

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | TUESDAY | 18 MAY 2021



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US asks Israel why it attacked media



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Azhar bats for ousted Raman

TABLOID

Mexico's Meza is Miss Universe 2021



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WEATHER

Max: 36.4°C
Min: 25°C
RH: 38%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Rain or thunder showers likely
Max/Min temp. 37/26°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Shashti till 12.28 pm
Star: Pushyami till 2.50 pm
Variyam: 4.06 am to 5.45 am (Wednesday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.20 am to 9.12 am; 11.05 pm to 11.50 pm
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 5,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.36 am
Zohar: 12.22 pm
Asar: 4.43 pm
Maghrib: 6.47 pm
Isha: 8.01 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.42 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.44 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 9.57 AM
MOONSET TODAY 11.29 PM

COUNTER POINT



My god! Our planet Earth is mutating...

SHORT TAKES

US sanctions on Myanmar junta

Washington: The US placed more members of Myanmar's ruling military junta on a financial blacklist Monday for the deadly attacks against civilians following the February coup in the southeast Asian nation. The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control imposed financial sanctions on 16 people and the newly created State Administration Council.

55-hr work week risky: UN study

Geneva: Working over 55 hours a week increases the risk of death from heart disease and strokes, according to a United Nations study out Monday. The report by the UN's World Health Organisation and International Labour Organisation agencies comes as the pandemic accelerates workplace changes that could increase the tendency to work longer hours. ■ **Report on Page 10**

Pak demarche to Afghan envoy

Islamabad: Pakistan on Monday served a demarche to Afghanistan's ambassador Najibullah Alikhel, protesting against the accusations by the Afghan leadership. Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO), however, did not specify the statement which angered it. ■ **Report on Page 9**

India loses ONGC gas field in Iran

New Delhi: India on Monday lost the ONGC Videsh Ltd-discovered Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf after Iran awarded a contract for developing the giant gas field to a local company. "The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has signed a contract worth \$1.78 billion with Petropars Group for the development of Farzad B Gas Field in the Persian Gulf," the Iranian oil ministry's news service Shana reported.



Waves lash the shoreline in Mumbai on Monday as Cyclone Tauktae, packing ferocious winds and threatening a destructive storm, surge bore down disrupting the countrys response to its devastating Covid-19 outbreak. — AFP

Cyclone makes landfall in Guj., Diu 6 killed, 17 injured as Tauktae batters India's West Coast

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI/AHMEDABAD, MAY 17

Strong winds and heavy rains battered the West Coast of India as Cyclone Tauktae made its landfall in Gujarat and Diu on Monday 8 pm. At least six persons were reported to have died and 17 injured in Maharashtra.

The Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm (ESCS) crossed the Gujarat coast between Porbandar and Mahuva (Bhahnagar) between 8 and 11 pm with maximum sustained wind speed of 155-165 kmph. Diu reported 133 kmph wind speed at 9.30 pm.

Maharashtra officials said six persons were

killed in Konkan region. Of them, three persons died in Raigad district, a sailor died in Sindhudurg district while two persons were killed in Navi Mumbai and Ulhasnagar after trees fell on them, in Thane district.

Two boats, with seven sailors were on board, anchored at the Anandwadi harbour in Sindhudurg district capsize. A sailor, identified as Rajaram Kadam, from Devgad taluka in the district died in the incident, while three others were missing. The three other sailors were safe, said the officials.

■ **Page 2: Navy rescues 410 stranded on 2 barges**

55 flights to Mumbai airport cancelled

Mumbai, May 17: More than 55 flights, both incoming and outbound, were cancelled at the city's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) on Monday after the private airport operator was forced to suspend all air services at 11 am due to cyclone 'Tauktae'.

These cancellations apart, some seven incoming flights were also diverted to various airports.

The CSMIA for the fourth time in the day extended the closure of operations till 10 pm after first announcing that the airport will remain closed for three hours, starting 11 am. Major airports in Gujarat shutdown till Tuesday as a precautionary measure. Three major airports — Ahmedabad, Surat and Vadodara - will remain closed for both domestic and international flights till Tuesday, officials said. — PTI

CBI arrests 4 TMC men, Didi storms agency office

Court gives bail in Narada case, HC stays it

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 17

Within two weeks of obtaining West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhanakhar's "sanction for prosecution" of four former Trinamul Congress ministers, accused in the Narada sting operation, the CBI arrested and chargesheeted the quartet after detaining them from their residences in Kolkata during a raid with the help of the Central paramilitary forces.

A furious TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee immediately stormed the CBI's anti-corruption branch office on the 14th floor of Nizam Palace on AJC Bose Road in south Kolkata and



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee leaves the CBI office after a six-hour seige. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

laid a six-hour-long siege there from around 11 am. TMC councillor and lawyer Anindya Raut, who accompanied her, said: "The CM demanded that the CBI officers arrest her too like they did to Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra

and Sovan Chatterjee." In the evening the Bankshall court granted bail to the accused after rejecting the CBI's plea. The bail was later stayed by the High Court.

■ **Page 2: CBI sought 14-day judicial custody**

HEALTH | STOCK

Modi assures doctors speedy testing, supply of medicines, setting up new infra

Vax for frontline staff paid rich dividends: PM

New Delhi, May 17: Asserting that the strategy of starting the vaccination programme with frontline warriors has paid rich dividends in the second wave of Covid-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday that the vaccines have ensured the safety of most of the doctors as 90 per cent of health professionals have already taken its first dose.

In an interaction with a group of doctors via video-conferencing, Modi said he is testing, supply of medicines or setting up new infrastructure in "record

time", all these are being done at a fast pace, according to a statement. His assertions came amid criticism from opposition parties of his government's vaccination programme and also alleged poor handling of the second wave of the pandemic. Noting that challenges of oxygen production and supply are being overcome, Modi said steps taken by the country to augment human resources, like including MBBS students in Covid treatment and ASHAs and Anganwadi workers in rural areas, provided extra

■ **THE DOCTORS** shared their experiences, best practices and the innovative efforts they took to deal with the pandemic.

■ **EVERY EFFORT** is also being made to take proper care of non-Covid patients support to the health system.

The PM also thanked the entire medical fraternity and paramedical staff for the "exemplary fight displayed by them against the extraordinary circumstances" of the second wave, adding that the

entire country is indebted to them.

He urged doctors to include oxygen audit in their daily efforts. Noting that a large number of patients are undergoing treatment in home isolation, he asked the doctors to ensure that the home-based care of every patient is SOP driven. He said telemedicine has played a big role for patients in home isolation, adding that this service needs to be expanded in rural areas as well. Praising doctors who formed teams and are providing telemedicine

service in villages, Modi appealed to the fraternity across states to form similar teams, train final year MBBS students and MBBS interns, and work towards ensuring that all tehsils and districts of the country have this service.

Touching on the challenge of mucormycosis, he said doctors may need to put in extra effort towards taking active steps to deal with it and spread awareness about it.

Underscoring the importance of psychological care along with physical care, he said continuously fight-

ing this long battle against the virus must be mentally challenging for the medical fraternity but the power of faith of citizens stands with them.

The doctors shared their experiences, best practices and the innovative efforts they took to deal with the pandemic. Every effort is also being made to take proper care of non-Covid patients, they said, sharing their experiences of increasing awareness among the public, including about sensitising patients against improper use of medicines. — PTI

KCR: 48 hospitals to have O2 plants

CM tells Covid patients to go to state hosps

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

Chief Minister K. Chandrababhai Rao on Monday appealed to Covid-19 patients to undergo treatment in government hospitals free of cost. They would get free food and medicines, he said.

The Chief Minister urged the people to take advantage of the facilities in government hospitals including oxygen, beds and medicines for free instead of going to private hospitals and spending huge amounts. Since the treatment is good at government hospitals too, people should prefer them, he said. Rao said that as on Monday 6,926 beds lay vacant in government hospitals in the state. Of these, 2,252 were oxygen beds, 533 ICU beds and 4,140 general beds.

The CM's appeal comes in the wake of increasing demand from various quarters to include Covid treatment under AarogyaSri to enable patients from poorer sections avail treatment at private hospitals free of cost. The CM also announced the setting up of oxygen production plants of 324 metric tonnes capacity in 48 government hospitals across the state to overcome the problem of oxygen shortage for Covid patients and make

HC seeks details of third wave strategy

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

The Telangana High Court on Monday directed the state government to furnish details of its strategy to deal with the third wave of Covid-19 infection that is being predicted by experts, during which children will be the most vulnerable. This time, the government should not be caught napping, Chief Justice Hima Kohli cautioned.

The court was also anxious over the increasing number black fungus infection cases and directed the government to make medicines available to treat the patients. The court sought a report on the steps taken by the gov-

ernment to address the issue of black fungus infection. A division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy was dealing with PILs related to the Covid-19 infection. The court commended the measures taken by the government and the police to enforce the lockdown, more specifically during Id-ul-Fitr. The court directed the police to ensure that there must be no crowding in the markets during the relaxation of lockdown. This came when senior counsel L. Ravichander brought the issue of overcrowding in the markets.

■ **Page 2: Admit patients without RT-PCR test: HC**

the State self-reliant in oxygen supply.

The decision was taken at a review meeting held by the CM on the Coronavirus situation attended by senior officials at Pragathi Bhavan. It was decided to set up an additional 100 metric tonne capacity liquid oxygen plant in Hyderabad.

Accordingly, six plants of 16 metric tonnes, 15 plants of eight metric tonnes, 27 plants of four metric tonnes will be set up in government hospitals in Hyderabad and in district hospitals and area hospitals in all districts.

■ **Page 2: Six new medical colleges to be set up**

India sees least vax clotting, bleeding

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The number of daily fresh Covid-19 cases on Monday was below the 3 lakh-mark for the first time since April 21 in the country. However, since testing is usually low on Sundays, the figures in the next couple of days will be important to watch.

The Centre of Monday said it has identified only 26 potential cases of bleeding and blood clotting in India due to the administration of the Covishield vaccine as Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI).

In a report submitted to the ministry of health and family welfare, the National AEFI Committee has said that bleeding and clotting cases following the vaccine shots in India were minuscule and in line with the expected number of diagnoses of these conditions in the country.

The report comes after alerts were raised in some countries on post-vaccination "embolic and throm-

● **THE DAILY** fresh Covid-19 cases on Monday was below the 3 lakh-mark for the first time since April 21 in the country

● **THE AIIMS-ICMR-COVID-19** National Task Force and Joint Monitoring Group of the Centre has revised the Clinical Guidance for Management of Adult patients and dropped Convalescent plasma from its treatment protocol.

botic events" on March 11, 2021, particularly with the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine, Covishield, in India.

Since the Covid-19 vaccination drive was initiated, more than 23,000 adverse events have been reported through the CoWin platform from 684 districts of the country. Of these, 700 cases (@ 9.3 cases/million doses administered) were reported to be serious and severe, the health ministry said.

■ **Page 2: Health ministry advisory for people**

SHORT TAKES

WHY DID KCR, FAMILY AVOID VAX, ASKS BANDI

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar has thanked DRDO scientists and Reddy's Lab for producing the 2D Drug for Covid treatment. Hyderabad has once again emerged as a global city with the manufacturing of India's own Covaxin at Bharat Biotech followed by 2D — 2-deoxy-D-glucose — of the Indian defence establishment with encouragement from the Narendra Modi government, he said.

On Monday, Sanjay addressed the press via a social media platform and appealed to the people to take the Covid vaccine at the earliest. He asked Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao as to why he avoided going for the vaccination. "KCR formed the task force for Covid control under his son KTR for collection of crores from companies that would participate in the global tenders for vaccine procurement," he alleged. Bandi wondered why the state government hesitated with the second dose vaccination as 6 lakh doses were in its possession.

He also said farmers are stressed at paddy procurement centres as the government "failed to provide transportation and speed up purchases process." Farmers are also worried over unexpected rain and they are waiting for trucks to sell the product at the earliest. He urged the government to speed up the procurement process.

● "KCR formed the task force for Covid control under his son KTR for collection of crores from companies that would participate in the global tenders for vaccine procurement," he alleged.

NAVY RESCUES 410 STRANDED ON 2 BARGES

FROM PAGE 1

The Indian Navy deployed three ships to rescue at least 410 persons stranded on two barges off the Mumbai coast.

In the first instance, 273 people were stuck on a drifting barge near the Heera Oilfield at Bombay High Fields of Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), around 175 km from Mumbai.

Following an SOS from the Barge P305 which was adrift near the oilfields with the crew and ONGC personnel on board, the Indian Navy dispatched two ships INS Kochi and INS Talwar to render assistance.

In the second instance, another stranded barge GAL Constructor, with 137 people onboard, sent an SOS from its location around 15 km in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai. Responding to it, the Navy deployed INS Kolkata to render assistance to the crew and passengers on the second barge.

One person died in a rain-related incident in Raigad district, state minister Aditi Tatkare said in a post on Twitter. Neeta Naik, a 50-year-old woman, died in Uran in a wall collapse while selling vegetables by the roadside.

A red alert was sounded in the Raigad district and an orange alert was declared in Mumbai. Over 12,000 citizens were relocated to safer places from the coastal areas. These include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri and 144 in Sindhudurg districts.

Gusty winds and heavy rains lashed Mumbai, where the island city and suburbs received 189 mm and 194 mm of rainfall respectively. The city witnessed water-logging and tree falling incidents at several places across the city. The sea remained rough throughout the day with huge tidal waves hitting the shore. At 2 pm, the wind speed of 114 kmph was recorded at the weather station based at Afghan Church in Colaba area.

Noose tightens, probe into Etala's deals fast-tracked

Officials skim through records to assess extent of encroachments by ousted minister's family

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

After a brief lull, the state government has stepped up investigation into the alleged encroachment of assigned and endowment lands by ousted health minister Etala Rajendar.

Officials from Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) and Vigilance and Enforcement (V&E) visited Masaipet on Monday and examined land records from the time as old as from 1980 at the MRO office to assess the extent of assigned land encroachments by Jamuna Hatcheries owned by family members of Rajendar.

Simultaneously, officials from the revenue department conducted an inquiry into the issue on Monday. Masaipet mandal revision

enue officer (MRO) Malathi and Veldurthi MRO Suresh visited the assigned lands and recorded the statements of village secretaries on how the lands were transferred to Jamuna Hatcheries.

Speaking to the media later, both the MROs said that Jamuna Hatcheries obtained NIC (no objection certificate) for regularisation of assigned lands by exerting pressure on village secretaries in 2018 and 2019. They said that Jamuna Hatcheries was setting up a poultry feed plant against the norms in Hakimpet even after the village secretaries issued notices twice to stop the works.

They said the village secretaries stopped the works after it was found that the firm was laying roads over an extent of 5.35 acres against

norms. The MROs informed that they had issued notices to 75 farmers owning 90 acres and a comprehensive land survey would be conducted from May 26 to 28 to ascertain the extent of encroachments.

The Medak district administration had earlier surveyed these lands and submitted a report to the state government on May 1 stating that Rajendar's poultry farm had encroached 66 acres.

However, the Huzurabad MLA's family members challenged the report in the High Court. The High Court questioned the 'unusual haste' by officials in completing 170-acre survey in a single day and set aside the report submitted by Medak collector S Harish. The inquiry was halted since then.

Similarly, the probe into the encroachment of Devarayamjal temple lands by Rajendar too was halted on May 8 after the High Court observed why there was an urgency to form IAS officers committee and engage senior officials and district collectors to probe into this issue at a time when people were dying due to Covid-19 in the state.

The government told the court that it was only a preliminary inquiry and a detailed inquiry will be conducted later.

Official sources said the government asked the committee to resume the probe and submit a report to the government in two weeks.

These probe reports will be submitted to the High Court which is expected to hear these cases again in July.

HC: Admit patients without RT-PCR test

From page 1

Reacting to an incident of a pregnant woman who died in an ambulance in Hyderabad on Friday, after being denied admission by several hospitals, the court said all the patients who come to hospitals should be admitted without insisting on RT-PCR reports. The court recalled the orders already issued regarding not to insist on test reports.

Justice Hima Kohli said the court had done right in staying the circular issued by the state government restraining entry of persons from other states to Telangana for Covid-19 treatment.

"The difficulty faced by the Telangana state government for treating an extra 35 percent of Covid-19 patients in the state was acknowledged by the Centre, and has resulted in the direct intervention of the Prime Minister and revised allocation of oxygen and life-saving drugs to the state," Justice Kohli said, and thanked the Prime Minister. However, she said, counsel for the Centre had not submitted data on how much the supply of oxygen and life-saving drugs had been increased.

Expressing regret over press reports highlighting the issue of non-payment of salaries to contract and outsourced healthcare workers, especially in King Koti Hospital, the Chief Justice directed the government to immediately release the dues.

The court directed the government to treat all police personnel and teachers, who were deputed to the recently-held elections as 'covid warriors' and extend benefits to them.

Poojitha, one of the counsels, informed the Bench that nearly 500 such officials had been infected with Covid-19, out of which 15 teachers succumbed. Taking cognizance of submissions by senior counsel Ravichander, who stated that the government website was fudging numbers on hospitals rendering Covid treatment and availability of beds, the court directed the government to place real-time data about bed availability.

Ravichander said around 350 hospitals, which are polyclinics, dental hospitals and others with 5,000 beds were reflected as Covid-19 hospitals in the website but were not rendering treatment on the ground. The government was directed to consider the introduction of walk-in vaccination in coordination with NGOs. The court sought details of vaccination to be administered to destitute, orphans, people from below poverty line and prison inmates, apart from people above 45 years and those above 18 years.

The state was directed to ensure that every civil authority in each district tied up with the local NGOs to set up community kitchens for providing free meals to the needy during the lockdown, as there were many instances where the entire family was down with Covid-19. A government order on the matter should be issued on the matter in 48 hours. Rebuking the government for keeping the testing at an average of about 69,000 for 15 days and not enhancing the data, the court directed the government to increase the tests. The court said a state task force should be constituted which should coordinate with the National Task Force with regard to allocation of oxygen and life-saving drugs. The court also sought a cap on the price of PPE kits, CT scans and blood tests done at private laboratories for Covid-19.

While responding to the contention of N.S. Arjun Kumar, one of the counsels, that revenue officials of Siddipet district were dislodging people from their homes at Moglicheruvu tanda, Etigaddakistapur, as the area would be submerged by water from the Mallanasagar, the court directed that the decision be altered till the end of the lockdown.

The court directed the government to consider the aspect of converting community centres for testing and Covid care. The court directed the government not to make steroids a part of the Covid-19 medical kit which is being given to patients.

CBI SOUGHT 14-DAY JUDICIAL CUSTODY

From Page 1

The CBI sought 14-day judicial custody on the grounds of their influential status and role in the case. At present, Mr Hakim is state transport minister while Mr Mukherjee is the panchayat minister. Mitra is the TMC MLA from Kamarhati. Chatterjee, who defected to the BJP from the TMC earlier, quit the saffron party ahead of this year's Assembly elections.

The four heavyweight accused were Cabinet colleagues of Ms Banerjee when they, along with seven more TMC leaders, including many MPs, and IPS officer S.M.H. Meerza were allegedly caught accepting around ₹5 lakhs in cash each in a sting operation by journalist Mathew Samuel ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections. While Hakim was then the municipal affairs and urban development minister, Mr Mukherjee held the panchayat portfolio. Mitra was state transport minister and Mr Chatterjee was state housing minister, apart from being Kolkata's mayor.

The arrest of these four by the CBI, close on the heels of the TMC coming to power for the third consecutive time in the state, triggered a volcano of protests in Kolkata and beyond. Violating the Covid-19 lockdown that got underway from May 16, ruling party workers came out on the roads and burst into anger. Some of them thronged to Nizam Palace and pelted stones at the Central forces deployed to guard the CBI personnel, while others demonstrated outside Raj Bhavan with their party flags. A worried governor, in the eye of the storm now, tweeted: "Invited attention @MamataOfficial: On channels and in public domain I notice arson and pelting of stones at CBI office. Pathetic that Kolkata Police @KolkataPolice and West Bengal Police @WBPOLICE are just onlookers. Appeal to you to act and restore law and order." He alleged: "Message @MamataOfficial: Total lawlessness & anarchy. Police and administration in silence mode. Hope you realise repercussions of such lawlessness and failure of constitutional mechanism. Time to reflect and contain this explosive situation that is worsening minute by minute. Concerned at alarming situation. Call upon @MamataOfficial to follow constitutional norms & rule of law. Police @WBPOLICE @KolkataPolice @HomeBengal must take all steps to maintain law & order. Sad — situation is being allowed to drift with no tangible action by authorities."

Questioning why no CBI action was taken against two other accused in the case — Mukul Roy and Suvedu Adhikari — who are now in the BJP, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh claimed: "Protests are spontaneous because the arrests of the four are illegal and undemocratic. The BJP is misusing the governor and CBI to fulfil its grudge of poll debacle at the hands of our party and create a situation of unrest which will push the state towards President's Rule."

Decision on Covid cure in Aarogyasri likely on May 20

MADDY DEEKSHITH |
DC
HYDERABAD MAY 17

A decision on including Covid-19 treatment under the Aarogyasri scheme, the state government's health insurance initiative, would be taken during the next state cabinet meeting expected on May 20, animal husbandry minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav has said.

He stated this during an interaction with the media on Monday along with home minister Mohd Mahmood Ali at the GHMC headquarters. The press meet was preceded by the ministers' review of the lockdown implementation,

as also aspects of coordination between departments and the Covid-19 situation in the city.

GHMC officials, heads of some hospitals, and Mayor Gadwal R. Vijayalakshmi were present. Yadav denied allegations by the Opposition that there was a shortage of ICU beds in the city for Covid patients. "They are indulging in cheap politics," he said.

"During these unprecedented times, I request the opposition to cooperate with the government. If they can't, they should keep quiet and sit at home. They are also politicising the stoppage of

ambulances from AP by TS police at the border." He also took aim at the central government saying it is not ensuring sufficient medical supplies to Telangana, and for the "step motherly treatment it meted out to TS." On the distribution of free food to the needy in the city limits, he said the government will not stop anyone from doing so between 6 am and 10 am. Instructions were given to police accordingly. When asked if food distributed at 10 am would not get spoilt by the time it is served as lunch or dinner, Yadav refused to respond.

He ducked questions on whether the 45,000

meals delivered by 220 Annapurna canteens were being given free to the needy during the lockdown or were being charged at the standard price of ₹5 per meal. He also refused to answer questions on the number of medical kits distributed to patients during the ongoing fever survey in the city.

Yadav said there was no need for corporators to monitor Covid-19 situation in the GHMC limits since officials have been doing this job. He said following instructions from Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, task force committees were regularly monitoring the Covid situation.

Lockdown lessened cases, says Talasani

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

Animal husbandry minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav on Monday said that with the implementation of lockdown and coordination among various departments, there was a gradual decline in new Covid-19 positive cases in the GHMC limits.

He was addressing a review meeting in which home minister Mohammed Mahmood Ali, mayor Gadwal R Vijayalakshmi, GHMC commissioner D.S. Lokesh Kumar, superintendents of various hospitals and senior officials were present.

"With the proper functioning of government hospitals and basti dawakhanas, door-to-door fever surveys and special sanitation drives have all resulted in a decline in positive cases. Regarding the second dose, the state government is yet to receive the vaccine and hence it has been stopped temporarily. The programme will be resumed soon," the minister said.

He said to facilitate easy access to infor-

mation a dedicated command control (number 040-21111111) has been opened at the GHMC headquarters. The minister said the citizens were cooperating with the government machinery.

He said with monsoon expected next month, desilting of nallas should be taken up rigorously. He said that the entomology wing and Enforcement and Disaster Management wing of the GHMC were spraying disinfectants to curtail the spread of Covid-19.

"Many NGOs are providing food to the needy during the four-hour relaxation. However, they have to obtain prior permission by informing the local police," he added. Mahmood Ali said awareness should be created in getting Covid information about the helpline and the control room. Basti dawakhanas have been urged to provide oxygen facilities in an emergency. The steps being taken by the Telangana government has become a model worthy of emulation.

"In order to provide

food to more deprived sections, the quantity of food at Annapurna Canteens has been increased correspondingly," he added.

Vijayalakshmi said that in order to contain the pandemic strict implementation of lockdown was needed. Isolation centres have been identified in each circle for use in case of emergency and in order to improve sanitation efficiency, she would inspect the sanitation works regularly.

Lokesh Kumar updated about the activities of the GHMC control room.

He said Hyderabad district collector Swetha Mohanthy has been providing information to the public about oxygen supply at prime hospitals, emergency drugs and availability of beds.

Superintendents of Gandhi, Fever, King Koti, Osmania and Sarojini Devi eye hospitals, and Nims among others, gave details about the number of beds, number of positive cases, availability of oxygen and remdesivir in their respective institutions.

Six new medical colleges to be set up

From page 1

The CM asked oxygen manufacturers to provide 11 oxygen tankers of 20-tonne capacity each in the next 10 days. It was also decided to set up six new medical colleges in the government sector to boost health infrastructure.

The new colleges will come up at Sangareddy, Jagtial, Kothagudem, Wanaparthy, Mancheri and Mahbubabad. Nursing colleges will also be set up.

The CM asked officials to make arrangements for the equipment and the required medicines in ENT Hospital in Koti, Gandhi Hospital in Secunderabad, medical college hospitals in the districts to treat the black fungus disease among Covid-19 patients.

The CM said, if need be, 25 Microdebrider machines and HD endoscopic cameras will be purchased. He also instructed the officials to immediately invite global tenders for the supply of the vaccines. He asked officials to be in touch with the Centre regularly on the vac-

● THE OFFICIALS informed the CM that the state received 57,30,220 doses of vaccine and had a stock of 1,86,780 doses. Of this, 58,230 are Covaxin and 1,28,550 are Covishield vaccines.

cination quota and get the vaccines to the state.

The officials informed the CM that the state received 57,30,220 doses of vaccine and had a stock of 1,86,780 doses. Of this, 58,230 are Covaxin and 1,28,550 are Covishield vaccines.

To give medical treatment facilities and medicines to the poor in government hospitals, 12 regional sub centres should be formed at Siddipet, Wanaparthy, Mahbubabad, Kothagudem, Nagarkurnool, Suryapet, Bhongir, Jagtial, Mancheri, Bhupalpally, Vikarabad, and Gadwal. The CM said the 200-bed hospitals in Anantagiri in Vikarabad, Singareni, RTC, CISH, Railways, Army and ESI hospitals should be brought in for Covid treatment.

From page 1

The health ministry is separately issuing advisories to healthcare workers and vaccine beneficiaries to encourage people to be aware of suspected thromboembolic symptoms occurring within 20 days after receiving any Covid-19 vaccine (particularly Covishield) and report preferably to the health facility where the vaccine was administered.

People have to watch out for breathlessness, pain in the chest, pain in limbs/pain on pressing limbs or swelling in limbs (arm or calf), multiple, pinhead size red spots or bruising of skin in an area beyond the injection site, persistent abdominal pain with

● HOWEVER, IN the absence of a proper reporting mechanism as most of the helplines are not responding, and awareness among people to report to AEFI, the study may not be reflecting the true picture and magnitude of AEFI.

or without vomiting, seizures in the absence of previous history of seizures with or without vomiting, severe and persistent headache with or without, weakness/paralysis of limbs or any particular side or part of the body, persistent vomiting without any obvious reason, blurred vision or pain in eyes or having double vision, change in

AP police: Did not interfere in judicial

From page 1

Within a few hours, the CID court asked the police to get his injuries examined by the board and a team of doctors of Ramesh Hospitals. The apex court finally gave a direction to the Army Hospital, Secunderabad to examine and submit a report.

"Except for opposing the examination and treatment at Ramesh Hospitals, which itself is facing several criminal charges, the government did not interfere with the judicial process," a senior police official stressed.

The SC took up two petitions — one filed by Raju himself on medical examination and another by his son Bharat Raju challenging the HC's rejection of bail to his father. Senior counsels Mukul Rohtagi and Dushyant Dave represented Raju and the state government respectively. At one stage, the bench adjourned the proceedings and sought the opinion of the Centre.

While Raju's counsel wanted the medical examination done at the AIIMS, New Delhi, the

● "EXCEPT FOR opposing the examination and treatment at Ramesh Hospitals, which itself is facing several criminal charges, the government did not interfere with the judicial process," a senior police official stressed.

AP government suggested the AIIMS, Mangalagiri, or the Manipal Hospital in Guntur. The SC bench decided to entrust the task to the Army Hospital, Secunderabad.

On bail, the court directed the state to file counters and posted the case to Friday. The apex court also said Raju could be admitted to the Army Hospital and kept there for medical care until further orders.

The hospitalization will be considered as part of judicial remand and expenses of treatment, if any, shall be borne by the MP, the bench said.

It also ordered that the Y category security would escort Raju till the hospital and need not be present during the medical examination.

sel) events following the administration of Covishield vaccine — with a reporting rate of 0.61 cases/ million doses," the report said. It added there were no potential thromboembolic event following administration of Covaxin vaccine.

"AEFI data in India showed that there is a very minuscule but definitive risk of thromboembolic events.

The reporting rate of these events in India is around 0.61/million doses, which is much lower than the 4 cases/million reported by UK's regulator Medical and Health Regulatory Authority (MHRA). Germany has reported 10 events per million doses," the report said.

OTHER STORIES

PREGNANT
EMPLOYEE DIES
DUE TO COVID-19DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MAY 17

Sridevi, a typist working in Bhadradi-Kothagudem district collector office, died due to Covid-19. Sridevi, who tested Covid-19 positive, is eight month pregnant. She joined the government hospital in Kothagudem and died while undergoing treatment. The employees of Kothagudem colleagues were shocked by knowing the incident.



Budan Ali Baig

BUDAN BAIG DIES
OF COVID-19 IN
BENGALURUDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MAY 17

TRS Khammam district former president and former chairman of Telangana Industrial Development Corporation, Budan Ali Baig, died in Bangalore on Monday. Baig, who tested Covid-19 positive, joined a private hospital in Bangalore. He was also diagnosed with black fungus (mucormycosis) and succumbed to it. Baig, who was known as a fighter of the first phase Telangana movement, participated actively in the second phase T-struggle also. He was a close associate of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao during the statehood movement.

Different political parties like Congress, CPI-M, CPI and CPI (ML) New Democracy expressed condolence on his demise. The Telangana Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) K. Ramnarayana said that the demise of Baig is a great loss to Telangana.

MIN. WARNS PVT
HOSPS AGAINST
CHARGING HIGH FEEDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MAY 17

State government will take stern action against private hospitals under Disaster Management Act if they collect high fee from patients undergoing treatment for Coronavirus, transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar warned.

His warning comes in wake of allegations that some private hospitals are collecting enormous fee from patients and billing more than MRP on key medicines like remdesivir.

The minister said the government has supplied 1,500 Remdesivir injections to private hospitals, so that they could be giving when required at the rate stipulated.

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has spoken to Hetero about supply of remdesivir. The company has come forward to supply the required amounts of these injections," Ajay Kumar said. He asked hospitals to note down the name of patient and his or her Aadhaar number while administering the injection.

"I will not hesitate to send errant hospital management members to jail," he observed over reports of private hospital collecting high charges while treating their patients.

The minister said a task-force will audit records of private hospitals. He also advised hospitals not to collect high deposits from patients before treating them. He asked the district unit of Indian Medical Association to involve itself in ensuring that patients are treated in a better manner. He underlined that Remdesivir should be administered to patients only on experts' advice.

Ajay Kumar pointed out Covid-19 hospitals in the district are being supplied 12 tonnes of oxygen every day.

● **THE MINISTER** said a task-force will audit records of private hospitals. He also advised hospitals not to collect high deposits from patients before treating them.

Warangal commissioner of police, Tarun Joshi observing as Covid test is conducted on beggars at Hanamkonda on Monday.
—BY ARRANGEMENTWarangal police conduct
Covid-19 tests for beggarsDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MAY 17

The beggars in the city do not have the awareness to undergo Covid-19 tests, nor do they have the privilege to approach a Covid-19 testing centre. This could lead to the spread of the Coronavirus. Hence the police department has decided to conduct the tests for them, said Warangal commissioner of police Tarun Joshi.

About 150 beggars underwent the Covid-19 test held by the police department at the public garden and the Hanamkonda bus depot on Monday.

● **"SEVEN PERSONS** who underwent tests today were tested positive for Coronavirus. They have been shifted to the isolation centres and we will see to it that they receive good treatment," the commissioner said.

● **POLICE OFFICIALS** distributed fruits, masks and served meals to the beggars, who came to undergo Covid-19 test.

Police officials distributed fruits, masks and served meals to the beggars.

"Seven persons who underwent tests today were tested positive for Coronavirus. They have been shifted to the isolation centres and we will see to it that they receive good treatment," the commissioner said.

Central zone DCP

Pushpa, Deputy DMHO Yakub Pasha, Hanamkonda and Warangal ACPs Jitender Reddy, Giri Kumar, Cls from Hanamkonda, Matwada, Intezargunj, Mills colony, Subedari, Chandrashekar Goud, G a n e s h, Venkateshwarlu, Ravi Kiran, Raghavender were present among others.

T-diagnostic hub inaugurated
by minister in MahbubabadDC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MAY 17

The Telangana Diagnostic Hub was inaugurated at Mahbubabad by Tribal, Women and Child Welfare minister Satyavathi Rathod on Monday. The facility was set up at a cost of ₹2.7 crore, 57 types of tests can be done in the diagnostic hub.

Speaking on the occasion, minister, Satyavathi Rathod said that efforts are being made to strengthen government hospitals in Telangana under the leadership of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao.

All facilities are being provided in government hospitals with utmost priority for the lives of the people.

"The Telangana diagnostic hub helps the public avoid private centres or travelling elsewhere for medical tests. Even the two types of tests to determine Coronavirus are conducted here," the minister stated.

Telangana diagnostic hub established in Mahabubabad.
—BY ARRANGEMENT

"The task force, led by municipal minister K.T. Rama Rao, is constantly working to provide emergency medicines and essential facilities for Covid patients undergoing treatment in the government hospitals," she added.

The minister also reminded the public of their social responsibility in following lockdown norms to prevent the spread of Coronavirus infection.

She said that the gov-

ernment and public representatives were constantly working for the control the spread of Coronavirus and appealed to the people to abide by the Covid appropriate behaviour and remain safe.

ZP chairperson Bindu, Mahbubabad MLA Shankar Naik, municipal chairman Rammohan Reddy, collector V.P. Gautam, additional collector Abhilasha Abhinav were present among others.

HELPING | HAND

MLA, Ganesh set up a-75-member team to prepare food and serve it

Free meals for Covid patients

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MAY 17

To give a helping hand during Covid-19 pandemic, a free meals programme has been initiated in Nizamabad city for Covid-19 patients and their attendants. Around 1,500 to 2,000 meals are being provided to Covid-19 patients at their doorsteps or on government and private hospital premises.

Nizamabad has turned into a hotspot for Covid-19 cases as the district shares its border with Maharashtra, where Covid-19 spread is alarming for the last two months. People from undivided Nizamabad, Adilabad, Karimnagar and neighbouring Maharashtra state reach here for Covid-19 treatment.

In the majority of Covid-19 positive cases, they are unable to get food timely either at home isolation or in gov-

Volunteers packing free meals for Covid-19 patients and their attendants in Nizamabad on Monday.
—BY ARRANGEMENT

ernment and private hospitals. The patient attendants are forced to starve due to lockdown restrictions. In this context, Nizamabad Urban MLA Bigala Ganesh Gupta has come forward to provide free meals to Covid-19 patients and their attendants.

He pressed into service

a-75-member team to prepare food and serve it to the needy across Nizamabad city. Calling dedicated numbers of 7207392708, 7207392709, the Covid-19 patients and their attendants are getting free meals daily. Volunteers distribute food packets containing fine quality rice, dal, veg-

TSRTC left in lurch as
lockdown hits profits

95 % buses were limited to depots leaving the company in huge loss

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MAY 17

The TSRTC, which has been facing losses for several years, had recently started making profits but the Coronavirus pandemic is playing spoilsport and pushing it back into losses.

Due to the lockdown imposed by the government, the depots in the urban areas are running city buses during the lockdown relaxation period. The rural depots, which usually ferry people between villages are not finding many takers.

The Jangaon bus depot with 128 services every day used to earn ₹15 lakh to ₹16 lakh but it fell to ₹12 lakh to ₹13 lakh in April due to a drop in the number of passengers due to the Coronavirus effect. The public is showing very little interest in taking the RTC buses due to fear of contracting Covid-

Jangaon bus depot with most of its buses parked inside due to lockdown.
—BY ARRANGEMENT

19. A total of 95 per cent of the buses were limited to depots in the lockdown leaving the company with huge losses. The loss incurred so far has been ₹90 lakh in six days at ₹15 lakh per day. Cargo services also declined because of the lockdown effect.

B. Lakshmidharma,

depot Mmanager, Jangaon said the impact of the pandemic on the RTC has been severe.

The depot used to earn over ₹15 lakh per day but with a limited number of services being run due to the lockdown, the revenue is coming in at just ₹50,000 to ₹60,000, he said.

● The Jangaon bus depot with 128 services every day used to earn ₹15 lakh to ₹16 lakh but it fell to ₹12 lakh to ₹13 lakh in April due to a drop in the number of passengers due to the Coronavirus effect.

The Bhupalpally depot too is facing a similar situation. The depot used to run 80 buses during the normal days but it is now running only 20.

Half of the services were cancelled due to no takers even before the lockdown began.

The cargo service is returning zero revenue. The depot which used to receive ₹10 lakh to ₹11 lakh of revenue every day is now receiving a meagre ₹50,000.

As a result of this situation, the survival of the corporation is in danger of becoming questionable if the pandemic intensifies in the future.

Police team led by Ramagundam police commissioner, V. Satyanarayana conducting police patrol, vehicle checking at Rapanapalli-Sironcha interstate check-post in Kotapalli mandal of Mancherial two days ago.
—BY ARRANGEMENTCops intensify border patrol
suspecting Covid-affected
Maoists could sneak into TSDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MAY 17

Telangana police have sounded an alert following information that Maoists operating in Sukma, Bijapur and Dantewada districts of Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, who have contracted Coronavirus, might sneak into the state for treatment.

The vigil is particularly intense along roads off rivers Pranahitha and Godavari, which the outlawed Maoists often use as part of their operations.

Police have set up a check post at Sironcha and checking vehicles, people, patients, and their attendants coming

into Mancherial from Maharashtra. The flow of people into Mancherial district from bordering Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh has increased with completion of interstate bridges connecting Telangana to the neighbouring states.

Ramagundam police commissioner V. Satyanarayana, SP Y. V. Sudhendra, DSP Acheshwar Rao, circle inspector Sudhakar and sub-inspector Ramesh visited the Wankidi check post on the border with Maharashtra on Monday.

It is a known fact that people from bordering villages of Yavatmal, Gadchiroli, and Chandrapur districts come to Karimnagar and other towns seeking

treatment for Covid-19, or for dialysis and deliveries. Similarly, people from neighbouring districts also reach Mancherial and Peddapalli, where good medical facilities are available.

Police are keeping a close watch on people coming into Mancherial, Peddapalli, Karimnagar, and Bhoopalapalli districts, suspecting that Maoists infected with Coronavirus are most likely to enter Telangana for treatment.

Ramagundam commissioner Satyanarayana has even offered free medical treatment for Maoists on humanitarian grounds, provided they join the mainstream.

PADDY NOT BEING
PURCHASED IN
KHAMMAM: KISAN
MORCHA CHIEFDC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MAY 17

Bharatiya Kisan Morcha state president Kondapalli Sridhar Reddy said on Monday that farmers are suffering due to the non-lifting of paddy at Indira Kranthi Patham centres.

Sridhar Reddy, who visited the paddyfields at Patharpadu in Tirumalayapalem mandal, said the government failed to put a plan in place to lift the paddy. Paddy stocks for sale in some mandals were hit by unseasonal rain, he said.

"The government has no control on millers because it has a hidden deal with them in the lifting of paddy. The millers are cutting the price in the name of 'tharam' (a practice of reducing the price) twice – first in the field and later at the mill," he said. He said the government is not being mindful of the woes of the farmers who raised paddy for quality rice on the advice of the government. "Nobody including millers and other agencies is showing any interest in lifting the stocks."

The Kisan Morcha president urged the government to lift all varieties of paddy. The Chief Minister should leave the farm house first and initiate efforts in lifting the paddy. "Farmers told me they will be thrown into the hands of moneylenders if the produce is not lifted on time, or went waste due to rain."

● **SRIDHAR REDDY** said the government is not being mindful of the woes of the farmers who raised paddy for quality rice on the advice of the government.

524 CASES BOOKED IN 6 DAYS AGAINST
PEOPLE VIOLATING LOCKDOWN NORMSDC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, MAY. 17

Adilabad police are striving hard to implement lockdown effectively in the Adilabad town since many people with 'passes' issued by the authorities are coming out to roads by claiming that they were government employees and working in the emergency departments.

At various points in the

Adilabad town, police teams led by incharge superintendent of police M. Rajesh Chandra are conducting vehicle checking and inquiring the bike riders about their whereabouts and checking their passes. A team of police led by SI Gunwath Rao were seen conducting vehicle checking at the NTR chowk and verifying the passes in the Adilabad town.

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IN BRIEF

COPS SEEK 5-DAY CUSTODY OF KALRA

New Delhi, May 17: The Delhi Police on Monday sought a five-day custody of businessman Navneet Kalra from the court for interrogation in connection with alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators.

Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal will decide on the police's plea seeking grant of custody.

The Delhi Police arrested Kalra on Sunday night. The businessman was on the run for over a week since the seizure of more than 500 oxygen concentrators from three upscale restaurants owned by him in the national capital.

Oxygen concentrators are a crucial medical equipment used in the treatment of Covid-19 patients and are on a high demand amid the second wave of the pandemic.

The district court had rejected Kalra's anticipatory bail plea on May 13, saying the allegations against the businessman were serious and his custodial interrogation was required to "unearth the entire conspiracy".

Pursuant to this, the accused moved the Delhi High Court, which also declined to grant him interim protection from arrest in the case, agreeing with the reasons given by the trial court while denying him the relief.

PORTALS OF KEDARNATH OPEN IN U'KHAND

Dehradun, May 17: The portals of Kedarnath opened on Monday after a six-month winter break with the first puja being held by priests on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, officials said.

Only a select few people attended the temple's opening ceremony in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. It is for the second consecutive year that Covid has cast a shadow on the pilgrimage to the temple which has been kept out of bounds for pilgrims in view of rising coronavirus cases.

A Chardham Devasthanam Board official said the first puja was held by priests on behalf of the prime minister as the gates of the famous Himalayan temple were opened at 5 am.

A limited number of temple priests, including Rawal Bhim Shankar Ling and Chief Priest Bagesh Ling, and officials of the administration and Devasthanam Board attended the ceremony.

Expressing happiness at the opening of the temple, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat prayed for the welfare and good health of the people.

The yatra to the temple is temporarily suspended for the sake of people's safety, Rawat said, asking people to have virtual "darshan" of Baba Kedarnath and perform puja at home.

Tourism Minister Satpal Maharaj said Chardham Yatra will be started soon after the coronavirus pandemic subsides.

The temple was decorated with eleven quintals of flowers on the occasion.

SATAV'S LAST RITES PERFORMED AT NATIVE PLACE

Mumbai, May 17: The mortal remains of Congress MP Rajeev Satav, who died after recovering from Covid-19, were consigned to flames with state honours at his native place Kalamnuri in Maharashtra's Hingoli district on Monday.

Several key Congress leaders, including AICC in-charge of Maharashtra H K Patil, party's Maharashtra unit chief Nana Patole and state ministers Ashok Chavan, Balasaheb Thorat, Vijay Wadettiwar, Aslam Shaikh, Nitin Raut, Varsha Gaikwad, Satej Patil, Vishwajeet Kadam and other party workers were present at the funeral.

Satav (46), considered as a close associate of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, died at a hospital in Pune on Sunday, days after recovering from the coronavirus infection.

The late Rajya Sabha member's family members bid him an emotional farewell as his mortal remains were consigned to flames at his native place on Monday.

Paying tributes to the late leader, Shaikh said, "...he would always talk about the issues concerning the people of Maharashtra...the farmers have lost their leader. He is not among us. I am speechless."

Kadam described Satav as his "big brother and mentor".



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to an elderly person at a drive-through vaccination camp at a mall in Noida on Monday. - PTI

CoWIN portal in Hindi, other languages from next week

17 more laboratories to be added to INSACOG network soon: Centre

New Delhi, May 17: The CoWIN portal will be made available in Hindi and 14 regional languages by next week, while 17 more laboratories will be added to the INSACOG network to monitor the variants of Covid-19, the health ministry said on Monday.

According to a statement by the ministry, these decisions were announced at the 26th meeting of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) on Covid-19, chaired by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, on Monday.

Vardhan informed his colleagues that 17 new laboratories are going to be added to the INSACOG network to increase the number of samples screened and allow for more spatial analysis, the ministry said.

The network is presently served by 10 laboratories located at different corners of the country.

Speaking on their contribution to the country's achievements today, Vardhan said, "India's new Covid-19 cases have dropped to less than three lakh for the first time after 26 days. Also, a net decline of 1,01,461 cases has been recorded in the active caseload in the last 24 hours."

He lauded the efforts of defence scientists and the leadership of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching the country's first indigenous anti-COVID drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose or 2-DG (developed by the DRDO in collaboration with the INMAS and the Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories), the ministry said.

The research efforts for the drug started in April last year and ended recently, when the DCGI gave it

Rahul says PM nowhere in sight when needed

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The Congress on Monday hit out at the Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the PMCares ventilators.

Taking to Twitter Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "There's a lot common between PMCares ventilators and the PM himself: too much false PR, don't do their respective jobs, nowhere in sight when needed!"

The attack comes amidst a row over reports suggesting ventilators bought with PMCares funds and supplied to a hospital in Punjab's Faridkot have been left unused because of technical glitches.

The Centre has hit back at these reports, calling them "unfounded" and alleging it is the lack of infrastructure at the Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital that is to blame.

the emergency-use approval.

He noted that the Centre continues to help the states under a "whole of government" approach to tide over the pandemic.

Over 4.22 crore N95 masks, 1.76 crore PPE kits, 52.64 lakh Remdesivir injections and 45,066 ventilators were distributed among the states and Union territories, according to the statement.

The Union health secretary apprised the meeting that the CoWIN platform is being made available in Hindi and 14 regional lan-

● The attack by the Congress leader comes amidst a row over reports suggesting ventilators bought with PMCares funds and supplied to a hospital in Punjab's Faridkot have been left unused because of technical glitches.

The ventilators in question were supplied by Bharat Electronics Limited and AgVa. The Central government has ordered an immediate audit of the process of installing and operating the ventilators, and directed healthcare workers be trained in its use, if necessary.

Since its inception last year, the Congress has been critical of the PMCares fund.

It has demanded that proper audit of the fund

guages by next week.

Dr Sajeet K Singh, Director, NCDC, presented a detailed report on the mutations of SARS-CoV-2 and the Variants of Concern (VoCs) being reported in India. He showed figures related to the state-wise prevalence of VoCs like the B.1.1.7 and B.1.617. The B.1.1.7 lineage (UK variant) was found predominant in the samples collected in Punjab and Chandigarh between February and March, the statement said.

Dr Balaram Bhargava, Health Secretary, should be carried out. The party maintained that instead of a new fund, the PM National Relief Fund should have been used to collect donations as it had been done in the past.

Last week, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson Sachin Sawant accused the Central government of providing faulty ventilators and called for a state-level inquiry into the matter.

Several states have red-flagged the ventilators manufactured by AgVa Healthcare and supplied by PMCares Fund.

Earlier last week, Rajasthan chief minister Mr. Ashok Gehlot complained that the state had received faulty equipment and urged the Union health ministry to launch an investigation into the procurement of defective ventilators using PMCares Fund.

Research and DG, ICMR, made a presentation on the innovative changes in testing policy that would widen its scope of application and help in mass screening for Covid, particularly in peri-urban and rural settings, where the health infrastructure is relatively weak.

Deployment of mobile RT-PCR testing vans and amplification of RAT tests were presented as the way forward. While the present capacity is around 25 lakh (RTPCR 13 lakh, RAT 12 lakh), this is projected to exponentially increase

to 45 lakh (RTPCR 18 lakh, RAT 27 lakh) under the new testing regimen.

The DG, ICMR also informed regarding the home-isolation guidelines, which have been converted into Hindi and other regional languages for a wider reach. Warning signs for hospitalisation, admission to ICU and for potential administration of Remdesivir and Tocilizumab were also highlighted.

S Aparna, Secretary (Pharma) informed that a dedicated cell has been created to coordinate production and allocation of the drugs in demand to treat COVID-19.

Stress was laid on the procurement and allocation of Remdesivir, Tocilizumab and Amphotericin-B. She notified that the demand for Favipiravir too has increased, although the drug is not recommended in Covid medical guidelines. She suggested IEC campaigns for a judicious use of these drugs.

The secretary (pharma) also highlighted that Remdesivir production has more than tripled in the country with government intervention from around 39 lakh to 1.18 crore vials per month.

The demand for Amphotericin-B, which is used in the treatment of mucormycosis, has also increased. Five suppliers have been identified and efforts are being made for an optimal allocation of the drug. The states were given one lakh vials from May 1-14, while avenues for import are being actively explored, the statement said.

The secretary (pharma) emphasised that the states must make an equitable distribution among the government and the private hospitals.

He said, "We have already discussed odd-hour management where senior doctors have to do duty from 11 pm to 7 am. We have seen that maximum patients died during the night. Some of them came at night time in hospital and after two to three hours the patient died."

Pointing out that most senior doctors do duty during the day shift, Mr sarma said, "Now they

BJP MP says cow urine can prevent Covid

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 17

BJP's Bhopal MP Pragya Singh Thakur, known for her penchant for sparking controversy, has once again stirred up a row when she said, "cow urine can prevent coronavirus infection".

Ms Thakur told a gathering of party members here late on Sunday that, "If you take *desi gau mutra* (urine of cow of indigenous species) every day, then it cures lung infections from Covid. I take cow urine every day and hence I have been able to ward off Covid so far. I do not take any medicine. Cow urine is a life saver".

She however added that "The urine of cow which grazes in the forest has only medicinal properties".

It may be recalled that she was admitted to Delhi's AIIMS in December 2020 over symptoms of Covid-19.

The Indian Medical Association has already come out with clarifications that there is no scientific evidence to establish that cow urine can prevent or cure Covid-19.

There is no concrete scientific evidence that cow urine or cow dung boosts immunity against Covid-19," Dr J A Jayalal, president of IMA has earlier said.

She had a couple of years ago claimed that she could fully recover from cancer by taking cow urine mixed with certain cow products.

Her statement on

● Thakur was admitted to Delhi's AIIMS in December 2020 over symptoms of Covid-19.

● The Indian Medical Association has already come out with clarifications that there is no scientific evidence to establish that cow urine can prevent or cure Covid-19.

● Pragya Singh Thakur had a couple of years ago claimed that she could fully recover from cancer by taking cow urine mixed with certain cow products.

Monday drew flak from Congress which demanded action against her for 'promoting superstition' regarding Covid-19.

"The BJP leadership must clarify as to whether Ms Thakur's recommendation has the party's sanction. She should be booked for promoting superstition regarding the virus", Congress spokesman here Bhupendra Gupta said.

Ms Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case in Maharashtra, has often landed her party by making controversial statements.

She had triggered an outrage in the country in 2019 when she made 'offensive' remarks against slain IPS officer Hemant Karkare, martyred in 26/11 Mumbai blast by terrorists, inviting actions from Election Commission then.

Assam extends curfew hours

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MAY 17

In what has taken many by surprise, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Guwahati Medical College and Hospital at about 2.30 am on Sunday to take stock of the Covid situation.

Informing that the state will start an 'odd-hour management' process in government medical colleges and other hospitals, Mr Sarma told reporters, "I visited GMCH at about 2.30 am to ensure the presence of senior doctors at odd hours. There were reports of some patients coming to hospital at odd hours and after two three hours patients died."

He however expressed satisfaction over the arrangement of the hospital even in odd hours. "I was satisfied with the arrangements. I reiterate my gratitude to doctors and nursing staff for their help," he said.

He said, "We have already discussed odd-hour management where senior doctors have to do duty from 11 pm to 7 am. We have seen that maximum patients died during the night. Some of them came at night time in hospital and after two to three hours the patient died."

Pointing out that most senior doctors do duty during the day shift, Mr sarma said, "Now they

have to do duty during the night also. CCTV cameras have been fixed in every ward and we will monitor everything."

Mr Sarma who also entered the CCTV control room to take the stock of doctors and nursing staff's activities said, "We have an adequate amount of oxygen cylinders till now. No bed scarcity at Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) but we will increase bed capacity and the process has been started at Sarusajai sports complex."

Meanwhile, the government has extended curfew timings in the state from 2 pm to 12 noon.

"We have noticed that Covid positive cases decreased from 1,600 to 1,000 in Guwahati after extending curfew timings. So, we have decided to extend curfew timings from 2 pm to 12 pm. We will monitor the positivity rate during one week," said the chief minister who is said to have been keeping a round the clock watch over the Covid scenario.

Even problems pointed out on social media are taken care off by the chief minister himself. The pro-active approach of the new chief minister has alerted the police as well as civil administration which are now keeping a close watch on social media and media reports.

FIGHTING COVID

Essential services staff, those travelling for emergency to be allowed to move outside

Four districts of Kerala under triple lockdown

Thiruvananthapuram, May 17: The boundaries of four major districts in Kerala, which report the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the state, were sealed and restrictions were further intensified on Monday as a seven-day triple lockdown announced by the state government came into force there from midnight.

Majority of sub-roads were closed and police took control of the major roads in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts as part of efforts to arrest the massive

spread of the virus infection. Only essential services people and those travelling for meeting emergency needs were allowed to move out in all the four districts.

Borders were under the strict surveillance of police who could be seen returning many people while trying to travel without any valid reason in many places. They also warned of stern legal action and seizure of vehicles against those violating triple lockdown norms. In the state capital, police cut down the number of entry points to the

city to just six to force people to stay safe at homes and make them avoid unnecessary travels.

Despite strict instructions, the closing of roads, however, seemed to have caused long queues of vehicles in many places waiting for the police permission to proceed further. Thiruvananthapuram city police Commissioner, Balram Kumar Upadhyay, said 100 bike patrolling teams have been deployed here to check quarantine violations.

The public could seek the support of getting essential articles like medicine

in emergency situations, he added. Meanwhile, the district authorities have issued specific guidelines for each district under the triple lockdown.

While Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts would be under triple lockdown till May 23, the current lockdown would continue in other 10 districts, authorities added. As per the norms issued by the Thiruvananthapuram district administration, shops dealing with food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat and fish, animal

fodder, poultry and cattle feed, bakeries were opened Monday. They would be open on alternate days starting from Monday onwards and all shops would close, including for home delivery purposes by 2 pm. Banks, insurance and financial services will function with minimal staff on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 am to 1 pm.

Cooperative Banks will remain open only on Monday and Thursday from 10 am to 1 pm. According to the guidelines, milk and newspaper distribution shall be com-

pleted before 8 am.

Fair price shops (Ration/PDS/Maveli/Supply co shops) and milk booths are permitted to function on all days till 5 pm while restaurants and hotels will be allowed to function from 7 am to 7.30 pm with home delivery services only. No dine-in and take-away/parcels shall be allowed in any restaurants or hotels, it said. Medical shops, petrol pumps, ATMs, shops selling life-saving equipment, hospitals and other clinical establishments shall be functioning on all days.

Authorities have advised

the public to buy provisions and vegetables from shops near their houses and not to travel long distances for the purchase of provisions and vegetables.

The public will be prevented from travelling long distances for purchase of essential commodities, they said.

Police have already informed that all houses with positive and primary contact family members would be sealed and no person from containment zones would be allowed to step out even if he or she belongs to the exempted category of work. - PTI

SHORT TAKES

TUNISIA TROOPS
KILL 5 SUSPECTED
JIHADISTS

Tunis, May 17: Tunisian forces on Monday killed five suspected jihadists in an air and ground operation targeting a rugged mountain hideout of Islamist fighters, the interior ministry said.

The operation launched at dawn was still underway, the ministry said in a statement, adding authorities were working to verify the nationalities and affiliation of the “five terrorists” killed. The operation targeted a jihadist base on Mount Chaambi, near the border with Algeria.

Tunisia has seen a surge in radical Islam since veteran president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in the country’s 2011 revolution.

The army has been battling armed groups since 2012 in the country’s central mountains.

They include fighters from Jund al-Khalifa, or “Soldiers of the Caliphate”, linked to the Islamic State group.

SYNAGOGUE
BLEACHER
COLLAPSE: 2 DIE

Jerusalem, May 17: Israeli medics said at least two people were killed and more than 150 injured after a bleacher collapsed at an uncompleted West Bank synagogue on Sunday, the eve of a major Jewish holiday. The bleacher was packed with ultra-Orthodox worshippers and collapsed during prayers at the beginning of Shavuot. A spokesman for Magen David Adom told Channel 13 that paramedics had treated over 157 people for injuries and pronounced two dead, a man in his 50s and a 12-year-old boy.

Rescue workers were on the scene, treating the injured and taking people to the hospital.

The collapse comes weeks after 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews were killed in a stampede at a religious festival in northern Israel.

Amateur footage showed the collapse Sunday during evening prayers in Givat Ze'ev, just outside Jerusalem.

The ultra-Orthodox synagogue was packed with hundreds of people.

NINE DEAD IN
BURKINA FASO
JIHADIST ATTACK

Ougadougou, May 17: At least nine people were killed in a weekend attack in Burkina Faso blamed on jihadists in the country’s restive north, local and security sources said Monday. A traditional chief and three civilian defence volunteers were among those killed in the attack on Sunday in a village near the town of Pissila, a local official said, adding that another three people remained missing.

He said the “terrorists” who waged the attack were killed, without stating a death toll.

“The attack occurred around 9:00 am when men from the village and volunteers were holding a strategy meeting after a series of incidents and attacks in the area,” he said.

A local elected official said hundreds of people had fled to Pissila in recent days.

Three of the dead belonged to the Volunteers for the Defence of the Motherland (VDP), an anti-jihadist civilian defence force created in December 2019 to help the former French colony’s poorly equipped military fight jihadists.

COURT CLEARS WAY
FOR SAMOA’S 1ST
WOMAN LEADER

Wellington, May 17: Samoa appeared set to get its first woman leader after the nation’s top court on Monday reinstated the results of a knife-edge election last month.

Two decisions by the Supreme Court have paved the way for Fiame Naomi Mata’afa to become prime minister of the small island nation.

Her ascent represents a significant milestone not only for Samoa but for the broader South Pacific region, where there have been few women leaders.

Like many of its neighbours, Samoa tends to be conservative, strongly Christian and deeply traditional.

An advocate for women’s equality, Fiame, who was born in 1957, broke new ground during her campaign by going on the road and robustly criticising the incumbent, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, who had been in power for 22 years.

The court’s decisions appeared to end what most people viewed as an attempt by Tuilaepa to cling to power. Fiame had served as his deputy before they had a bitter split.

Israel: Gaza tunnels destroyed in strikes

The UN warns Gaza’s sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel because of continued aggression



A ball of fire erupts from a building in Gaza City’s Rimal residential district during massive Israeli bombardment on the Hamas-controlled enclave. — AFP

Gaza City, May 17: The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Monday, saying it destroyed 15 kilometres (nine miles) of militant tunnels and the homes of nine alleged Hamas commanders. Residents of Gaza awakened by the overnight barrage described it as the heaviest since the war began a week ago, and even more powerful than a wave of airstrikes in Gaza City the day before that left 42 dead and flattened three buildings. There was no immediate word on the casualties from the latest strikes. A three-storey building in Gaza City was heavily damaged, but residents said the military warned them 10 minutes before the strike and everyone cleared out.

They said many of the airstrikes hit nearby farmland. Gaza’s mayor Yahya Sarraj told *Al-Jazeera* TV that the airstrikes had caused extensive damage to roads and other infrastructure.

“If the aggression continues we expect conditions to become worse,” he said.

He also warned that the territory was running low on fuel and other spare parts. The UN has warned that Gaza’s sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel. The territory already experiences daily power outages of 8-12 hours and tap water is undrinkable.

The war broke out last Monday, when Hamas fired long-range rockets at Jerusalem after weeks of clashes in the Holy City

between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police. The protests were focused on the heavy-handed policing of a flashpoint holy site during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. Since then, the Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says are targeting Hamas’ militant infrastructure.

Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired more than 3,100 rockets into Israel.

— AP

Cricket club saves
Indian researchers

Beersheba (Israel), May 17: A cricket club in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba has come to the rescue of several Indian researchers at the Ben-Gurion University in the Negev southern region, who had been struggling for a proper shelter while being under a complete siege with rockets raining over the country’s south during the past one week.

The Beersheba Cricket Club building, a two-storey structure close to the University, which is actually a shelter house with an underground floor, opened its door for the local residents immediately after rockets launched by Palestinian militants started to fall on

Israel’s southern areas and also extended the kind gesture to Indian researchers at the University who were looking for proper protection during distressed times.

“Some of the Indian researchers also play for the cricket club and are like part of our family. But we told them that anybody looking for a safe shelter is welcome to use our facility,” said Naor Gudker, the Chairman of Beersheba Cricket Club. “There are several Indian researchers staying with us during the past week, both boys and girls, and we have tried to make things as comfortable as possible, extending them all possible help”, he said.

— PTI

Court postpones
start of Navalny
extremism case

Moscow, May 17: A Russian court on Monday postponed the first hearing in the “extremism” case against the political network of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, part of a campaign to outlaw the opposition to President Vladimir Putin. As the hearing got underway behind closed doors, the prosecution submitted additional documents and the proceedings were postponed until June 9, according to lawyers representing Navalny’s network.

The case is part of a sweeping crackdown on Putin’s most prominent critic and his supporters after Navalny barely survived a poisoning with the Novichok nerve agent last summer.

As part of the effort — which comes a few months before parliamentary elections — the lower house is set on Tuesday to begin debating a bill banning members of “extremist” organisations from being elected lawmakers.

Navalny’s network is being represented by lawyers of Team 29, a Saint Petersburg-based group that specialises in freedom of speech and treason cases.

The lawyers said it was not clear why Monday’s hearing was held behind

closed doors.

The Kommersant business daily on Monday cited a source saying the secrecy was because some of the case files contained personal information of police involved in dispersing opposition protests.

But key Navalny ally Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter that the case materials were kept secret so that “nobody could see the absurdity of what was happening”.

Prosecutors in April requested that Navalny’s regional network and his Anti-Corruption Foundation be designated “extremist” organisations, accusing them of plotting to stage a Western-backed uprising in Russia.

Such a court ruling would put Navalny and his supporters and financial backers on par with members of the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda and threaten them with long prison sentences.

“The opposition will be crushed,” Abbas Gallymov, an independent political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter, said, warning that the official ban on dissent would eventually backfire. “By destroying the opposition, they are destroying their own legitimacy,” he said.

— AFP

US asks Israel for proof of
Gaza media building strike

Copenhagen, May 17: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday he has asked Israel for any evidence of Hamas operating in a Gaza building housing news bureaus that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike over the weekend, but hasn’t seen any.

Blinken spoke at a news conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, as pressure is increasing on the Biden administration to ask for a ceasefire in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel destroyed a building housing The *Associated Press* and *Al Jazeera* claimed that Hamas used the building for a military intelligence

office. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the building a “perfectly legitimate target” and told *CBS*’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday that Israel passes such evidence through intelligence channels.

“Shortly after the strike we did request additional details regarding the justification for it,” Blinken said Monday.

He declined to discuss specific intelligence, saying he “will leave it to others to characterise if any information has been shared and our assessment that information.” But he said, “I have not seen any information pro-

vided.”

Blinken’s comments came after UN Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved.

— AP

Calls mount for cease-fire

United Nations, May 17: United Nations Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved.

His ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, told an emergency high-level meeting of the Security Council that the United States was “working tirelessly through diplomatic channels” to stop the fighting. But as battles between Israel and Gaza’s militant

Hamas rulers surged to their worst levels since 2014 and the international outcry grew, the Biden administration — determined to wrench US foreign policy focus away from the Middle East and Afghanistan — has declined so far to criticize Israel’s part in the fighting or send a top-level envoy to the region.

Appeals by other countries showed no sign of progress. Thomas-Greenfi-

eld warned that the return to armed conflict would only put a negotiated two-state solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict even further out of reach.

However, the US, Israel’s closest ally, has so far blocked days of efforts by China, Norway and Tunisia to get the Security Council to issue a statement, including a call for the cessation of hostilities.

— AP

Shehbaz placed on no-fly list

Islamabad, May 17: The Pakistan government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday added the name of Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who has been charged with corruption, to the no-fly list, barring him from leaving the country for medical treatment.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court granted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz — also the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — permission to travel abroad once for medical treatment.

After obtaining bail, Shehbaz, 69, was about to fly to London on May 8 when an Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team at the airport stopped him from travelling on the grounds that his name had been on the provisional national identification list (PNIL), which impose a temporary bar on someone to leave the country.

Shehbaz was offloaded from Doha-bound flight on May 8. Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that Shehbaz’s name was added to the exit control list (ECL) after it was given approval from the federal Cabinet.

— PTI

Remarks: Pak pulls
up Kabul’s envoy

Islamabad, May 17: Pakistan on Monday served a demarche to Afghanistan’s ambassador Najibullah Alikhel, protesting against the accusations by the Afghan leadership.

Pakistan’s Foreign Office (FO), however, did not specify the statement which angered it. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in a recent interview, alleged that Pakistan “operates an organised system of support” for the

Afghan Taliban. “The names of the various decision-making bodies of the Taliban are Quetta Shura, Miramshah Shura and Peshawar Shura — named after the Pakistani cities where they are located. There is a deep relationship with the state,” the Afghan leader said.

The FO said Pakistan was seriously concerned about the statements.

— PTI

BACK ISRAEL
CURBS, TURKEY
URGES POPE

Ankara, May 17: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has asked Pope Francis to support sanctions against Israel, saying Palestinians will continue to be “massacred” as long as the international community does not punish Israel. During a telephone call Monday with the Pope, he also said that “continued messages and reactions” from Francis in support of Palestinians would be of great importance for the “mobilisation of the Christian world and of the international community,” said a statement from the Turkish presidential communications directorate.

— AP

AMID CLASH,
ISRAEL BATS
FOR TOURISM

Dubai, May 17: As violence flares within Israel and on a day in which Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City killed at least 42 people, it was business as usual for a senior Israeli tourism official in Dubai as she promoted the country as a must-see destination for Muslim visitors.

At Dubai’s Arabian Travel Market on Sunday, billed as the first travel and tourism event to happen in person since the global coronavirus outbreak, a small Israeli booth — tucked behind Slovenia’s — marketed the country as the “Land of Creation.”

— AP

WRITS SEEKING
FRESH SWEARING
IN OF OLI FILED

Kathmandu, May 17: Four writ petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal on Monday demanding that Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli be sworn in again as he disgraced the office of the President by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during the oath-taking ceremony. President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace, on Friday.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Oli, the 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), omitted the word vow when the President recited it, besides in the name of God. I will take oath in the name of the country and the people, Oli, who has become Nepal’s prime minister for the third time, said, while President Bhandari mentioned God, country and the people. All four writ petitioners have demanded that Oli take another oath of office and secrecy as the one taken on Friday was illegal. *The Kathmandu Post* reported.

— PTI

SMART CITIES Fourth Industrial Revolution guided Japanese choice models

Mumbai, Medellin: Knowledge networks

Singapore, May 17: Mumbai and Medellin would be the two knowledge sharing regional networks for South East Asia and Latin America respectively to help realise and align smaller cities in the zones to execute their vision to become smart cities in the coming years, a top industrial source has said.

The two World Economic Forum (WEF) selected networks, which would be hosted by India and Colombia respectively to connect leading pioneer cities from the Global

Alliance with smaller cities in the region, will also help them have better cyber security as cyber attacks are becoming more frequent globally.

“Our ready for market approach with solutions for smart cities follows a recent announcement by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to launch two regional networks of cities in South Asia and Latin America with the aim to share knowledge on smart city development, while protecting public interests related to privacy, security and sustain-

ability,” the source, who did not wish to be named, said.

“With cyberattacks on municipalities rising and digital technologies becoming central to economic competitiveness and especially so in India, small cities need to invest in new technologies but have less capacity than their larger global counterparts to implement and ensure effective governance, said the source, who is close to one major technology group which is in talks with several parties to offer its products and

solutions tailored to specific need of each city. Bengaluru, Bhopal, Faridabad, Hyderabad, Indore, Kohima, Mangalore, Raipur, Shillong and Thane are on top Indian cities in the smart city list that would be seeking global best practices to be tech-driven municipalities for growth of local economies, according to the source.

He said global technology companies have positioned their solutions and products to help India realise and align its ambitions with the vision of smart cities in the coming

years. These networks selected last month as part of the WEF’s G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance are designed to help small cities implement new technology policies and will be supported by partners of the WEF and the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) Global Network. Going forward, the Japanese cities are their choice models which were guided by the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Japan, he noted.

— PTI

DECCAN
Chronicle

18 MAY 2021

Use every tool to overcome hesitancy on tests, vaccines

The second wave of Covid-19 is wreaking havoc in rural areas as well as our big cities, unlike the first one which had mainly hit urban dwellers. Reports coming from rural India are quite depressing as everything that plagues Indian villages plays a role in frustrating the attempts by health workers and local government representatives in getting people tested for the deadly virus. The people who live there have very little access to authentic information on what is happening all around them; they trust the quack more than the qualified physician; they are comfortable with him and his magic potions and home remedies much more than with evidence-based medicine and its elaborate protocols; they have very little health infrastructure to depend on; they fear the ways of officialdom — once their names appear on governmental records, they are done, they fear. So, they assume that if they test positive, they will be forcibly moved to government facilities, from which they are not sure when or if they will ever return. What will happen to their jobs, and who will take care of the rest of their family — these are the big questions on their minds. Why take risk when the quack can more than cure them?

There is very little point in blaming the villagers; there are urbanites who continue to believe that hot water, when gulped, will kill the virus on its way to the intestine. A pinch of turmeric powder mixed with milk is another panacea and the virus' nemesis, WhatsApp messages will tell you, and many people still believe it. There are those who earnestly believe that they can build immunity overnight and resist the onslaught of the microorganism; there are immunity boosters available in the market too. Vaccination is a waste, some of them feel, we would rather contract the disease and let the body manufacture its own antibodies, they would argue.

This is an area where the government must, and only the government can, intervene and set the record right. This message must pass down to every citizen that untested patients make themselves vulnerable, and that they will spread the infection among their near and dear ones if they delay getting tested or in getting vaccinated. The government needs to make sure that no one loses his/her job or is harassed at their workplace for undergoing the test or even for contracting the infection. It must be driven home that home remedies are okay as long as people follow the physician's advice. They must be told upfront that we as a nation do not have the infrastructure that can take care of everyone who falls sick, and that they risk losing their lives if they don't follow the scientific ways of keeping the virus at bay. The government must put every tool at its command and in the collective armoury of our society to defeat the virus. There is an urgent need to launch an information blitzkrieg on the pandemic aiming at emboldening the people to go in for testing and vaccination at the earliest. Every societal asset, be it governmental, media, religious, cultural, tribal, social or otherwise, must be tasked with taking the message to every home and get people out for testing and vaccination. Better be late than never.

Stop targeting critical voices

Are we intent on proving right the wag who said that we are a democracy until we begin to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi? In the national capital a rash of ordinary-looking posters appeared asking the PM: "Why did you send vaccines abroad, denying our own people?" The Delhi police, which comes under the Union home ministry, swung into action and rounded up a clutch of poor souls who make their living from climbing on poles to stick posters on rectangular frames, carpenters, three-wheeler auto drivers and cycle-rickshaw pullers.

It is possible to be supportive of India's vaccine diplomacy, and yet note that the police action in this case is a distinct mark of intolerance by the government of those who dare to ask the PM a question which is increasingly coming to the fore.

In hindsight, it appears that if the Modi government was alert to science and followed expert advice, it would not have prematurely declared victory over the Covid-19 pandemic and wound up the temporary facilities set up to treat millions of patients hit by the virus. If expert recommendations were heeded, it would have been realised by policymakers that India not only lacked oxygen, hospital beds and critical medicines, but also vaccines since advance bookings from manufacturers against payments hadn't been made.

Ergo, the rollout of vaccine diplomacy was premature. Today it seems more and more to have been a propaganda ploy to bring out the feel-good factor at home while earning goodwill abroad. In short, it was a political move, pure and simple, which left India defenceless. Its consequences are strewn everywhere for all to see and condemn. No wonder, there is talk now of ramping up the infrastructure of crematoriums, not just medical facilities.

If vaccine diplomacy has led to painful results, then the question posed in the poster must be answered by those in authority. Locking up those behind the poster, or wag fingers at Opposition leaders asking questions, besmirch the country even more. It must stop.

The so-called "positivity" and "constructive" approach by the government and its apologists appears cynical. If questions aren't raised, and we meekly submit to what we get as the natural law, God help our democracy, which is founded on the basic principle of accountable governance.

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KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930/4; Fax : 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: (0891)-2755285
Rajahmundry: Vernagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

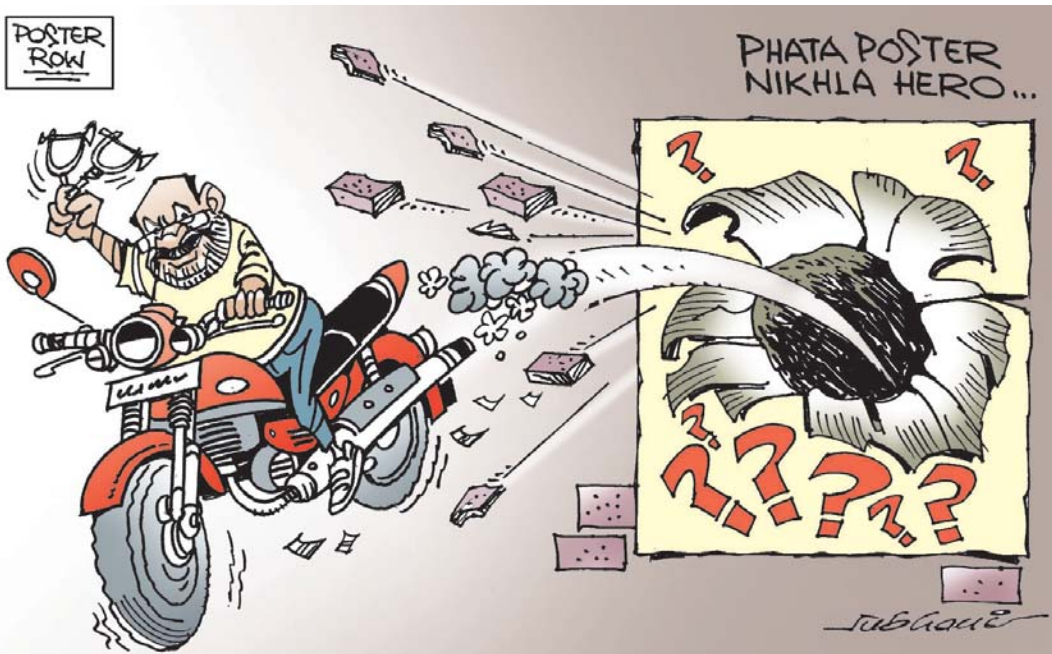
Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burunapur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph : 0422 2231255
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Subhani



Positivity effect: Govt has to do things differently



Shashidhar
Nanjundaiah

Confronted with an unprecedented international media focus and global criticism from several governments as well as global health experts, state governments, analysts, reputed medical journals, and the international and national media, the Central government and the ruling party's parent organisation, the RSS, have jointly begun a "positivity drive", in effect weaving a positive bias narrative both for itself and for the people at large. While one has the potential of a soothing impact on the audience, the other seeks to be politically self-serving. So have we indeed been communicating negativity in a crisis? Or have the Central government and the BJP been seeing it all wrong?

Earlier, in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" radio address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said a powerful positivity message needs to go out. Soon afterwards, the Covid Response Team chipped in with a five-day lecture series called "Positivity Unlimited", starting May 11. The stated intent was to instil confidence in a society struck by hopelessness and despair. Speakers included spiritual leaders, artists, writers, philanthropists and RSS leaders.

Meanwhile, the BJP machinery was hard at work with characteristic gusto, producing and reproducing messages of how hard Mr Modi and the government machinery were working. On May 12, health minister Harsh Vardhan's address repeatedly included "*santoshjanak baat hai, yeh khushi ki baat hai*" (it is a matter of delight and other positive connectors to the vaccination drives. The government's obsession with image management could fall on deaf ears as even its own ambassadors are finding it increasingly hard to put a positive spin. Positivity sounds a good

thing. But has the government given positive developments to be articulated about? Given the overwhelming amount of heart-rending news, and news of the government's repeated attempts to thwart social media criticism, a positive perception is hard to justify.

Inconvenient truths

Rahul Gandhi has reacted to the positivity drive, calling it a "false assurance". The Congress has said positivity won't help people to breathe. Earlier, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote to Prime Minister Modi, listing five specific points on which the government could work. Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal, Uddhav Thackeray and other leaders regularly tweet or talk critically of the government's handling. Expert after expert in television debates has been critiquing the government's handling of the situation. The media, which has finally reached the villages, routinely interviews ordinary citizens from a cross-section, most of whom place the blame on the government for the dire situation. All this has systematically been ridiculed by various ministers at the Centre, but in fact responsible criticism in general is also accompanied by recommendations, roadmaps and suggestions. In response, BJP chief J.P. Nadda shot off a strong repartee, telling Mrs Sonia Gandhi that she has been misleading people with negative messages. In his response to the former PM, the health minister's letter ridiculed the Congress.

To their credit, Mr Modi and others in the government have often tackled criticism with facts and numbers. To continued complaints from state governments about the acute shortage of oxygen, the government has been claiming the nation does not have a shortage — the bottleneck

lies in logistics. More recently, Mr Modi pointed out that the supply of oxygen was now more than three times of what it was during the peak of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In September 2020, the number of infections stood at less than one lakh a day. This time, that number is in excess of four lakhs. According to the ICMR, while 41.5 per cent patients required oxygen last year, that figure for second wave patients is 54.5 per cent. So Mr Modi's statement is a fair identification of where the problem lies, but does not provide any solution. The government is, after all, responsible for logistics management too.

Unacceptable interpretation

Positivity studies indicate that based on their belief system, people with a positivity bias will tend to hold positive views, report positively using those views, and filter in positive information. One way that organisations and governments seek to achieve popularity is through positivity effect, nudging people to see a situation positively when the desired results aren't achieved, and obtaining a positive feedback. Positivity bias can shroud reality and create false euphoria, which dangerous in a pandemic situation.

Rather than viewing criticism negatively, this criticism-averse government can also help transform public perceptions by responding more positively. For example, a recent newspaper editorial pointed out that in contrast to last year's total lockdown, which had devastating impacts on the economy, this year's lockdown in several states had struck a balance between the management of health and economic activity. This should be

The government's expectation of what constitutes acceptable criticism is either unclear or unrealistic. Indeed, it is the government's interpretation of criticism that is negative.

relatively good news. But if the Centre reacts to it as a criticism of its decisions, it will be seen as protecting its narrow political image-mongering interests, not the larger national interest.

Similarly, it is unfair to expect the media to run only positive stories. This government already enjoys the backing of a largely pliant media: it is well-documented that a significant section of the Indian media over the past seven years has held a pro-government bias. Television channels are often eager to politicise issues. For example, on May 12, leaders of 12 Opposition parties wrote to the Prime Minister demanding immediate action, funds for oxygen and free vaccination. Some TV news channels were quick to focus on which Opposition parties had not signed that petition. When BJP MP Tejasvi Surya purportedly made a surprise visit to an agency running a hospital bed allotment scam in Bengaluru, it was initially well-received by the media — until a video surfaced which revealed he and his colleagues had turned it into a communally objectionable exercise. With all its failings, we can expect legitimate media platforms and fair-minded people to compulsively turn to a fairness-for-all approach.

Positivity studies on communications patterns show that people use more positive than negative language, both written and spoken. Given that, the government's expectation of what constitutes acceptable criticism is either unclear or unrealistic. Indeed, it is the government's interpretation of criticism that is negative. Well-meaning critiques should lend themselves to the positive inference that there is scope for improvement in implementing decisions, not as an indicator of an existential crisis. Above all, tackle the reality — and the perception and its articulation will take care of itself

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications in India and the United States, and is the founder of "Being Responsible", which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

LIFT LOCKDOWN

Five days into the lockdown, the government has already started sending signals about the weakening financial position (*KCR to pay salary, pension; bills later, DC, May 17*). The state was compelled to go for lockdown as all neighbouring states were in lockdowns due to high positivity rates. Due to that, people started coming to Telangana. The government must lift lockdown in GHMC and cantonment.

Jakka Vijay Kumar
Secunderabad

PUBLICITY CRAZY

Who trumpeted that the worst was over? Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January declared victory over the virus telling a virtual gathering of the World Economic Forum that India's success couldn't be compared anywhere else. In the second week of March, India's health minister declared India was "in the endgame" of the pandemic. The country exported oxygen and vaccines that it would desperately need later. There could be a number of factors for the rise of Covid-19 but political ambitions in West Bengal polls held in 8 phases and other state elections were super spreader events. With just 1.6 per cent of India fully vaccinated, the science behind the pandemic was forgotten by Centre. The Centre must be held responsible for this disaster.

Nivas Rapaka
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Special efforts to complete Vizag plant

NEW DELHI, MAY. 17

Special efforts were being made to complete the Visakhapatnam steel plant as early as possible, Mr. Mohamed Shafi Qureshi, Deputy Minister for Railways, said here today.

He was inaugurating the conference on raw materials for engineering industries.

The Minister said that efforts were also being made to activate the completion of Salem and Hospet steel plants in South.

The Government is "vigorously" pursuing the idea of setting up of mini steel plants and electric furnace plants to tide over the immediate shortage of country's steel requirements, Mr. Qureshi said.

Aakar Patel



Govt needed to have 'grip' over Covid: That is what PM lacks

He is a famous name in the history of warfare, but Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery does not have many battlefield victories to his name. In fact, his most famous engagement, called Operation Market Garden (after which the Hollywood movie *A Bridge Too Far* was made), was a disaster. But historians agree that Montgomery had something that all generals should have, and this is "grip". This is the faculty of being aware of the situation, being knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in the future and being conscious of what events to anticipate.

These are not qualities which we associate with our Prime Minister. His interest is not in the details but in the broad scheme. In a famous interview just before the 2014 general election he said to the journalist Madhu Kishwar: "Even today if my officers show me some paper, I say: 'Tell me what's in it in two minutes. For me, two minutes is sufficient for a 10-page document. This skill is something I have developed.'"

But while he has no interest in the details, his preference is not to stand aloof from on-ground operations but to insert himself through the bold and imaginative stroke. For instance, the BBC reported at the end of March this year that before the lockdown last year not a single ministry was consulted about the consequences.

The BBC filed 240 right to information applications with various Indian government departments — health, finance, disaster management — to find out if and how much they were consulted ahead of the lockdown.

The responses revealed that no experts or government departments were consulted. The government refused to give the BBC a statement explaining why the concerned departments were not consulted ahead of time. A second example of the Prime Minister's style of functioning is the famous demonetisation exercise of November 2016. Here also only a handful of people knew that this was about to happen. As a parliamentary democracy, India follows the principle of collective responsibility. But even the Union Cabinet was not told till the day

of the demonetisation — Tuesday, November 8, that India's ₹1,000 and ₹500 notes — 86 per cent of all currency by value — would be wiped out that evening. The government was not only unprepared for Prime Minister Modi's move; it was deliberately kept hidden from the government.

My point is not to say that this style is good or bad or whether it has advantages or disadvantages. The evidence is clear, and there is no point in discussing that here. The point is to examine whether it works in situations such as the one we find ourselves in. The problem of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be approached through the single brilliant stroke. It needs the State to be aware of the situation, be knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in future and being conscious of what events to anticipate. In a centralised system, where decision making is often the purview of a few people and sometimes that only of one man, this may be harder to do as we are now discovering.

The official position of our government in response to a shortage of vac-

cines and a shortage of oxygen and of ventilators is that nobody could have anticipated this. But the fact is that the rest of the world anticipated it. What we are receiving today as aid is not new material manufactured yesterday around the world. It is the surplus that was produced by many nations which had anticipated the crisis we are going through today. They dealt with it because of their preparedness and that is the reason this material became surplus. No nation keeps useless stocks of expensive things lying around in case India will urgently need them. The reason we don't have enough vaccines is that we did not order them at the right time because we didn't think we needed them. As the Prime Minister said to the World Economic Forum in late January: "India is among those countries which have succeeded in saving the lives of the maximum number of its citizens and the number of people infected with corona is rapidly decreasing." He added that "it would not be advisable to judge India's success with that of another country. In a country which is home to 18 per cent

of the world population, that country has saved humanity from a big disaster by containing corona effectively".

We had decided based on the evidence we saw that India was unique and had overcome Covid-19. Other nations thought of the issue as a longer problem, and not limited to the first wave. They ordered the vaccines on time and received them. They let their scientists determine whether the battle against the pandemic was won instead of a divinely inspired leadership. Once the science revealed that only precaution, healthcare preparations and vaccination could stop the pandemic, that is where their execution capacities were deployed.

The question is why we did not anticipate a second wave or a wave of such destructive power. The answer is that if the leadership must take full control over situations, then it must have grip rather than genius strokes. There may theoretically be times when the latter style is advantageous, but this era is not among them.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|-------|
| Sensex | 49,580.73 | 1.74 |
| Nifty 50 | 14,923.20 | 1.67 |
| S&P 500* | 4,153.43 | -0.49 |
| Dollar (₹) | 73.21 | 0.10 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 103.26 | -0.20 |
| Euro (₹) | 89.00 | -0.29 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 47,547.348 | 0.73 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 69.45 | 1.08 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 5.972 | 0.00 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.645 | 0.01 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bharti Airtel posts ₹760 cr profit for Q4

Bharti Airtel reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 759 crore for Q4FY21 and an annual turnover of more than Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time. Airtel had posted a loss of Rs 5,237 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue rose 11.9 per cent to Rs 25,747 crore from Rs 23,019 crore. India revenue increased by 10 per cent in Q4 to Rs 18,337.8 crore from Rs 16,734.3 crore a year ago.

NEFT upgrade to disrupt services on weekend



The National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will be unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon. A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, the RBI said. "Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23," it said.

Federal Bank standalone net jumps 59%

Private sector lender Federal Bank reported nearly 59 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 478 crore for the March quarter against Rs 301 crore a year ago. Total income on a standalone basis was down at Rs 3,832 crore against Rs 4,108 crore. On a consolidated basis, the net profit for the quarter jumped by 65 per cent to Rs 500 crore. Income fell by 5.4 per cent to Rs 3,996 crore from Rs 4,223 crore.

Poonawalla exits Panacea, Serum picks up his stake

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla offloaded his entire 5.15 per cent stake in Panacea Biotech for Rs 118 crore through an open market transaction. The shares were picked by Serum Institute of India (SII). As per BSE block deal data, Poonawalla sold 31,57,034 scrips he held in the firm at a price of Rs 373.85 per share, taking the total deal value to Rs 118.02 crore. The shares were picked by SII at the same price.



FPIs net sellers by ₹2,256 crore Market cheers drop in daily Covid cases

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 17

A sharp drop in daily Covid infections to below 3 lakh cases triggered broad-based rally in the market, with investors expecting a return to normalcy sooner than expected before.

The Sensex gained 848 points, or 1.74 per cent, and closed at 49,580 after a bullish start on the first day of a new week. BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices also gained over 1.6 per cent each.

The market capitalisation of all stocks traded on the BSE touched a new all time high of Rs 213.64 lakh crore as investors' wealth soared by over Rs 3 lakh crore.

The Nifty-50 index too gained 245 points to close at 14,923.15.

The market seems poised to regain earlier highs with NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27 per cent from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021, as it recorded the lowest close of last 87 trading sessions since January 1, said analysts.

"The Nifty rebounded sharply as domestic coronavirus cases fell below the 3-lakh mark for the first time since mid-April. Extended lockdowns by majority states has helped in curbing the cases. Sentiments turned buoyant that soon restrictions/curbs would be eased once cases decline



GAINING STRENGTH

► Market capitalisation of the BSE touched a new high of ₹213.64 lakh crore as investors' wealth soared by over ₹3 lakh crore

► NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27% from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021

further," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,948.48 crore while foreign portfolio investors preferred to book profit and were net sellers of equities worth Rs 2,255.84 crore, as per the provisional data.

"Global cues were weak on the back of poor Chinese retail sales data and resurgence of Covid cases in some Asian countries. Gold scaled to three-month high as global inflation pressure rises," said Khemka.

Bank stocks led the rally on the bourses as the BSE Bankex closed 3.98 per cent up followed by Auto (1.90 per cent), Metal (1.93

per cent), Power (1.86 per cent) and Realty (1.59 per cent).

Barring telecom, all other sectoral indices closed in the green. The market expects the indices to regain earlier highs with financials leading the gainers list.

"It looks like we are going to head higher from hereon," because the authenticity of any move is measured by the quality of participation in it and today the banking space led from the front by giving a humongous intraday rally. When this pocket contributes heavily, the up-move can be considered a genuine one," said Sameet Chavan, chief analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking.

HOTELS' BODY JOINS OYO INSOLVENCY CASE

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 17

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has allowed hotels' body to intervene in the insolvency case against Oyo on behalf of its member hotels.

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) sought intervention on behalf of its affected members over an outstanding of about Rs 72 crore. Around Rs 200 crore of claims have been registered against Oyo, the FHRAI said.

The NCLAT has permitted it to make its oral submissions on June 2.

"The FHRAI has been receiving several complaints from member hotels with respect to the non-payment of debts by Oyo for years. The FHRAI has presently filed the application before the NCLAT on behalf of aggrieved hotels and restaurants across India who have filed their claims with the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP)," FHRAI vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said.

According to FHRAI, Oyo breached the terms of various kinds of agreement.

Vaccine costs to strain already creaking state budgets

ANIRBAN NAG & VRISHTI BENIWAL MAY 17

The world's worst coronavirus outbreak is set to stretch the already strained budgets of Indian states, making it more costly to borrow just when they need the money to cushion their economies.

The country's 28 states will have to foot about \$5 billion or more in vaccination costs after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal government suddenly made them responsible for inoculating most adults from May 1. Since they hadn't budgeted for the jobs or steps to tackle a second wave, their options to meet the additional expense are limited to cutting capital expenditures, selling public assets and boosting borrowing.

A simple calculation shows it will cost states Rs 35,400 crore (\$4.8 billion) to give two vaccine shots to about 590 million Indians in the 18-to-44 age group, at a combined cost of Rs 600 per person. If vaccinations are extended to those under 18 years old, the expense could rise to 0.25 per cent of gross domestic product, or about \$7 billion, according to Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd economist Madhavi Arora.

The additional burden couldn't have come at a worse time for states, which are facing higher yields on market borrowings this year amid the threat of widening fiscal deficits.

Failure by India's states

We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales"



— Palanivel Thiagarajan, Finance minister, Tamil Nadu

to raise and spend enough money risks holding back the recovery from a rare recession last year. That's because states account for 60 per cent of total government spending on asset creation and infrastructure building, which drive jobs creation and consumption.

In addition, states are having difficulty attracting foreign investors despite paying yields that are typically higher than those on federal government debt. Global funds have used only 1.2 per cent of the Rs 67,600 crore investment limit available to them in notes issued by states as of May 10, down from 4.8 per cent two years ago, data from the Clearing Corp. of India Ltd show.

"Finances are bound to be affected," said T. S. Singh Deo, health and commercial tax minister of Chhattisgarh. "The axe will certainly fall on capital expenditure."

Modi's government has encouraged states to sell assets to fund spending plans in the current year. That's one way to bring down the debt burden,

said Palanivel Thiagarajan, an ex-Wall Street banker and newly appointed finance minister of Tamil Nadu.

"Everything is on the table," he said. "We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales."

The pandemic has changed states' budgets significantly. The average gross deficit for states that presented their budgets before Covid was 2.4 per cent of output, while after the lockdown it stood at 4.6 per cent in the year ended in March, the Reserve Bank said.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, saw the gap widen to 4.17 per cent of the state's GDP in the year ended March 31, compared to the prescribed limit of 3 per cent. Bihar, among the nation's most impoverished states, estimated the gap at almost 7 per cent.

They may miss their goal of narrowing the

budget gap this year. Although there's no national lockdown this time to stem the deadly second wave of the pandemic, several states have imposed local movement curbs that are hurting economic activity and revenue collection. That's nudging many economists to cut their double-digit growth forecasts for the current fiscal year.

There's "renewed uncertainty regarding the near-term economic outlook," said economists led by Aditi Nayar at Icria Ltd. That "may modestly constrain the indirect tax collections of those particular states."

To bridge the gap, Rajasthan is planning to sell or lease out unused properties. Telangana is planning to sell land parcels to raise about Rs 14,500 crore, according to local media reports.

Still, there's no guarantee these deals will come through. Even the federal government has failed to achieve divestment targets for the past two years after failing to sell flag carrier Air India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp, a state-owned oil refiner. Those sales have been carried forward to the current year.

Punjab plans to cut capital spending to boost health care expenditure, its finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal said. "States have to fend for themselves," he said. "Even though we increased our health budget by 18 per cent this year, I see my health budget going up further."

—Bloomberg

MS BOARD HAD GATES INVESTIGATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

LINUS CHUA MAY 17

Microsoft Corp's directors started a probe into Bill Gates' alleged involvement with a female employee that was deemed inappropriate and decided that the co-founder had to step down from the board last year, Dow Jones reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The software giant had received a concern last year that that Gates had



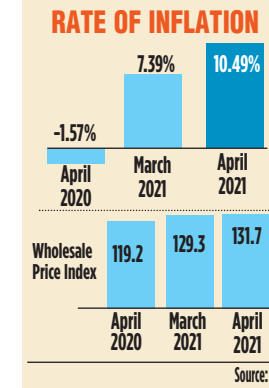
Bill Gates

tried to have an "intimate" relationship with an employee in the second half of 2019, Dow Jones cited a Microsoft spokesman as saying. The

board reviewed the matter with the help of an outside law firm, the spokesman added.

Board members handling the matter hired the law firm to conduct the investigation after receiving a letter from a Microsoft engineer who said she had a sexual relationship with Gates for years, Dow Jones said. Gates left before the probe was completed. A spokesperson for Gates couldn't be reached for comment. —Bloomberg

WPI INFLATION AT MULTI-YEAR HIGH OF 10.49%



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 17

Wholesale price inflation (WPI) climbed to a multi-year high of 10.49 per cent in April from 7.39 per cent in March, on the back of rising commodity prices and a low base. At 10.49 per cent WPI saw the highest level since April 2010.

"The annual rate of inflation in April 2021 is high primarily because of rise in prices of crude petroleum, mineral oils viz petrol, diesel etc, and manufactured products as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," a government release said.

In April, fuel and power index rose 20.94 per cent year-on-year but contracted 1 per cent over March. Manufactured products inflation rose 9.01 per cent year-on-year and 1.65 per cent over the preceding month. Primary articles inflation rose 10.16 per cent year-on-year and 3.83 per cent over the preceding month and prices of food articles went up 4.92 per cent year-on-year and 3.84 per cent over March.

The core-WPI inflation too moved up to 8.4 per cent on a yearly basis in April, driven by metals, paper, rubber, and chemicals. But retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 4.29 per cent from over 5.5 per cent in March.

"In sequential terms, the WPI-food recorded a sharp 3.8 per cent month-on-month increase in April 2021, as compared to a relatively limited 1 per cent uptick in the CPI-food index, suggesting a greater impact of supply chain disruptions at the wholesale level," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, Icria.

DOUBLE LIFE

Companies that made pledges have fewer Black employees

#BlackLivesMatter: An optics play for US firms?

ELLEN HUET & KAREN TOULON MAY 17

After the murder of George Floyd last year prompted widespread protests, dozens of companies released public pledges to promote racial justice. However, their support of the Black community wasn't reflected in the demographics of their workforces.

A new study of diversity in the technology industry found companies that made statements of solidarity had 20 per cent fewer Black employees on average than those that didn't. The finding highlights a gap between what companies say about social issues and what they do in their own workplaces, said Stephanie Lampkin, the founder and chief executive officer of Blendoor, which conducted the study set to



be published on Monday. Blendoor, a startup that helps companies recruit a diverse group of candidates, crunched publicly available data on 240 of the most prominent tech companies. Despite the shortcomings of many companies that put out

Black Lives Matter statements, the pledges could have a serious impact. Their financial commitments surpassed \$4.6 billion, more than double the amount of pledges made in the previous six years combined, according to the report.

Reviewing information released by companies over the past six years, Blendoor analysed trends in workplace diversity, inclusion policies and human-resources programmes, such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements and recruitment of underrepresented groups. It found, for example, that Pinterest Inc had the most robust policies and programmes for recruiting women; Mozilla Corp had the best for recruiting underrepresented minorities. McKesson Corp scored highest in Blendoor's rating of support-

ing women in leadership, while HP Inc tops the list for underrepresented minorities in leadership.

The analysis surfaced broader findings, as well, across hundreds of companies. Asian Americans have the widest gap between their representation in entry-level tech jobs and in leadership, and Asian-American women are the least likely to advance to executive roles. Women executives more commonly have C-level jobs that focus on areas such as HR, marketing or diversity, and those roles are among the least likely to be appointed to corporate boards. The analysis also found that 36 per cent of board directors are women or people of colour but that most of those are White women or Asian men.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Injured Jofra ruled out of Kiwi Tests

London: England pacer Jofra Archer, who recently returned to action after missing the now-suspended IPL, has been ruled out of the Test series against New Zealand as his elbow injury has resurfaced. The 26-year-old played a game for his County side Sussex against Kent but had to be pulled out of the game after bowling just five overs. Before this match, the fast bowler had also featured in a game against Surrey last week in a second XI game, bowling 29.2 overs. "England and Sussex seamer Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the est Series against New Zealand starting next month," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement read. — PTI

Das is women's batting coach

New Delhi: Gutsy former India opener Shiv Sunder Das has been appointed the batting coach of the Indian women's team for the tour of England and he is looking forward to use his coaching stint at NCA to guide the youngsters during the trip. Das, who has played 23 Tests between 2000-02, has a decent average of near 35 with more than 1300 runs, including two hundreds and nine half centuries. "It will be good experience and I am looking forward to it," the former Odisha skipper said. He has honed his skills as a batting coach at the NCA under Rahul Dravid's guidance and that, he believes, will help him while trying to solve the technical problems of the batters. — PTI

Modric to lead Croatians at Euro

Zagreb: Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic named a 26-man squad for Euro 2020 on Monday, comprising players who won silver at the 2018 World Cup and their younger peers and led by veteran Luka Modric. "Our latest results were not the best, but I'm an optimist. Our first goal is to get out of the group," Dalic told reporters. Croatia have been drawn in Group 'D', and will play England in London on June 13. Dalic described that opening match as the toughest in the group stage as England "have good quality and we play at Wembley." Croatia then travel to Glasgow where they will face the Czech Republic on June 18 and Scotland four days later. "We have difficult opponents, but I believe in us. We are at our best when the going gets tough," Dalic said. — AFP

Honda's Espargaro comes home 8th

Le Mans, France: Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro encountered all conditions, while Marc Marquez returned to leading a Grand Prix but was ultimately left disappointed at the French MotoGP on Sunday. Australian rider Jack Miller of Ducati made a great start to overtake pole-sitter Fabio Quartararo and then held him off to win the race. Honda's Marquez who started sixth didn't finish the race, while Espargaro held on to his starting position of eighth. It was a dramatic first lap for Espargaro who threw himself into the heat of battle alongside Marquez and Takaaki Nakagami after a strong launch. Contact with Franco Morbidelli forced the Honda rider to drop back and out of the top five. Alex Marquez took top Honda honours for the LCR Honda Team in sixth.

Curry captures 2nd scoring title

Los Angeles: Stephen Curry scored 46 points and claimed his second NBA scoring title as the Golden State Warriors won their sixth straight by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 113-101 on Sunday in San Francisco. Curry finished the regular season with a 32.0-point scoring average, claiming the league title over Washington's Bradley Beal who scored 25 points earlier Sunday to finish at 31.3 points per game. "I had a lot of good looks all night," Curry said. "We were in sync. The guys set great screens for me." The 33-year old Curry won his first scoring title in 2016. He and Michael Jordan are the only NBA players to win a scoring title after turning 33. Curry also joins Jordan, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain as the only players with multiple scoring titles, most valuable players awards and NBA championships. — AFP

TWIST & TURN

ICC says fixing allegations 'implausible', concludes investigation

Dubai, May 17: The ICC on Monday dismissed claims made by news channel *Al Jazeera* that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore "implausible as a fix". *Al Jazeera* in a documentary — 'Cricket's Match Fixers' — released in 2018 had claimed that India's game against England in Chennai in 2016 and the one against Australia in 2017 in Ranchi were fixed. The International Cricket Council (ICC) also cleared five people — filmed by the channel — of any wrongdoing saying even as they behaved in a questionable manner but no credible evidence was available to charge them.

During the programme, an alleged bookie Aneel Munnawar was seen making claims about his dubious connections and history of fixing matches including two Tests involving Virat Kohli's Indian team.

The ICC had launched an investigation into the claims. "The programme alleged that two matches were fixed: India v England in Chennai in 2016 and India v Australia in Ranchi in 2017. To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims," the ICC said in a release after it concluded its investigation.

"All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore implausible as a fix," the release added.

"No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code," the ICC said. — PTI



A screengrab of *Al Jazeera* documentary in which 'bookie' Aneel Munnawar claimed to have fixed matches.

'Sandpapergate' to be reopened

Melbourne, May 17: As Cricket Australia (CA) on Monday made it clear that it was open to a re-investigation into the 'Sandpapergate', former captain Michael Clarke said he won't be surprised if it comes to light that more players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in 2018. He also accused CA of sweeping the issue under the carpet.

"If you are playing sport at the highest level you know your tools that good it's not funny. Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it? Please," Clarke told *Sky Sports*



Michael Clarke

radio on Monday.

"I love how the articles in the paper are, 'It is such a big surprise that Cameron Bancroft has made a...' Actually, if you read his quotes, it is not what he did say as what he didn't say in regards to other people knowing

about 'sandpapergate'," he said.

Following Bancroft's interview, Cricket Australia's integrity team has already approached the pacer for more information.

"What's the surprise? That more than three people knew? I don't think anybody who has played the game of cricket, or knows a little bit about cricket, would know that in a team like that, at the highest level, when the ball is such an important part of the game," Clarke said.

"That's why there's going to be finger-pointing until someone writes

AUSSIE PLAYER CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE

Melbourne, May 17: Australian domestic cricketer Aaron Summers, who has also played in the Big Bash League, was produced in a court in Darwin on Monday after being charged with child abuse. The 25-year-old fast bowler was charged with two counts of possessing child abuse material and one count of grooming a minor.

Arrested last week, Summers appeared in the Darwin Local Court, with police alleging that his mobile phone contained child abuse videos.

Summers represented Deccan Gladiators in the Abu Dhabi T10 league and has also played domestic cricket in Pakistan, the first Australian player to do so. He turned out for Southern Punjab in the Pakistan Cup.

— AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates with the Italian Open trophy after defeating Novak Djokovic in the final. — AFP

Nadal the king of Rome, again

Rome, May 17: Rafael Nadal defeated world number one Novak Djokovic to win a 10th Italian Open title on Sunday.

Second seed Nadal won through 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in 2hr 49min against the defending champion to match Djokovic's record of 36 Masters 1000 titles and lay down a key marker two weeks out from the defence of his Roland Garros crown.

"I really wanted this title. This had been one of the first important titles I won in my career. I'd won 10 in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Roland Garros and really wanted this one too," said 34-year-old Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal were facing each other for the 57th time, having last played in the 2020 French Open final which the Spaniard won easily in straight sets.

The pair have won 15 of the last 17 Rome titles between them, while Nadal leads their head-to-head in finals in the Italian capital 4-2.

Despite losing his opening service game Nadal broke back in the third game hitting twice as many winners as the Serb with 21 in the set.

A dip in form in the second set allowed Djokovic, 33, to break twice and get back into the game.

But Nadal got back on track in the third with Djokovic having played nearly five hours on court on Saturday between his rain-delayed quarter-finals and semi-final matches.

The Spaniard saved two break points on his serve in the fifth game and broke for love for 4-2.

Djokovic saved a first match point in the eighth game but Nadal made no mistake on his second chance in the following to seal his 88th career title after winning in Barcelona earlier this month.

SERENA SAILS PAST TEENAGER

Serena Williams brushed aside the challenge of local teenager Lisa Pigato in the opening round of the WTA tournament in Parma on Monday.

Williams, ranked eighth in the world, beat the 572nd-ranked Pigato, making her WTA debut, 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between the two players.

The 39-year-old American had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her premature exit from the Italian Open, where she crashed out in the second round in what was her first match in nearly three months since her semi-final defeat in the Australian Open.

— AFP



Luis Suarez (centre) celebrates after scoring a goal against Osasuna on Sunday.

— AFP

ATLETICO ON TRACK

Suarez's late strike helps Madrid team edge closer to title

Madrid, May 17: Diego Simeone hailed Luis Suarez as "extraordinary" on Sunday after the Uruguayan scored the goal that could win Atletico Madrid La Liga, his late winner snatching a dramatic 2-1 win over Osasuna.

Atletico trailed Osasuna with nine minutes to go at the Wanda Metropolitano and faced a defeat that would not just have postponed their bid to be champions but allowed Real Madrid, who were beating Athletic Bilbao, to go top with one game left.

Instead, Atletico scored in the 82nd and 88th minutes to pull off a stunning turnaround. Renan Lodi smashed in an equaliser before Suarez proved the hero, firing in from eight yards to spark mass celebrations.

"He's extraordinary," said Diego Simeone. "He came here wanting to prove people wrong,

Victory maintains Atletico's two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

wanting to show that he was a forward still at the top of his game. Who better than him to decide a match that seemed to be getting away from us?"

Atletico's players and substitutes piled onto Suarez in the corner and at full-time, some of their players dropped to their knees, not with ecstasy, but relief, the title now just one win away. "These are moments of happiness," said Suarez. "It was one of the best first halves of the season. We missed a lot of chances, me in particular, but to win the league you have to suffer and today we stepped up."

To be crowned champions with a game to spare, Atletico needed Real Madrid to slip up at San

Mames but Nacho Fernandez put Real ahead in the second half and Atletico's priority quickly became preservation. Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

MESSI'S FUTURE WITH BARCA DOUBTFUL

With Barcelona's season effectively over, Lionel Messi now has a big decision to make. Should he finish out his career at the club that helped him become an all-time soccer great?

Or have the team's struggles to keep winning trophies convinced him that he can find more success in Paris or

Manchester?

Barcelona were left without any chance of winning the Spanish league on Sunday, bowing out the title race in demoralizing fashion after letting Celta Vigo overhaul a goal by Messi and rally for a 2-1 victory.

Barcelona have one game left on the calendar, but with nothing to play for except third place in the league, the club's attention is now fully on the future of their inscrutable star.

Last summer, Messi had said he wanted to leave Barcelona after a campaign that finished without a title and a humiliating 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

When that exit was denied by the club, Messi said that he would focus on this season and put off any decision until this summer when his contract expires on June 30. — Agencies

DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG BOOK BERTHS

Berlin, May 17: Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg clinched Champions League qualification, while Hamburger SV's hopes of rejoining the Bundesliga were put on hold for another year.

Dortmund won 3-1 at Mainz and Wolfsburg drew 2-2 at Leipzig to ensure both sides will finish among the top four to qualify for Europe's top club competition. Leipzig, who secured second place behind league champion Bayern Munich, were already assured of playing in the Champions League next season. Leipzig looked tired in their first game after losing the German Cup final to Dortmund on Thursday, but fought back with goals from Justin Kluivert and a penalty from Sabitzer.

— AP

GOD PUT HIS HAND ON MY HEAD: BECKER

London, May 17: Liverpool kept alive their dreams of qualifying for the Champions League in remarkable circumstances as goalkeeper Alisson Becker scored a 95th-minute winner at West Bromwich Albion.

The emotional Brazilian, who lost his father in a drowning accident in February, dedicated the first goal of his senior career — a fine, glancing header — to his family as he said: "God put his hand on my head today".

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp claimed a partial assist for "the technically insane" goal that came after Mohamed Salah had cancelled out Hal Robson Kanu's opener for West Brom. — Agencies

OVER 80 PER CENT IN JAPAN OPPOSE OLYMPICS THIS YEAR

Tokyo, May 17: More than 80 per cent of Japanese polled oppose hosting the virus-postponed Olympics this year, a new survey showed on Monday, underlining public antipathy less than 10 weeks before the Tokyo Games.

The latest downbeat poll comes after Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency Friday as the nation battles a fourth wave of infections.

The surge in cases has put pressure on the country's healthcare system, with medical professionals repeatedly warning about shortages and burnout.

The weekend poll by the *Asahi Shimbun* daily found 43 per cent of respondents want the 2020 Games cancelled, with 40 per cent wanting a further postponement. Those figures are up from the 35 per cent who backed cancellation in a survey by the paper a month ago and the 34 per cent who wanted a further delay.

"I am one of those in the 80 per cent. I think the Olympics should be postponed. Is it that difficult to postpone it?" passer-by Sumiko Usui, 74, said.

— AFP

Aussies home, CA chief lauds BCCI

Melbourne, May 17: Cricket Australia's interim chief executive Nick Hockley on Monday said he was "grateful" to the BCCI for ensuring a "safe and quick" return of Australia's IPL contingent from India following a stopover in Maldives.

Australian players, including Pat Cummins, David Warner and Steve Smith, arrived in Sydney almost two weeks after the T20 league was indefinitely suspended following a breach in its Covid-19 bio-security bubble. "We are delighted. We're really grateful to the BCCI for getting them home quickly and safely. I haven't spoken to them since they've landed, but obviously we've been in text exchange and I'm sure they'll be very relieved and very appreciative to be home," Hockey was quoted as saying in *Sydney*

Morning Herald.

A group of 38 Australians, including 14 players, had left for Maldives on May 6 after the suspension of IPL 2021 as their government had banned flights from India till May 15 in the wake of unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases there.

Besides the players, the group included support staff and commentators, who were all flown out of India to the Maldives via chartered planes after the IPL's suspension.

The Australia cricketers, support staff and commentators will undergo a 14-day mandatory quarantine across hotels in Sydney before leaving for their respective destinations.

Chennai Super Kings' batting coach Michael Hussey also headed home on Sunday via Doha after testing negative for Covid-19 on Friday.

— PTI