way to deal with this would be to ignore it, which is what the various governments of India did in the past, which is why the number of takedown notices Twitter received were few. But if a government is sensitive to what is said about it, and sensitive to such an extent that it finds any criticism intolerable, then it will do what is going on in the India social media today.

Twitter is slightly different from Facebook and pretends to have more independence and pretends to be a guardian of free speech. Facebook is just a cutthroat corporate company that will go to bed

with authoritarian governments and do whatever they want in terms of blocking users and content and promoting the government's material even if it incites violence. Twitter says that it stands for freedom of its users, that it is "committed to the open exchange of information", and that it is why it publishes this transparency report from which the data above has been taken.

India is not the only democracy which makes such requests of Twitter. In the United States, the Secret Service which protects the President is obliged to assess every threat made against the President even if these are made casually. But this is not censorship of views. What is happening in India is that criticism of the government is not being allowed. And the deliberate vilification of the Opposition by the government is being pushed, and when it is caught it resists accountability.

India is going the way of China, where the social media has to be in full compliance with the government's desire to control the messaging and to carry out mass sur-

veillance. It is nobody's case and certainly not mine that India was ever some haven of free speech before the Narendra Modi government. It was not. Few democracies have the full force of government backing the blocking of free speech of citizens as is the case in India. We have jail terms for free speech under laws like sedition, criminal defamation, criminal contempt and laws which criminalise things communicated in words or even without words. This has always been the case.

But the criticism of the government was not intolerable as it has become now. This government insists on only one narrative and is willing and enthusiastic about stopping the other side from expressing itself. And it is also, as the toolkit fiasco shows, willing to fabricate material to invalidate what anyone else says. This is what the Emergency must have been like, and those who lived through it might not be feeling very different nowadays.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,651.90	0.22
Nifty 50	15,197.70	0.15
S&P 500*	4,199.50	1.05
Dollar (₹)	72.96	-0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.14	0.37
Euro (₹)	89.08	-0.02
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,015.95	0.19
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.14	2.56
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.611	-0.021

* As of 8:30 PM IST

FDI jumps 19% to \$59.64 bn in 2020-21: Govt

Foreign direct investments (FDI) into the country grew 19 per cent to \$59.64 billion during 2020-21, the commerce and industry ministry said. Total FDI, including equity, re-invested earnings and capital, rose 10 per cent to the "highest ever" of \$81.72 billion during 2020-21 against \$74.39 billion in 2019-20. "FDI equity inflow grew by 19 per cent in 2020-21 (\$59.64 billion), compared to 2019-20 (\$49.98 billion)."

Jaypee CoC defers voting, may consider NBCC bid



Jaypee Infratech's financial creditors deferred the voting process on Suraksha Group's offer to acquire the realty firm and will decide later this week whether bids of Suraksha group as well as NBCC should be considered again. The Committee of Creditors on Monday decided to conduct voting on May 27-28 on whether offers from both the contenders— Suraksha group and NBCC—should be allowed.

Bank credit up 6.02%; deposits grow 9.87%

Bank credit grew by 6.02 per cent to Rs 108.69 lakh crore and deposits increased by 9.87 per cent to Rs 152.17 lakh crore in the fortnight ended May 7, 2021, RBI data showed. In the fortnight ended May 8, 2020, bank advances stood at Rs 102.52 lakh crore and deposits at Rs 138.50 lakh crore, according to RBI's Scheduled Banks' Statement of Position in India as on May 07, 2021, released on Monday.

MFIs credit costs may be in 3-6% range in FY22

With their collection efficiency getting impacted amid disruptions caused by the Covid second wave, microfinance institutions (MFIs) may see their credit cost in the 3-6 per cent range in the current fiscal, India Ratings and Research said. It said collections of micro lenders and small finance banks are likely to have declined 3-5 per cent MoM in April 2021 and additional 5-7 per cent in May 2021 (first fortnight of the month).



■Apex court may direct plea to RBI SC unlikely to grant another moratorium

KFALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Supreme Court on Monday indicated that it would not be able to grant relief in terms of an interest-free loan moratorium for another period of six months or till the Covid-19 situation improves. The apex court observed that this is a policy decision and the court cannot decide to pass such directions. The court said that a representation can be allowed to be made to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The court will hear the matter again on June 11.

In the light of the Covid second wave and the consequent lockdowns, a plea has been filed afresh by Advocate Vishal Tiwari before the Supreme Court this month seeking directions for relief to borrowers in the form of a fresh loan moratorium on term loans. Tiwari urged the court to direct that no bank or financial institution would take action for auction in respect of any property of any citizen or party or any corporate for a period of six months for non-payment of loans.

The petition stated that the central government and its concerned ministries along with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have failed to bring in any sound relief in this present situation for stressed sectors and individuals for whom sustenance and existence have become difficult.



A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and M. R. Shah made an observation while waiting for the video connection of Advocate Tiwari to be established.

Justice Bhushan asked Justice Shah, "Have you seen the prayers, brother?" To this, Justice Shah said, "Yes. We cannot grant it. A representation can be allowed to be made to the RBI."

The court then deferred the hearing to June 11.

In a statement, Harsh Vardhan Patodia, president, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (Credai), appreciated the Supreme Court's stance.

"We appreciate the view of Hon'ble Supreme Court for guiding the matter of extension of loan moratorium for a period of six months this year to the Reserve Bank of India. In line with the representation made to the apex court, we feel due relief for borrowers is an absolute necessity considering the prolonged

impact of the second wave of the pandemic, and consequent financial stress borne by individuals and businesses due to loss of employment and business opportunities. With the real estate sector being more severely impacted in 2021 as compared to 2020, as the apex industry body, Credai has already made separate representations to RBI and the Government of India on the matter."

The petition said, "No such monetary relief and packages has been declared by the sovereign in this stressed time and people are under tremendous pressure to maintain the EMIs and are always under the threat of accounts being declared NPA. With no salary, revenue for individuals it has turned out to be a hopeless situation for individuals. The RBI on 6-5-2021 has issued a circular for resolution plan 2.0, which cannot be said to be adequate relief to all in the present circumstances..."

POSTPAID-PREPAID SWITCH THROUGH OTP ON THE CARDS

New Delhi, May 24: Mobile phone subscribers may soon be allowed to switch from a postpaid connection to prepaid and vice versa by using an OTP-based authentication and without a need to change SIM card, according to an official DoT note.

Industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) has proposed the mechanism to the Department of Telecom (DoT) and the DoT has asked telecom operators to carry out proof of concept (PoC) on the same.

The final decision on allowing the change in the account will depend on the outcome of PoC, according to the DoT note.

"The PoC for conversion from prepaid to postpaid and vice versa may be carried out by the telecom service providers as per the procedure...The decision regarding implementation of the procedure shall be taken after the assessment of the outcome of the PoC," DoT ADG Suresh Kumar said in a May 21 note.

The COAI, whose members include Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea, had requested the department on April 9 for permission to allow mobile customers to migrate from prepaid to postpaid and vice versa without undertaking fresh KYC procedure and by using OTP (one-time password) based authentication.

—PTI

It's a \$3 trillion stock market now

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 24



Indian stock market's capitalisation crossed the \$3 trillion mark for the first time on Monday on a closing basis, with the help of a big surge in mid-cap and small-cap companies' stock prices along with the rally in the shares of large companies.

Since market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty-50 peaked in February post-the Union Budget, the broader market has seen even a bigger rally than large-caps from the pandemic lows and this helped the market cap to rise to over \$3 trillion mark. The market-cap had briefly crossed the \$3-trillion mark on Friday in intraday trade.

The market capitalisation of the BSE, which has the largest number of listed companies on board, stood at Rs 218,94,202.30 lakh crore or \$3,00,085.00 lakh crore at Monday's USD-INR exchange rate of around Rs 72.96. One lakh crore is

equivalent to 1 trillion.

With a \$3-trillion market cap, the BSE is now among the top seven stock exchanges in the world. Only the New York Stock Exchange, Nasdaq, Shanghai Stock Exchange, Hong Kong Stock Exchange, Euronext and London Stock Exchange are now ahead of the BSE in terms of m-cap.

Though the benchmark Sensex reached an all-time high of 52,516.76 points on February 16 due to the rally in the large-cap companies, it is the broader market that has taken the BSE's market cap to \$3 trillion.

From the April lows, the

BSE Mid-cap Index has rallied 103.48 per cent and the BSE Small-cap index 141.53 per cent compared to the 71.67 per cent rally in the Sensex. This clearly shows the broader market rally since March 2021 was responsible for the big surge in the stock market capitalisation.

On Monday too the broader market outperformed with BSE Mid-cap up 0.86 per cent and BSE Small-cap 0.70 per cent compared to the Sensex gaining 0.22 per cent.

A total of 4,722 companies are listed on the BSE and a majority of them fall in the mid-cap and small-cap categories.

"Market capitalization of equities of listed companies on BSE reached \$3 trillion for the first time ever," said Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD and CEO, BSE.

The market's capitalisation had hit \$2.5 trillion on December 16, 2020. It took only 159 days for the market to gain \$500 billion to touched \$3 trillion in valuation on Monday.

Zeta raises \$250 mn from SoftBank Vision

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

Banking software platform Zeta on Monday announced it has raised \$250 million in funding, led by Japan's SoftBank, valuing the firm at \$1.45 billion. This is one of the largest single investments in a banking tech startup globally.

Zeta, founded by serial entrepreneur Bhavin Turakhia and Ramki Gaddipati was last valued

at \$300 million when it raised \$60 million from Sodexo—also Zeta's largest customer currently.

Zeta is the 14th company this year to cross the \$1 billion valuation mark after Meesho, Cred, Pharmeasy, ShareChat, Moglix and others. The proceeds of this funding round will be used to accelerate Zeta's growth in the United States, Europe and India, including scaling its operations, team, and platform to meet the demands of its

expanding customer base.

Zeta counts amongst its customers over 10 Banks and 25 fintechs, across eight countries, including Sodexo, HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Yes Bank, RBL Bank, SBM Bank India and others.

A recent Aite Group study found 61 per cent financial institution executives believe investment in newer technologies will improve their customer experience.

RBI issues guidelines on co-op bank amalgamation

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 24

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said that it would consider the amalgamation of district central co-operative banks (DCCBs) with state cooperative banks (StCBs) subject to various conditions, including that a proposal should be made by the state government concerned. The guidelines will also apply for amalgamation of one or more DCCBs in a state with the StCB or amalgamation of one DCCB with another.

The Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, 2020 has been notified for the StCBs and DCCBs with effect from April 1, 2021. Amalgamation of such banks needs to be sanctioned by the Reserve Bank of India.

The RBI said it would consider proposals for amalgamation when the state government makes a proposal to amalgamate one or more DCCB/s in the state with the StCB after conducting a

detailed study of the legal framework along with additional capital infusion strategy, assurance regarding financial support, if required, projected business model with clear profitability and proposed governance model for the amalgamated bank. Similarly, it would also consider a proposal when the scheme of amalgamation is approved by the requisite majority of shareholders or when such proposal of the state government has been examined and recommended by the Nabard.

"The proposal for amalgamation of DCCBs with the StCB will be examined by the Reserve Bank in consultation with Nabard and the sanction/ approval will be a two-stage process. In the first stage, an 'in-principle' approval will be accorded subject to fulfilment of certain conditions, following which the processes for amalgamation may be initiated by all concerned. After completion of the above

processes, Nabard and Reserve Bank may be approached for final approval along with a compliance report. To enable the Reserve Bank to consider the application for sanction, the state government shall submit the information and documents specified to the concerned regional office of Reserve Bank and Nabard," said the central bank said.

Detailing the regulatory criteria, the RBI said that the financial parameters of the amalgamated entity based on notional consolidated latest audited financial statements should be robust. It should have its capital to risky asset ratio (CRAR) above the prescribed regulatory minimum, the gross non-performing assets below 7 per cent and net NPA below 5 per cent and availability of adequate liquid assets. Post-amalgamation, it should be a profit making and financially viable entity on a sustained basis, said the apex bank.

Roche Antibody Cocktail launched at ₹59,750/dose

New Delhi, May 24: Drug majors Roche India and Cipla on Monday announced launch of Roche's Antibody Cocktail in India priced at Rs 59,750 per dose for the treatment of mild to moderate Covid-19 in patients who are at high risk.

The first batch of the Antibody Cocktail (Casirivimab and Imdevimab) is now available in India while a second batch will be made available by mid-June. In total they can potentially benefit 2,00,000 patients as each of the 1,00,000 packs that will be available in India offers treatment for two patients," Cipla and Roche said in a joint statement.

Cipla will distribute the product, it added. The price for each patient dose [a combined dose of 1,200 mg (600 mg of Casirivimab and 600 mg of Imdevimab)] will be Rs 59,750 inclusive of all taxes. The maximum retail price for the multi dose pack (each pack can treat two patients) is Rs 1,19,500, inclusive of all taxes.

As per the statement, the drug will be available through leading hospitals

and Covid treatment centers.

The Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation had recently provided an emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the Antibody Cocktail (Casirivimab and Imdevimab) in India. It has also received a EUA in the US and several EU countries.

We are optimistic that the availability of Antibody Cocktail in India can help in minimising hospitalisation...play a key role in treatment of high risk patients before their condition worsens, said V. Simpson Emmanuel, MD and CEO, Roche Pharma India. Umang Vohra, MD and Global CEO of Cipla said we look forward to leveraging our solid marketing and distribution strengths in India to provide broader, equitable access to this innovative treatment option in the country.

The cocktail is to be administered for the treatment of mild to moderate Covid in adults and children (above 12 years weighing at least 40 kg) who are confirmed to be infected with Sars-Cov2.

—PTI

GUPTA'S LIBERTY STEEL TO SELL UK PLANT TO PAY BACK DEBT

ADITI KHANNA LONDON, MAY 24

Liberty Steel, the company led by British Indian businessman Sanjeev Gupta, on Monday announced very constructive and productive meetings as part of its ongoing restructuring plans, which will result in the sale of its Stocksbridge plant in south-east England to help pay back lender Credit Suisse.

Gupta, who heads the wider Gupta Family Group (GFG) Alliance, and his newly formed Restructuring and Transformation Committee held advanced discussions with Credit Suisse Asset Management (CS) in Dubai over the weekend to reach a formal standstill agreement on its Liberty Primary Metals Australia business while refinancing is completed that will repay Credit Suisse out in full.

The investment bank has, meanwhile, agreed to pause court proceedings against Gupta's empire while the sale of Stocksbridge is conducted.

Both parties also made significant progress in agreeing a framework to resolve GFG Alliance's remaining exposure with CS, Liberty Steel, the UK's third largest steel maker, said.

This work includes identifying a positive solution which will allow Liberty to complete the restructuring and refinancing of its UK operations, protecting thousands of jobs and supporting the fulfilment of its vision to be a leader in the decarbonisation of the UK steel industry, it added.

A formal sale process for the aerospace and special alloys steel business at Stocksbridge and its downstream plants, the narrow strip mill at Brinsworth and Performance Steels at West Bromwich will be launched shortly, according to a statement by Liberty Steel.

The company has been working on a refinancing plan since its main lender Greensill Capital collapsed earlier this year. This sale will allow it to focus on developing its Rotherham plant.

—PTI

SF90i | STRADALE The hybrid car is for the masses, with no production limit set Ferrari pitches \$500,000 supercar for daily driving

HANNAH ELLIOTT MAY 24

The main thing Ferrari will tell you about the 2021 Ferrari SF90 Stradale is how much of a bargain it is.

The arithmetic requires some squinting around the edges of elitism and a healthy injection of relative logic. It goes like this: The two-door coupe is the second hybrid from Modena, Italy's crown jewel, the first being the La Ferrari of 2013. That car, which had 950 horsepower, cost more than 1 million (\$1.2 million) when it debuted, and examples today sell for \$4 million (and an additional million for the convertible version). The new SF90



Stradale, with 986 horsepower, starts at the breezy bargain basement price of \$507,300. (One fine distinction: The SF90 is a plug-in hybrid, while the LaFerrari does not plug-in.)

And while the La Ferrari was limited to 499 units sold, plus one auctioned for charity, the SF90 is a veritable car for the masses, set at all. No, see? Big

deal! Huge.

Well. A test drive of Ferrari's new hybrid across Los Angeles on May 19 did not convince me that this half-million-dollar machine spells a new era of budget-friendliness at the 81-year-old brand. But with an on-the-road dynamism born of the most advanced integration I've ever experienced with electric or conventional power, it does

convince me that the future of the brand is in good hands. Those who can afford the price tag have much to anticipate.

This car is extreme in every way, so of course that's reflected in its styling. Eat this: With 1000cv and at a dry weight of 3,461 pounds, it has a weight-to-power ratio of 1.57 kg/cv and produces 390 kg of downforce at 250 km/h-which, for the first time ever at Ferrari, puts a V8 engine, not a V12, at the most powerful and fastest of the production model range. It adds an eighth gear to the dual-clutch automatic transmission and adds 20 per cent torque over its predecessor, but the gearbox still weighs 10kg less. It

has brand-new actuation hydraulics that cut clutch times to 200 ms. (Compare that to the 488 Pista's 300 ms.)

A high-performance Lion battery provides power to all three motors and guarantees a 25 km (16 miles) range in all-electric mode, using just the front axle. Top speed is 211mph; it can go to 62mph in 2.5 seconds. The push to such great speeds feels instant; thank the electric motor gods for that.

The split nose and upturned grin of the hood, the dorsal fin on the roof, the unique placement of the rear air vents, and the big lip on the rear assist its spaceship-like speeds.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Renedy helps his state fight virus

New Delhi: Former India mid-field maestro Renedy Singh is working relentlessly to arrange oxygen cylinders and help his home state of Manipur win the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. In his prime Renedy was known for his ability to put in inch-perfect balls for the strikers inside the box. His penchant for "assisting" when the chips are down has not changed even after a decade of having last played for the Blue Tigers. "It is a difficult time for everyone. Our frontline workers have been working tirelessly. It was high time we stepped in to try and assist in any way possible," Renedy was quoted as saying by AIFF. "We have friends from different fields like doctors, police officers, IAS officers, businessmen — all of whom have joined the campaign to try and help," the former national team captain added. — PTI

BCCI to donate in Covid relief work

New Delhi: The Indian cricket board on Monday said it will distribute 2,000 oxygen concentrators of 10 litres each to various medical organisations, ramping up the country's overwhelmed healthcare infrastructure in its fight against the raging Covid-19 pandemic. The deadly second wave of the pandemic has caused unprecedented health crisis with thousands losing their lives. Last month, the national capital region emerged as the worst sufferer due to oxygen crisis, leading to fatalities in multiple hospitals. "The Board of Control for Cricket in India on Monday announced that it will contribute 10-Litre 2,000 Oxygen concentrators to boost India's efforts in overcoming the Covid-19 pandemic," the BCCI said in a release. — PTI

Former FIA prez Mosley no more

London: Max Mosley, the former president of motor sports' world governing body the FIA, has died aged 81, ex-Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone announced on Monday. Mosley became FIA president in 1993 after serving in previous administrative roles in motorsport, including within Formula One. He served three terms as president before standing down in 2009. He had been suffering from cancer. Ecclestone told the PA news agency: "Max was like family to me. We were like brothers. I am pleased in a way because he suffered for too long." — AFP

Mickelson oldest to win golf major

Kiawah Island, USA: Phil Mickelson has delivered so many thrills and spills over 30 years of pure theater that no one ever knows what he will do next. His latest act was a real stunner: A major champion at age 50. Mickelson captured his sixth major and by far the most surprising Sunday at the PGA Championship. He made two early birdies and let a cast of contenders fall too far behind to catch him in the shifting wind of Kiawah Island. He closed with a 1-over 73, building a five-shot lead and not making any critical mistakes that kept him from his place in history. — AP

Former TNTA vice president dead

Chennai: Former state tennis player and vice president of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association, V.K. Parthasarathy passed away due to an ongoing illness on Monday. He was 82-years-old. He was a South India Hardcourt Junior Singles Champion, winner of the Stanley Cup (Fr. Bertram Championships) as a University student and captain of Madras University and state teams. He had trained under the legendary T.K. Ramanathan, father of Ramanathan Krishnan and grandfather of Ramesh Krishnan along with a number of prominent players of the time. In 1961, Krishnan chose him as his doubles partner for the tour of Pakistan winning all the three doubles tournaments, including the Pakistan Nationals held in Rawalpindi.

LILLE BLOSSOM

Galtier's men pip powerhouse PSG to win French league

Paris, May 24: Lille won the Ligue 1 title on Sunday thanks to a 2-1 victory at Angers which ensured they were crowned French champions for the first time since 2011 on the final day of the season.

An early Jonathan David strike and Burak Yilmaz's penalty in first-half stoppage time ensured that Christophe Galtier's Lille finished one point ahead of second-placed Paris Saint-Germain, who won 2-0 at Brest.

Angelo Fulgini pulled one back in added time at the end of the match, but the hosts couldn't stop Lille becoming champions for the fourth time in their history.

The match was played behind closed doors due to Covid-19 restrictions but fans poured into the streets of Lille to celebrate at the final whistle.

Supporters lit flares and chanted songs in the northern city's central Place Charles de Gaulle in jubilation at a historic triumph against far wealthier opposition.

"This is exceptional. It's been a long day and a lot of pressure. To beat Paris Saint-Germain to the league title is something exceptional," a jubilant Galtier said to *Canal+*.

"The players were amazing... The credit goes to the players, they are the heroes," he added.

The title win came after another away success for Lille, who finish the season unbeaten on the road since November, and ends a three-year league winning streak for PSG.

It was fitting that it was David and Yilmaz who scored the crucial goals at Angers, as both have been key to an improbable run to the title that has also held significant pressure from Monaco.

Mauricio Pochettino's PSG will have to settle for the French Cup in a disappointing season for the mega-rich club. They lost eight times — a record since they were taken over by Qatar Sports Investments in 2011.

— AFP



Lille players celebrate after defeating Angers to claim the French top division football league title at The Raymond-Kopa Stadium in Angers, north-western France, on Sunday. — AFP

Aguero ends City career in style

Manchester (United Kingdom), May 24: Sergio Aguero signed off for Manchester City in style on Sunday, scoring twice in a 5-0 romp for the Premier League champions against Everton before lifting the trophy for the fifth time in his Etihad career.

City's record goalscorer, who is leaving the club after next week's Champions League final, hit a quickfire double after coming off the bench with 25 minutes remaining.

His efforts added to earlier strikes from Kevin De Bruyne, Gabriel Jesus and Phil Foden as City showed no sign of letting up ahead of the showpiece clash against Chelsea in Porto.

"When I came here the first title for me was the most important, for the club and for me, that Man City started to win more titles so I'm so happy because it's not easy to be 10 years at one club, for

Manchester City's record goalscorer Sergio Aguero, who is leaving the club after next week's Champions League final, hit a quickfire double after coming off the bench with 25 minutes remaining.

me it's an honour," he told Sky Sports. "Before the game I felt so strange, the sensation is not good. I prefer to think about the good moments," added the Argentine, who said he hoped to feature in the Champions League final. Manager Pep Guardiola was in tears after the final whistle in Manchester, describing Aguero as a

"special person for all of us".

"He helped me a lot," the City boss said as fans celebrated in the stands. "We cannot replace him."

'SERGIO CLOSE TO BARCELONA DEAL'

Aguero is close to agreeing a move to Barcelona that would unite him with fellow Argentine superstar Lionel Messi, according to Pep Guardiola.

"Maybe I reveal a secret," Guardiola told the BBC. "Maybe he is close to agreeing a deal for the club of my heart — for Barcelona." — AFP

Juve, AC Milan qualify for CL

Milan, May 24: Juventus qualified for the Champions League on the final day of the season on Sunday with a 4-1 win at Bologna and were joined by AC Milan who beat Atalanta 2-0.

Napoli had to settle for a Europa League spot, finishing fifth, one point behind Juventus, after a 1-1 draw at home against Hellas Verona.

A pair of Franck Kessie penalties at the end of either half ensured AC Milan finished the season second — 12 points behind city rivals Inter Milan — and return to the Champions League for the first time since the 2013-2014 season.

"We deserved the Champions League as well as second place," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli, whose side had missed the chance to seal their berth last weekend against Cagliari.

"We went through the whole championship at



Juventus' Alvaro Morata scores against Bologna on Sunday. — AFP

the top, unfortunately we had thrown away the match point last Sunday. "I'm really excited, happy, I have to thank the club because they made us work in a spectacular way." Atalanta had already

left on the bench by Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo, who opted for an attacking line-up of Paulo Dybala and Alvaro Morata flanked by Federico Chiesa and Dejan Kulusevski.

"It was a shared choice, Ronaldo was tired after the fatigue on Wednesday," said Pirlo. "He made himself available to the team but I chose to have another player named Morata play, who is not the latest arrival. I have a quality team, with many choices available."

A Morata brace along with goals from Chiesa and Adrien Rabiot prevented Juventus missing out on the elite European competition for the first time since 2012.

In Naples, Amir Rrahmani scored for Napoli after an hour against his former club, which would have been enough to secure a berth at the top table. — AFP

RAMOS OUT OF SPAIN'S SQUAD FOR EURO 2020

Madrid, May 24: Sergio Ramos was left off Spain's squad for the European Championship on Monday following a season plagued by injuries. Spain coach Luis Enrique said Ramos' lack of play recently made it difficult for the Real Madrid defender to be included in the Euro 2020 squad.

The 35-year-old Ramos missed most of the second half of the season after a series of muscle injuries and a knee problem that required surgery.

He would enter Euro 2020 with a chance to break the record for most appearances for a national team. The veteran Spain captain already holds the European record with 180 appearances. The world record of 184 is held by Egypt player Ahmed Hassan. — AP

ASIAN | BOXING

Hussamuddin gives India winning start

Dubai, May 24: India were off to a confident start at the Asian Boxing Championships with Commonwealth Games bronze-winner Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg) beating Kazakhstan's Makhmud Sabyrkhan in his opening bout to enter the quarterfinals, here on Monday.

Hussamuddin prevailed 5-0 against the 19-year-old two-time Asian youth champion.

The Indian has a real tough one next up as he will meet reigning World and Asian Games champion Mirzazibek Mirzahalilov. Mirzahalilov is the top seed in the draw and is the defending champion as well.

The score-line might suggest otherwise, but Hussamuddin was locked in a gruelling battle with the youngster.

The exchange of blows was fierce as the two boxers put up an entertaining show. The Indian, however, proved to be a better defender than the Kazakh, who relied just too heavily on counter-attacks.

On Tuesday, Olympic-bound Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Sakshi (54kg), Jasmine (57kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) will fight their respective last-8 stage bouts at the event which is



Mohammad Hussamuddin (56kg) celebrates after winning his bout on Monday.

being jointly hosted by the Boxing Federation of India (BFI) and the UAE Boxing Federation.

The continental showpiece features 150 pugilists from 17 countries this year including strong boxing nations such as Uzbekistan, Philippines and Kazakhstan.

India's best-ever show at the Asian Championship was in the 2019 edition in Bangkok where the country secured an unprecedented 13 medals including two gold, four silver and seven bronze. — PTI

KOCHI TUSKERS STILL OWE 35% MONEY TO PLAYERS

Melbourne, May 24: Former Australia batsman Brad Hodge on Monday cheekily enquired if BCCI has been able to "locate" the money that the now defunct Kochi Tuskers Kerala owed him for representing them in the 2010 edition of Indian Premier League.

The 46-year-old had played 14 games for KTK, scoring 285 runs at an average of 35.63. He was bought by Kochi Tuskers for \$425,000 at the 2010 auction.

"Players are still owed 35% of their money earned from ten years ago from the @IPL representing Kochi tuskers. Any chance @BCCI could locate that money?," Hodge tweeted.

As per Hodge's tweet, it seems that Kochi Tuskers still owe the Australian more than \$127,000.

He was reacting to a report published in the *Telegraph* about Indian women's team not receiving their share of \$550,000 ICC prize money from the BCCI.

It must be noted that Kochi Tuskers were expelled after just one season for defaulting on an annual payment of ₹55.3 crores in 2011.

Players such as Rahul Dravid, S. Sreesanth and Mahela Jayawardene had represented the franchise, which was bought for a whopping ₹1550 crore. It had finished eighth in the 10-team tournament.

KTK had failed to pay the bank guarantee per year, which led to their termination from the cash-rich league. — PTI

TEST | WORLDS

Gill says India well prepared for final

New Delhi, May 24: India opener Shubman Gill feels the team can't be better prepared for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand but underlined the importance of playing session by session in English conditions. Gill is undergoing a 14-day quarantine in Mumbai along with the rest of the squad. It will be his first tour of England with the senior team having made his debut in Australia in December last year.

He did not have the best of times in the home series against England and he is looking to make amends starting with the WTC final against New Zealand from June 18.

"We did well in Australia. We have been playing well overseas and I feel we can't be better prepared for this final. As an opener, I feel you should be able to play session by session not just in England, overseas in general," Gill told *India TV*.

"It is very important to play session by session. In England whenever there is cloud around, the ball swings more and when the sun is out, it gets easier to bat. It is important to assess those conditions as an opener."

Talking about the quarantine protocols in Covid times, he said: "It is very hard, you are in a room for 14 days there is not much to do. We are given workout schedules, we do that. We try to keep ourselves busy watching movies and spend some time on the I-pad but it is very hard," said Gill, who has played seven Tests so far. — AP



It is very important to play session by session. In England whenever there is cloud around, the ball swings more and when the sun is out, it gets easier to bat. It is important to assess those conditions as an opener. — SHUBMAN GILL Indian opener

Gill has been with the Test squad since 2019 but got his big break with the Boxing Day Test at the MCG in December.

Asked about time spent in the team and interactions with skipper Virat Kohli and opener partner Rohit Sharma, he added: "Virat *bhai* tells me to play fearlessly whenever we speak about the game. He speaks about mindset a lot, that you have to be in good frame of mind when you go out to bat and shares his experiences."

"And when I am batting with Rohit *bhai*, we usually discuss where the bowlers will bowl, what the situation is like, depending on that, when to take risk or not." — PTI

Japan opens mass vax before Games

Tokyo, May 24: Japan mobilised military doctors and nurses to give shots to elderly people in Tokyo and Osaka on Monday as the government desperately tries to accelerate its vaccination rollout and curb coronavirus infections just two months before hosting the Olympics.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is determined to hold the Olympics in Tokyo after a one-year delay and has made an ambitious pledge to finish vaccinating the country's 36 million elderly people by the end of July, despite scepticism it's possible. Worries about public safety while many Japanese remain unvaccinated have

prompted growing protests and calls for cancelling the games, set to start on July 23.

Suga's government has repeatedly expanded the area and duration of a largely voluntary request-based virus state of emergency since late April and has made its virus-fighting measures stricter. Currently, Tokyo and nine other areas that are home to 40% of the country's population are under the emergency and a further extension is deemed unavoidable.

With Covid-19 cases still high, Suga now says vaccines are key to getting infections under control. He has not made vaccinations conditional for holding the Olympics and has

TOKYO'S SUMO STADIUM IS NOW A VACCINATION CENTRE

Tokyo, May 24: Tokyo's sumo stadium was turned into a vaccination center on Monday with the aim of accelerating an inoculation program that has lagged behind other developed countries.

Unlike normal inoculation venues, those who got vaccinated at the stadium get to sit in the spectator stands and watch videos of sumo tournaments shown on screen for 15 minutes while healthcare providers observe them for any immediate reactions. At the exit, people who got vaccinated can try a lottery which gives them a wide variety of sumo-themed souvenirs from KitKat chocolates. — AP

arranged for Pfizer to donate its vaccine for athletes through the International Olympic Committee, while trying to speed up Japan's inocu-

lation drive as anti-Olympic sentiment grows.

Suga, speaking to reporters after a brief visit to the Tokyo centre, said accelerating the vac-

cine rollout is an unprecedented challenge.

"We will do whatever it takes to accomplish the project so that the people can get vaccinated and return to their ordinary daily lives as soon as possible," he said.

At the two centres, staffed by about 280 military medical staff and 200 civilian nurses, the aim is to inoculate up to 10,000 people per day in Tokyo and 5,000 per day in Osaka for the next three months.

In hardest-hit Osaka, where hospitals are overflowing, with tens of thousands of people becoming sicker or even dying at home, dozens began lining up before the inoculation centre opened early Monday. — AP

Regd. No. TNENG/2010/35692

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited and Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at No. 2/22, Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.O Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore - 641 022, RNJ. Registration No: TNENG/2010/35692 Ph No. : 2231252/253/255/257 & 358 Editor: KAUSHIK MITTER