

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | FRIDAY | 21 MAY 2021



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Israel vows to intensify strikes



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Rahul Dravid is India coach for Lanka series

TABLOID

World Meditation Day: For that state of Zen



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WEATHER



Max: 34.9°C
Min: 23.6°C
RH: 48%
Rain: 13 mm

Forecast: Rain or thundershowers likely. Max/Min temp. 38/26°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Navami till 11.06 am
Star: Poorva Phalguni till 3.16pm
Variyam: 10.05 pm to 11.36 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.21 am to 9.12 am; 12.38 pm to 1.30 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HIJRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 8, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.35 am
Zohar: 12.22 pm
Asar: 4.44 pm
Maghrib: 6.48 pm
Isha: 8.03 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.43 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.43 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 12.43 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.59 AM

COUNTER POINT



Our kids are having enough milk... they are using only our urine and dung!

SHORT TAKES

SSC grades to be declared today

Hyderabad: The TS Secondary School Certificate (SSC) grades will be declared on Friday at 11 am on bse.telangana.gov.in, said an official from the state education department on Thursday. The exams were cancelled last month and all students were declared passed. The results have been prepared on the basis of their performance in internal assessments.

■ Full report on Page 2

New tax e-filing site from June 7

New Delhi: The income-tax department is expected to launch a new e-filing web portal for taxpayers, which they use to file routine ITRs and perform other tax-related works from June 7, officials said on Thursday. The existing web portal www.incometaxindiaefiling.gov.in will be shut for six days between June 1-6. Officials said the new portal www.incometaxgov.in will be made more user-friendly.

India sought 40K FB users' data

New Delhi: Facebook said it has received 40,300 requests from the Indian government for user data in the second half of 2020. This was 13.3 per cent higher from the January-June 2020 period when India had made 35,560 total requests, according to the Facebook's Transparency Report. The company restricted access to 878 items in India in response to directions from the Union IT ministry.

Bharat Biotech boosts capacity

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech has decided to boost its vaccine manufacturing capacity for Covaxin by adding yet another production line at its Ankleshwar-based subsidiary Chiron Behring Vaccines. The Hyderabad-based company has already been producing its Covid vaccine at its Hyderabad and Bengaluru facilities.

■ Full report on Page 2

Govt hospitals hog limelight

After KCR's visit to GGH, ministers tour hospitals in districts

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 20

Government hospitals have begun attracting unusual attention all of a sudden, thanks to Chief Minister Chandrashekar Rao's visit to Gandhi Hospital on Wednesday. A day after the CM's visit, several ministers made a beeline to government hospitals in their respective districts to interact with doctors, staff and Covid patients, so as to instil confidence among them and ensure better treatment facilities on par with private hospitals. As the CM's Gandhi Hospital visit evoked a good response from vari-

ous quarters, he wanted to continue his 'government hospitals yatra' along with finance minister T. Harish Rao. The two would visit government hospitals in district headquarters starting with Warangal MGM Hospital on Friday. Energy minister G. Jagadish Reddy visited the government hospitals in Nalgonda district on Thursday. Roads and buildings

minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy visited hospitals in Nizamabad district. Endowments minister A. Indrakaran Reddy went to hospitals in Adilabad district, Panchayat Raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and women and child welfare minister Sathyavathi Rathod did so in Warangal, transport minister Puvvada Ajay in Khammam and agriculture minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy in Mahbubnagar district. Government hospitals and the public health sector are getting more prominence after the Chief Minister took over the health portfolio from Etala Rajendar on May 2.

He has roped in two key ministers — K.T. Rama Rama Rao and Harish Rao — to handle crucial issues of Covid vaccination, injections and recruitment of health staff in government hospitals etc. Rama Rao was appointed as chairman of the state task force on the procurement of vaccines and medicines. He is working on getting increased supplies of vaccines from the Centre and is also engaged in discussions with vaccine makers. Harish Rao is dealing with the day-to-day administration of the health department on behalf of the CM.

■ Page 2: Medical fraternity upbeat over CM's visit

KCR clears V-Cs for 10 varsities, awaits Gov. nod

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

After establishing a full-fledged TS Public Service Commission (TSPSC) on Wednesday, Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has now shifted his focus to state universities that were functioning without vice-chancellors for almost two years now. He has cleared names of VCs for 10 universities and referred them to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, the Chancellor of Universities, for approval, according to official sources. The universities include Osmania, Kakatiya, Telangana, Satavahana, Palamuru, Mahatma Gandhi, JNTU-Hyderabad, Telugu University, Ambedkar Open University and JNAFAU. Following the Governor's nod, the government

The government has referred the names to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan for approval. Following her nod, the appointment orders will be issued in a day or two.

will issue orders appointing V-Cs in a day or two. Administrative and academic activities of all those varsities have been badly affected in the last two years. They could not fill teaching and non-teaching vacancies in the absence of regular V-Cs. A majority of the posts continue to remain vacant. When the V-Cs of these 10 universities retired in July 2019, the state government appointed IAS officers as in-charge VCs, a decision that drew sharp criticism from academicians, the teaching com-

munity, student unions and opposition parties. At one stage, even the Governor expressed displeasure over the inordinate delay and urged the government to expedite the process.

In the meantime, some petitions were filed in the High Court over the government's failure in appointing VCs. The court also rapped the government for the delay on various occasions. The pace at which Chandrasekhar Rao is filling up vacancies and nominating posts in the government has raised hopes of disgruntled TRS leaders, who are eyeing them. TRS leaders, who failed to secure party tickets to contest Assembly and Lok Sabha polls and those who lost elections, are lobbying for nominated posts in corporations.

ITR FILING DUE DATE EXTENDED TILL SEPT. 30

New Delhi, May 20: The government on Thursday extended the due date of filing income tax returns for 2020-21 for individuals by two months till September 30.

The CBDT has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30. For individuals whose accounts are not required to be audited and who file their income tax return using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms the deadline to file ITR is July 31. The deadline for taxpayers, like companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31.

The deadline for issuing Form 16 by employers to employees has been extended by a month till July 15, 2021. — PTI

■ Full report on Page 7

Stinking HCA scrap rises to the top

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Muck in the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has hit the ceiling. With five of the elected Apex Council members up against president Mohammed Azharuddin ever since the acrimonious Annual general meeting (AGM) on April 11, the HCA heavyweights have been landing blows and counters for control of the cricket body. The former Indian captain is in a tight corner and outnumbered. First, it was the appointment of Ombudsman and Ethics Officer on which the two groups weren't on the same page. Now it is the newly appointed CEO who is caught in the crossfire.

Azhar has taken strong objection to the nomination of Suneel Kante for the top executive post and has written to secretaries



R. Vijayanand



Mohammed Azharuddin

HCA president Mohammed Azharuddin has taken strong objection to the nomination of Suneel Kante for CEO. He alleged "violations of the constitution of HCA and procedural infirmities."

The rival group put out Kante's CV that lists him holding a MBA degree and having worked for companies such as Tata Technologies, Ernst & Young and EXL with stints in the UK and the USA.

of affiliated clubs, listing out the anomalies in the appointment, which the other group claims was done at the AGM that continued after the president ended it abruptly (after a ruckus) and walked out

with his supporters without completing the agenda.

Last week, HCA secretary R. Vijayanand sent out a note saying Kante has taken charge as CEO in the presence of the vice-president, secretary, joint

secretary and treasurer and was available at the HCA office at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

Azhar contends Kante does not fulfil the criteria, and threw the rule book at his rivals as he alleged "violations of the constitution of HCA & procedural infirmities in the hiring of the CEO."

"It is only logical to assume that the hiring process was done under the collective responsibility and watchful eyes of the Vice-President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer and Councillor. Neither me, the players' council representatives nor the CAG representative were kept in the loop on this hiring," the HCA president said, accusing them of conspiring to bulldoze the Constitution.

■ Page 2: Hiring process wasn't followed, says Azhar

Black fungus is now a notifiable disease

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The black fungus disease has been declared a notifiable disease by the state government on Thursday. This makes it compulsory for all hospitals to report to the government all such cases that come to their hospitals, ENT clinics, eye hospitals and eye clinics. Those who take up these cases for treatment have to alert the government on the same day. The guidelines for screening, diagnosis and management were issued by the Union health ministry and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). All suspected and confirmed cases must be reported to the health department, the government said, adding there must be strict com-

pliance of protocols.

This will help the government and the private sector identify the incidence of the disease. It will also help in understanding what has gone wrong and led to the emergence of the black fungus disease on a large scale.

A health official from the epidemiology wing of the state government explained, "Lowered cell immunity, improper use of humidifiers for oxygen at home and at makeshift hospitals and uncontrolled diabetes are the three main causes. An audit shows that these cases have risen in home treatment and that will require up-skilling them as all mild cases cannot be shifted to hospitals."

■ Page 2: Fungal infection prolongs morbidity: Centre



Pinarayi Vijayan

VIJAYAN TAKES OATH AS KERALA CM FOR 2ND TIME

Thiruvananthapuram, May 20: CPI(M) veteran Pinarayi Vijayan, who led the Left Democratic Front (LDF) to an unprecedented consecutive victory in the April 6 assembly polls, on Thursday took oath as Chief Minister of Kerala for the second time along with 20 ministers.

Governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oath of office to 77-year-old Vijayan and ministers in a low-key function at the Central Stadium here, which was held completely in accordance with the Covid protocol.

Congratulating Vijayan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted: "Congratulations to Shri @vijayanpinarayi Ji on taking oath as CM and commencing his second term in office."

It is the Marxist veteran's second stint in the top office. While 15 ministers including the Chief Minister took oath in the name of the Indian Constitution, five took it in the name of God.

Representative of the Indian National League in the CPI(M)-led ministry, Ahamed Devarkovil, took oath in the name of Allah. — PTI

VIRUS | ALERT

Paediatricians advise parents to keep children hydrated and physically active

Covid may spark inflammation among kids

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY, 20

With the weather fluctuating, paediatricians have asked parents to be careful about their children in case they show symptoms like fever, cough or vomiting, for they could have contracted the Coronavirus. They point out that a variant of the virus during the second wave has been affecting children. Experts have also cautioned about the multisystem inflammatory syn-

drome in children (MIS-C) that is affecting children recovering from Covid-19 or whose family member had been infected by the virus. Childcare specialists have recommended vitamin D tablets for children who have been barred from playing outside and cannot be in sunlight. They should be exposed to indoor fitness activities, such as stretching exercises and yoga. Further, all children must be kept well-hydrated.

Paediatrician Dr Shivarajani Santosh disclosed

DON'T LOWER GUARD
Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C) can surface within four weeks after children have recovered from Covid-19. They can also acquire it from persons with suspected or proven Coronavirus infection.

During this period, they may get a fever lasting more than 24 hours. It could be associated with rashes over the body, red eyes, red inner mouth; severe stomach pain with vomiting, diarrhoea, severe dullness, cold and seizures.

Prolonged use of multivitamins can harm the child. Consult a paediatrician for required dosage. Eight glasses of water a day is a must for children.

Some children have a slight fever even after the recovery from Covid-19. In such cases, a paediatrician should be consulted.

that most children get only a mild form of Corona-

virus. They may have fever for a maximum of five

days, sore throat, some cough and cold; and mild

■ Page 2: Get kids physically engaged, say doctors

IN BRIEF

Rly: RT-PCR report must for Maha

Hyderabad: The railways has issued an advisory to passengers whose destination is Maharashtra that they must carry an RT-PCR negative report, which is a requirement of the Maharashtra government. The RT-PCR negative certificate will have to be issued up to a maximum of 48 hours before the time of entering Maharashtra.

3 held for black marketing drugs

Hyderabad: Three men, including a pharmacist, were on Thursday held for selling anti-fungal injections that are used to treat black fungus for ₹50,000 per vial, as against the MRP of ₹305. Officials from north zone task force team in Panjagutta also seized five injection vials and three mobiles from them. The accused, Falamam Kashaiah and Sugali Vinod Kumar Naik, both 23, and Mohd Khaja Nizam, 30 were nabbed from Pochamma basti in Panjagutta while in possession of amphotericin B injections, said the police. "Noticing the high demand for the injections, they hatched a plan and with the help of Mohd Khaja Nizam, who works at MNR Pharmacy, started targetting gullible people and sold each vial for ₹50,000," police said.

BHARAT BIOTECH TO BOOST COVAXIN PRODUCTION

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Bharat Biotech has decided to boost its vaccine manufacturing capacity for Covaxin by adding yet another production line at its Ankleshwar-based subsidiary, Chiron Behring Vaccines. The company has already been producing its Covid-19 vaccine at its Hyderabad and Bengaluru facilities.

The company said it plans to produce 20 crore doses of Covaxin per annum in the GMP facilities that are already operational for the production of vaccines. The product availability at Ankleshwar, the company said, will commence from October 2021. The additional manufacturing at Chiron Behring would effectively take the volumes up to 100 crore doses per annum, with its own established campuses.

SSC 2021 GRADES TO BE DECLARED TODAY

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The TS Secondary School Certificate (SSC) grades will be declared on Friday at 11 am on the official website bse.telangana.gov.in. This was stated by an official from the state education department here on Thursday. The exams were cancelled last month and all students were declared passed. The results have been prepared on the basis of their performance in internal assessments.

The government had announced that grades would be awarded duly considering the performances in internal assessment marks for 20 per cent (only one formative assessment was conducted instead of two due to Covid-19) and 20 per cent of internal marks would be scaled up to 100 per cent marks.

Over 5.5 lakh students who have been promoted to the next class will receive their grades as a one-time measure. Last year too, about 5.3 lakh SSC students were assessed for results based on year-long performance due to lockdown that came into force in March.

UTTAM: GIVE FREE TREATMENT TO BPL FAMILIES

Hyderabad: TPCC president and Nalgonda MP N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, on Thursday demanded that the state government ensure that all BPL families in the state get free treatment for Covid-19 and non-BPL families must be given treatment in private hospitals at regulated charges. He also demanded that ambulances should be provided at nominal charges. He said that while many states are providing free treatment, people in the state were being forced to pay for getting the treatment. He said that ₹10 lakh ex gratia is given to the kin of persons who die of Covid in other states.

People shift to meditation for calm

SRIRAM KARRI | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

On turning 43 in May two year ago, Pushpak, a highly successful senior executive with a global fin-tech firm located in the Financial District, made several changes in his lifestyle. These included getting a farm house in the town, buying a new SUV and promising to block his calendar for a family holiday abroad.

His fitness goals included joining a gym, cycling and running. His life revolved around the stress of managing his own wealth portfolio as also his financial goals and ambitions.

Two years later, the SUV means far less to him. His farmhouse seems a trifle less important.

He has lost two members in his extended family, a close friend and several friends. He has failed at least in one case; despite all the money, he failed to get an ICU bed for a close relative in another city.

He now has a new priority: having peace of mind. After many trials, he has chosen an unlikely route – meditation – to achieve his goal.

Speaking on the eve of World Meditation Day, Pushpak says, "I knew it



Spiritual leader Daaji during one of the sessions of Heartfulness meditation.

but missed the significance of such an elementary truth in life. Life is all about breathing. We breathe, we are alive. For all my life, I took it for granted. Today, anxiety and stress, fear and worry are all taking a toll on my life. Corona has raised questions on what we thought was our success. The calm of being aware of my own breath has been the greatest learning."

He's alone now. Hordes of people have been forced by the pandemic and its continuing challenges to seek and find mental peace through meditation.

Kamala Chirravuri, one of the top-notch yoga meditation teachers in Hyderabad, has celebrities — those with serious men-

tal issues and corporate executives — seeking her help. She offers them counselling and personalised yoga-meditation solutions.

"Meditation as defined by Patanjali comprises dharana and dhyana. Dharana is singularly focusing all our conscious attention on one object, the starting point of meditation. Dhyana is the highest level we can achieve, wherein we are immersed and become one with the flow," she says.

When asked about her heightened interest in meditation, Kamala replies, "It feels like we are in the midst of a mythological pralaya. To face the unrest outside, we must find strength, peace and calm within. Once we learn to

focus our attention within, and become aware of our breath, we find a center and we reduce the imbalance that causes stress, anxiety and unrest."

A trainer in the Krishnamacharya tradition, Kamala is comfortable with the diversity of meditation techniques. "There are many techniques from Vipassana, the focus on breath and sensations, to chanting of 'Om' to visualizations. Anything that works for you! But the one constant in life is our breathing."

Sanjay Sehgal, a US-based master and guide of Heartfulness meditation, says, "In our technique, we begin with thought as a focal point and dive deeper into the heart. This is a 76-



Kamala Chirravuri

years-old technique of diving deeper and achieving a higher level of consciousness."

He says, "People may reach out for various reasons. Relieving your stress or finding peace is easy. I often say, you can find peace with a peg of good whiskey or if you can avoid fighting with your spouse. But finding sustainable inner peace, to be a better person, is harder, which is where we take you to."

The heart-centered meditation, which has millions of practitioners, over 14,000 trainers and over 260 ashrams in 130 nations, renders its service all free.

When quizzed about the recent spurt in interest, Sehgal says, "Even a basic practice of pranayama

will help you at a physical level. It expands your lungs and eases the flow of air from your nose to inside. It can most certainly help during Covid times. Bad things can happen to anyone. But a great gift of meditation is that it helps you alter and find a better sense of control over your own reactions and responses. I have seen in my own family that those who meditate had a distinctly different and qualitatively better response to the emergencies arising out of the Covid pandemic than to those who don't meditate."

Trainers have adopted technology in the Covid season to ensure that meditation can be taught in the virtual mode. From an institutional meditation like Heartfulness, whose global headquarters is in Hyderabad and whose spiritual leader Daaji has held remote virtual sessions to individual trainers like Kamala, to those who are doing sessions through Zoom or Google Meets, technology is helping bring together the agitated with those who guide you to inner peace.

For more, you can contact www.heartfulness.org or access the Hearts App or write to anilkamala@gmail.com for a session.

CENTRE: FUNGAL INFECTION PROLONGS MORBIDITY

From Page 1

The Union health ministry said a new challenge has emerged in the form of black fungus disease. This has been reported from many states, from amongst Covid19 patients, especially those on steroid therapy and deranged sugar control.

"This fungal infection is leading to prolonged morbidity and mortality amongst Covid19 patients," Lav Agarwal, joint secretary in the Union health ministry, said.

The treatment of this fungal infection requires multidisciplinary approach consisting of eye surgeons, ENT specialists, general surgeon, neurosurgeon and dental maxillo facial surgeon, among others, and institution of amphotericin-B injection as an antifungal medicine.

TMREIS EXTENDS LAST DATE FOR ADMISSIONS

Hyderabad: Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society (TMREIS) has extended to May 31 the last date for online submission of applications for admission into classes V, VI, VII, VIII and Intermediate first year for academic year 2021-22. TMREIS secretary B Shafiqullah requested students and parents to utilise this opportunity and submit online applications through the TMREIS mobile app or website tmreis.telangana.gov.in.

Applications can also be submitted at offices of the schools and junior colleges by those who do not have internet facilities. Further details can be gathered from TMREIS website or by contacting district minority.

Hiring process wasn't followed, says Azhar

FROM PAGE 1

"The rule says there shall be an appropriate induction process laid down by the Apex Council for the CEO and the managers, which shall include a fair and transparent process of appointment," Azhar added.

"As per the advertisement issued on October 27, 2020, for CEO & CFO, the six requirements were: Management degree with sufficient experience in different layers of organisation; knowledge of budget planning and financial prudence; operational knowledge of cricket operations; ability to implement innovative administrative methods; should possess the ability to handle regulatory bodies and should be a team player.

"Twelve CVs were received on email between October 27, 2020 and November 11, 2020. The CV of the selected candidate announced by the Secretary is not in the list of applications

received on email. I would be surprised if the 12 applicants were even called for an interview. Shortlisted applicants should have been tested by a panel of experts from the fields of cricket, finance, management, legal, compliance & administration. None of this was followed.

"The law also says he should have management experience of at least 5 years as CEO/MD of a company having a turnover of at least ₹100 crores besides having knowledge & familiarity with cricket & other sports; understanding of the financial position & fiscal direction of HCA; knowledge of operations of cricket administration & overall policy; clarity on role, division of responsibilities & hierarchy and familiarity with regulatory & legal responsibilities & attendant risks. All the above requirements of law were blatantly violated," Azhar alleged.

The rival group put out Kante's CV that lists him

holding a Master in Business Administration degree and having worked for companies such as Tata Technologies, Ernst & Young and EXL with stints in the UK and the USA.

Ironically, in the previous episode, it was Azhar who went ahead with the appointment of an ombudsman which was challenged by the group over procedures and violations of norms.

Azhar says there's an enquiry initiated against some members of the Apex Council and that they should get their names cleared by the authority before administration can resume and Council meetings convened.

The opposite group is levelling charges, raking up Azhar's past and pending CBI cases on match fixing and betting.

This ugly confrontation is definitely dragging Hyderabad cricket through mud, and the game looks far from gentlemanly now.

Final yr medicos join Covid battle

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

In a follow-up to the directives from the central and state governments to final-year medical students to join duty and serve in Covid wards, over 250 students from medical colleges in the state would do special training outside of their regular fields so as to help those in need.

The government's directive prompted a team of doctors and public health experts in the state to

hold special online webinars to inform and teach students on practical treatments and differences between handling and risk assessment during the first and second Covid waves.

The team led by Dr P.S. Vijayender, a public health expert and professor at one of the medical colleges in the state, has been taking these classes for the past five days. They started it with about 30-40 volunteers from final year medical courses, and are now adding about 100 every day.

"My idea to start this training was to help lift off a part of the burden on our medical practitioners. These students on the way to become healthcare workers need to be able to help the needy efficiently. For that, they need expert training from as many doctors as possible before they jump into the real world. So far, practitioners like Dr Karuna Madap, a pediatrician and another doctor from AIIMS Rishikesh have helped with the classes," said Dr Vijayender.

150 GET ADMITTED TO ENT HOSPITAL: BLACK FUNGUS

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD MAY 20

As many as 150 persons have been admitted with black fungus infection or mucormycosis at the Government ENT Hospital here in the last three days. The maximum of these patients were from different districts of Telangana state who came in once the facility was declared the nodal centre for treatment.

Doctors say they have only 50 unoccupied beds and the hospital is now full with in-patients of black fungus infection. Severe cases have been admitted where the infection is in the nose and space behind the eyes. Mild cases of sinus are being treated at out-patient level and oral medicines prescribed.

The out-patient ENT department is also seeing a huge rush of patients as Covid-recovered patients are coming to the hospital for check-ups. Panic about the disease is also causing many to get themselves checked.

Doctors have advised the recovered patients to wear masks at home, which will help in prevention. From the admitted patients, it was found that only 30 per cent of them had uncontrolled sugar levels while the others were found to have side-effects of steroids and lowered cell-immunity due to the virus.

Mucormycosis in maximum patients has affected the eyes and this will require ear, nose, throat and eye doctors to step in with help in the treatment process.

A doctor at the hospital says, "There are a few patients whose both eyes have turned black. These will require aggressive treatment. The challenge is to save lives and also save vision in at least one eye. These patients will be attended to on a priority basis."

Stocks of amphotericin B are sufficient, stated doctors, adding, they are being directly supplied by the Telangana State Medical Devices and Infrastructure Development Corporation.

The cases in ENT Hospital indicate more men than females suffering from the disease. The ratio is 9 males per one female for every 10 cases. The cases among the age group of 30-50 years are high. Those who were under home treatment and did not take steroids have also reported severe infections of black fungus.

Dr Manish Gupta, senior ENT surgeon at the hospital, explained: "The Covid19 virus reduces cell immunity, making the human body susceptible to fungus in the air. Improving cell immunity in recovery is important." With the antifungal medicines available, doctors are confident that after surgical intervention in the treatment will be effective as the medicine removes the fungus completely from the body.

AYUSH HAS CURE FOR BLACK FUNGUS: CHIEF

Hyderabad: The AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homoeopathy) department appears to be on the offensive in the battle against mucormycosis or black fungus infections with its director claiming that AYUSH systems can help fight the disease. After claiming that ayurvedic formulations could help in control of black fungus disease among Covid patients on Wednesday, a day later she said that unani formulation could be used as prophylactics for Covid-19 patients to help boost their immunity and possibly help prevent subsequent black fungus infections among those vulnerable to the disease.

STORIES OF HOPE

Team of Sikh youths helps patients in isolation

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD MAY 20

Twenty friends from the Sikh community came forward and extended their help to Covid19 patients here in the past 15 days. Some 35 families have been benefited by their efforts so far.

They are supplying free oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators and required medicines to those who are getting treated in home isolation.

This group lives in the surrounding areas of Ameerpet. Its members are of different age-groups and from different backgrounds. This group was formed with six members on May 1. They initially bought four cylinders, then

slowly the team's number grew up to 20, having equipment of 21 oxygen cylinders and four oxygen concentrators. Along with these, free medication is supplied.

Kunaldeep Singh, working in a corporate sector, said, "This idea occurred to us when we were sitting at the gurudwara at Ameerpet and discussing how we can be of some use to these suffering people. We friends wanted to start doing something immediately. Initially, we decided to distribute free food. But, the need for oxygen emerged. We changed the plan to procure oxygen cylinders and oxygen concentrators."

"A Covid patient we helped is Shanker Yadav. We provided him oxygen



Sikh community members supply free oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators to Covid-19 patients.

cylinder for five days. He has recovered."

Sukwinder Kaur said, "Due to this pandemic, I

lost seven close family members. This made me think and I decided to do something for those affect-

● THIS GROUP lives in the surrounding areas of Ameerpet. Its members are of different age-groups and from different backgrounds. This group was formed with six members on May 1. They initially bought four cylinders.

ed by this disease. When the idea was shaping up, we knew it will be a great help to many. We started pooling in money. As our activities progressed, many more came forward to give us funds. We expanded our services. We hope more people will join us in this endeavour."

Mahesh Chand Agarwal, a beneficiary from Balkampet, said, "My wife

got infected. She required oxygen. I got this number on a social network site and contacted them. They immediately came with the oxygen cylinder. Without charging us for the service, they fixed the oxygen and left. At that time, it was a life-saver. Our family is thankful to them."

Vishal Temker, another beneficiary, lives in Vidyanagar. "My father got infected. He was treated in a private hospital for seven days. When he was discharged, his condition was not stable. Doctors advised that he be kept on oxygen support. I knew one of the group members doing this activity. When contacted, they helped us with the setting up of the oxygen cylinder free of cost. This was a great help to us."

are found to be false.

IN BRIEF

POLICE THRASH WOMAN FOR NOT WEARING MASK

Sagar, May 20: A woman was allegedly beaten up and dragged by some police personnel on a road for not wearing a mask while going out to buy vegetables amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar district.

After a video of the incident, which took place on Monday in Rahli town, went viral, a police official said the woman allegedly hit a female cop first.

The woman and her daughter were stopped by police around 11 am on Monday for not wearing masks.

The police tried to take them away in a jeep to an open jail as punishment, but the duo resisted and allegedly hit a police-woman.

In the video, some police personnel, including a female cop, were seen beating up the woman, pushing her down and dragging her by her hair.

They were trying to shift her in the police jeep while she was resisting it and in the process, they thrashed her.

However, Rahli's sub-divisional officer of police Kamal Singh said the "video showed only half of the incident".

"The woman hit a female cop first and the latter had bruises on her face of an injury caused by nails," he said.

ONE DETAINED FOR REMDESIVIR BLACK MARKETING

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 20

Driver of spouse of a minister in the Shivraj Singh Chouhan was on Thursday detained in Indore for interrogation in connection with the alleged black marketing of life saving drug Remdesivir.

Govind Singh Rajput, driver of wife of state irrigation minister Tulsi Silawat was picked up by police in Indore for interrogation after Punit Agrawal, driver of a local government doctor, dragged him in the case.

Govind was, however, let off after interrogation.

"Govind denied his role in the black marketing of the life saving injection. The driver said he had procured two Remdesivir injections from Punit after he tested positive for coronavirus.

"He, however, did not use the injections since he had recovered from Covid-19 and returned the two injections to Punit", a senior police officer of Indore told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted in the interest of investigation in the case. "We may call him again for interrogation if needed", he indicated. Earlier on Monday, Punit, driver of local government doctor Poornima Gadhria, was 'caught red handed' by police while selling Remdesivir injections at inflated prices in Indore.

Interestingly, Punit told the reporters in Indore while being produced in the local court on Tuesday that he had procured Remdesivir injections from Govind.

SONIA URGES MODI TO HELP OUT COVID ORPHANS

New Delhi, May 20: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide free education in Navodaya Vidyalayas to children orphaned due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In her letter, Sonia Gandhi said the nation owes it to children to give them hope and provide them a robust future after their tragedy.

"I am writing to request you to consider providing free education at the Navodaya Vidyalayas to children who have lost either both parents or an earning parent on account of the Covid-19 pandemic," the Congress chief said.

"I feel that as a nation, we owe it to them to give them hope for a robust future after the unimaginable tragedy that has befallen them," Sonia Gandhi said.

The BJP, however, took a swipe at the Congress chief, saying her idea of looking after kids orphaned during the pandemic is "outdated and copied".

"Several state governments are already doing it except perhaps those run by the Congress. Instead of writing to the PM, she should have written to Amarinder Singh and Ashok Gehlot," BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi shared the letter on Twitter.



Mass cremation of Covid-19 victims at a crematorium set up on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Thursday.

- PTI

Vaccine will be available for all by December: Nadda

India conducts 20.55 lakh Coronavirus tests in single day, highest so far

Jaipur, May 19: BJP president J.P. Nadda said on Wednesday the coronavirus vaccine will be available for all in the country by December.

He also accused the Congress of spreading anarchy at the time of the pandemic.

Nadda was reviewing the Covid-19 situation in Rajasthan in a virtual interaction with BJP state president Satish Poonia and party MPs from the state, a party statement said.

Nadda said the prime minister had warned the chief ministers of the states in March itself and asked them to be prepared for the second wave of coronavirus.

"India developed two indigenous vaccines for the first time in just nine months, which have been administered to 18 crore

Indians so far. By the end of December, the vaccine will be available to all and its calendar has been set," he said.

Nadda said the Modi government at the Center has ensured the availability and supply of oxygen and medicines to all the states.

He said that real face of the Congress has been exposed after revelation of its "tool kit".

Even at the time of the pandemic, the Congress is trying to spread anarchy in the country and is working to destroy the morale of the people by spreading confusion among them, he alleged.

Meanwhile, more than 20.55 lakh Covid tests were conducted in a span of 24 hours, the highest-ever conducted in a single day in India, while the daily positivity rate stands at 13.44 per cent, the Union

Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulatively, 20,55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country. India's daily Covid-19 recoveries outnumbered the daily new cases for the seventh consecutive day. A total of 3,69,077 patients recuperated in a span of 24 hours as against 2,76,110 infections being reported during the same period, the ministry said.

India's cumulative recoveries have reached 2,23,55,440.

Besides India recorded less than 3 lakh new cases for four consecutive days now.

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana reported 77.17 per cent of the 2,76,110 new cases regis-

tered in a span of 24 hours.

Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 34,875, followed by Karnataka with 34,281 new cases.

The ministry said India's total active cases have decreased to 31,29,878 with a decline of 96,841 cases being registered in the total active caseload in a day. It now comprises 12.14 per cent of the country's total cases.

Karnataka, Maha-rashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh cumulatively account for 69.23 per cent of India's total active cases. The National Mortality Rate currently stands at 1.11 per cent, the ministry said.

A total of 3,874 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for

72.25 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (594). Karnataka follows with 468 daily deaths.

The ministry also said that the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has reached 18.70 crore. A total of 18,70,09,792 vaccine doses have been administered through 27,31,435 sessions, according to the provisional report till 7 am.

These include 96,85,934 healthcare workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose and 66,67,394 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 1,46,36,501 FLWs who have received the first dose, 82,56,381 FLWs who have taken the second dose and 70,17,189 beneficiaries in the 18-44 years age group who have received the first dose.

- PTI

NDRF to set up spl. unit to deal with pandemics

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

Learning from the experience of the devastation caused by Corona, Home Ministry plans to set up a highly specialised Division within the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to deal "exclusively with pandemics."

As of now the mandate given to NDRF allows it to deal with all "natural and manmade disasters" like cyclone, floods, earthquake, chemical or gas leakage, building collapse etc. The NDRF is a highly specialised force and has been fully trained and equipped to deal with such disasters.

But now the Home Ministry is planning to set up a high specialised unit within the NDRF which will also deal with pandemics like Corona or other diseases. This will not only allow NDRF to have specialised medical teams but also the necessary infrastructure to set up health facilities at a short notice.

Home Ministry sources said they were examining the proposal and looking into the legality whether it will have to approach the Union cabinet for sanction or the new division can be set up through an executive order itself. Senior officials said the devastation

caused by Corona's second wave has also been a huge learning curve for Central agencies. Shortage of oxygen, critical medicine, ventilator and hospital beds had led to a massive health crisis across the country as Corona cases registered a massive surge during the second wave.

So what the Home Ministry now plans is to put in place what is being described as a "modern and professional unit" that can deal with all health related pandemic in future. Even now both central para-military forces and defence forces had worked over time in setting up temporary hospitals and health car facilities, transporting oxygen and other essential items. But now the government proposes to have a dedicated agency which will anticipate, prepare and provide all necessary assistance during the such health crisis.

Senior Ministry officials argued that NDRF is an extremely competent agency with tremendous experience of dealing with natural or manmade disasters. Now with additional resources in terms manpower and equipment, the Force will be able to handle these health crisis and Home Ministry has started working in that direction, officials said.

2nd Covid wave hits K'taka hard

Bengaluru, May 20: One-third of the total Covid cases and fatalities since the outbreak of the pandemic in Karnataka took place in the last two-and-half months when the second wave hit the State, reveals official data.

The second wave did not spare children, teenagers and youth in their 20s who accounted for a number of infections and fatalities.

According to the data, 7,06,449 people got infected, of which 7,980 people lost their lives between March 1 and May 15.

However, since the outbreak of the pandemic last year, 21,71,931 contracted Covid, out of which 21,434 lost their lives.

The data shows that 20,206 children up to the age of nine were infected in the second wave which killed 17 of them, whereas 51,673 teenagers contracted the disease, of which 19 lost their lives.

People in their 20s accounted for 1,53,174 infections of which 151 lost their lives. According to the data, as many as 467 people in their thirties, 1,037 in their 40s and 1,717 in their 50s died of Covid in the second wave.

People above 60 years of age were the worst hit in this second wave of pandemic.

Out of 93,483 infected, 2,198 sexagenarians lost their lives whereas 1,584 people among the 28,658 infected persons in their

● The second wave did not spare children, teenagers too. The data shows that 20,206 children up to the age of nine were infected in the second wave which killed 17 of them, whereas 51,673 teenagers contracted the disease, of which 19 lost their lives.

● People in their 20s accounted for 1,53,174 infections of which 151 lost their lives.

70s succumbed to Covid-19. The mortality rate among the people in their 80s and 90s was very high compared to any other age group.

Out of 81,65 infected octogenarians, 674 died of Covid taking the Case Fatality Rate (CFR) to 8.3 per cent.

Among those in the 90s, the CFR is 11.9 per cent with 970 infections and 115 deaths.

The centenarians, however, were lucky enough to escape the wrath of the second wave of pandemic.

Out of 68 infected, only one person died.

Dr Sheela Chakravathy, Director of Internal Medicine at Fortis Healthcare, said Covid infection and its reaction to the virus causes injuries to the lungs.

"Since elderly people have poor immunity, they end up having infections. A majority of youngsters are affected because of cytokine release," Dr Chakravathy said.

S'pore talks of anti-misinformation law after AK demands flight ban

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

New Delhi on Thursday evening refused to react to media reports that quoted Singapore's High Commissioner to India Simon Wong as saying that his country reserves the right to invoke its anti-misinformation law

POFMA (Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act) against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for his recent comments that had alleged that there was a Singapore variant of the Covid virus and that flights from Singapore to India should be stopped.

Asked about the Singapore High Commissioner's

ments, ministry of external affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said his ministry "does not have anything to add" other than the statements already issued by the MEA earlier on Wednesday on the entire controversy.

Indian media reports quoted Mr. Wong as saying, "Prominent political office holders must have a responsibility not to propagate falsehoods. In Singapore, we have Protection from Online Falsehoods & Manipulation Act. It is meant to mitigate the spread of misinformation, so we reserve the right to invoke POFMA on some of the comments and assertions made by the honorable

chief minister on this topic".

Singapore had on Wednesday summoned India's High Commissioner there and lodged a strong protest against a recent tweet by the Delhi Chief Minister that claimed there was a Singapore variant of the Coronavirus that was harmful to children, following which the Indian High Commissioner promptly told Singapore authorities that the Delhi Chief Minister had "no competence to pronounce on Covid variants or civil aviation policy".

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had also then swiftly "clarified" that "the Delhi CM does not speak for India".

Lauding Singapore's dispatching of military aircraft with oxygen supplies recently to help India battle the second Covid wave, Jaishankar - in a thinly-veiled barb at Mr. Kejriwal - had lamented that "irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships".

Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan - who had lambasted Mr. Kejriwal and asked him to "stick to facts - then thanked Jaishankar for the clarification.

Mr. Kejriwal's tweet earlier on Tuesday when he called for a ban on flights from Singapore to India had led to a furore in the tiny nation.

FIGHTING | COVID

Coronavirus cases in the country peaked in Sept. and there was a decline in cases from Oct.

3rd wave likely if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist

New Delhi, May 20: If the vaccination drive against coronavirus is not ramped up and Covid-19 appropriate-behaviour is not maintained, there is a possibility of a third wave of the pandemic in 6-8 months, said M. Vidyasagar, a scientist involved in the Sutra Model which uses mathematics to project the trajectory of Covid-19. He, however, stressed the Sutra Model has not predicted any third wave and it is working on it.

The Indian Institutes of Technology-Hyderabad professor cited a paper by Italian researchers on infected people with decreasing antibodies, which give some sort of

immunity, in six months.

"If the antibodies are lost, then there is a chance of immunity going down. In this case, vaccination has to be ramped up and Covid-19 appropriate-behaviour must be practiced. If not then there is a possibility of a third wave in 6-8 months," Vidyasagar said. "We are also adding the aspects of immunity and vaccination in our model for our future forecasts," he added.

According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with Covid-19 for at least eight months after they were infected.

A recent sero-survey by

● According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with Covid-19 for at least eight months after they were infected.

the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) suggested that the neutralising antibodies declined significantly after five-six months, making people prone to reinfections. The coronavirus cases in the country peaked in September 2020 and there was a nationwide decline of new cases starting in October.

"Using more stringent measures (more than 30

per cent inhibition of surrogate receptor-spike protein binding), the loss of neutralisation may be even higher.

"We speculate that this may be related to recurrence of outbreaks in March 2021, after the peak in September 2020," the IGIB paper said on the second wave that started raging from late March.

K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, had said on May 5 that as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves. Two days later, he said there may not be a third wave of coronavirus in the country, if strong

measures are taken and effectively implemented at the state, district and city-level.

"If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere.

"The guidance about precautions, about surveillance, about containment, about treatment and about tests. This insidious asymptomatic transmission can be stopped if we follow the guidelines. This sounds difficult, it is difficult and we can and must do it," VijayRaghavan had said. - PTI



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visits Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College & Hospital to review treatment facilities for Covid in Barpeta.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

IMPEACHMENT VOTE AGAINST SLOVENIA PM

Ljubljana, May 20: Less than two months before Slovenia takes over the EU's rotating presidency, conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa is battling fires at home and abroad — including an impeachment motion.

The vote in the Alpine country's parliament is the latest crisis for the combative 62-year-old, known for his support for former US president Donald Trump and his outspoken Twitter posts.

Four centre-left opposition parties have initiated the impeachment bid, alleging among other things that Jansa mismanaged the country's coronavirus response.

With the nation of two million suffering a relatively high proportion of pandemic deaths compared to other EU countries, the premier's public approval ratings have slumped to their lowest point since he took office in March 2020.

13 KILLED IN AFGHAN ROAD BOMBINGS

Kabul, May 20: Roadside bombings in southern and central Afghanistan killed 13 people, including nine members of one family, officials said Thursday. Meanwhile, militants stopped a bus in western Afghanistan, ordered three men to get out and shot and killed them. No one has claimed responsibility for the latest attacks. The three men on the bus were ethnic Hazaras.

The government blamed the Taliban, who denied responsibility. Previous attacks on Hazaras, who are mostly Shiite Muslims, have been claimed by the Islamic State group. Large swaths of war-ravaged Afghanistan have been littered with bombs and land mines.

Many have been planted by insurgents to target military convoys but often kill civilians instead. One of the two bombs struck a car carrying a family of 12 in southern Helmand province late on Wednesday, said provincial police spokesman Zaman Hamdarad. Several of the nine family members who died were children.

NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM LEADER BADLY WOUNDED

Kano, May 20: Nigerian Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau has been seriously wounded after trying to kill himself to avoid capture during clashes with rival Islamic State-allied jihadists in the north of the country, two intelligence sources said Thursday.

Shekau's Boko Haram faction and fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province had been battling in northeastern Borno state, where ISWAP militants have become the dominant force in Nigeria's more than decade-long jihadist insurgency. Shekau, who made international headlines when his men kidnapped nearly 300 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, has been reported dead several times since Boko Haram first began its insurgency in 2009.

After a series of clashes, Shekau and some of his fighters were surrounded on Wednesday by ISWAP jihadists in Boko Haram's Sambisa forest stronghold, where they demanded he surrender, one intelligence source said.

2012 CAMPAIGN FINANCING: SARKOZY ON TRIAL

Paris, May 20: The trial of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy on charges that his unsuccessful 2012 reelection bid was illegally financed has formally started on Thursday. The scandal had thrown his conservative party into turmoil. Sarkozy, 66, is facing allegations that he spent almost twice the maximum legal amount of 22.5 million euros (\$27.5 million) on the presidential race he lost to Socialist Francois Hollande. He has denied wrongdoing. Sarkozy wasn't present Thursday at the Paris court, where he was represented by his lawyers.

The trial is scheduled to last until June 22. Sarkozy, who was president from 2007 to 2012, faces up to one year in prison and a fine of 3,750 euros (\$4,580), if found guilty. The proceedings got underway less than three months after Sarkozy was convicted of corruption and influence peddling in another case. He has appealed that verdict. According to the judicial investigation in his case, Sarkozy "indisputably benefitted from fraud that allowed him to have, during his 2012 campaign, resources much superior to what the law authorised."



Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korcock (C) and his counterpart from the Czech Republic Jakub Kulhanek (2nd R) listen to remarks by their Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi (L) during a tour of a building that was hit by a rocket fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip, in the Israeli city of Petah Tikva on Thursday. — AFP

Israel unleashes strikes as chances of truce rise

Bibi pushes back against US calls to wind down offensive

Gaza City, May 20: Israel unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, and Hamas fired more rockets, even as expectations rose that a cease-fire could be coming.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back against calls from the US to wind down the Gaza offensive, appearing determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career.

Still, officials close to the negotiations say they expect a truce to be announced in the next 24 hours. In another possible sign of progress, Netanyahu scheduled a meeting later Thursday with his Security Cabinet, where the issue of a cease-fire was likely to be debated.

Explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the pre-dawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in Khan Younis. There were also heavy airstrikes on a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting "military infrastructure," as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City. With hundreds already killed in the worst fighting since Israel and Hamas' 2014 war, US President Joe Biden told Israel on Wednesday that he expected "a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire" — but Netanyahu pushed back, saying he was "determined to continue this operation until its aim is met."

It marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began and poses a difficult test of the US-Israel relationship early in Biden's presidency. Still, an Egyptian intelligence official said a cease-fire was likely late Thursday or early Friday, after the US appeal bolstered Cairo's own efforts to halt the fighting.

The official spoke on

Stop hostilities at once, says UN chief

United Nations, May 20: The UN chief is urging an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers at the start of a UN General Assembly emergency meeting.

The session is expected to hear from about 100 speakers, including 12 ministers mainly from Arab and Islamic countries. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Thursday's in-person meeting in the assembly chamber that he and the UN Mideast envoy are engaged in "extensive diplomatic efforts" in the region, including with Egypt, Jordan and Qatar, to stop the fighting.

He called on all members of the international community "to do everything in their power to enable the parties to conflict to step back from the brink." The UN chief also called on Israel and Hamas "to allow for mediation efforts to intensify in order to bring the fighting to an end." Guterres implicitly criticised Israel and Hamas for violating "the laws of war" which ban indiscriminate attacks

and attacks against civilians and civilian property as well as attacks on military targets that cause disproportionate civilian casualties.

He urged Israeli authorities to abide by the laws, "including the proportionate use of force" and called on them "to exercise maximum restraint in the conduct of military operations." He urged Hamas and other militant groups "to stop the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods into civilian population centres in Israel."

— AP

Palestine cries genocide

United Nations, May 20: The top Palestinian diplomat is accusing Israel of committing "genocide" against Palestinian families and urging the international community to protect the Palestinian people until their freedom is assured. Foreign Minister Riad Al-Malki told Thursday's emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly on the conflict between

Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers that "every country in the world has a responsibility to ensure that peace, justice and freedom prevail." He urged the assembly ensure that Israel is held accountable for killing innocent Palestinians and is not provided with arms.

He said the presence of a dozen ministers, almost all from Arab and Islamic

condition of anonymity to discuss the delicate talks. Khalid Okasha, director of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, which has close ties to the government, also said a cease-fire was likely in that timeframe, as did Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official. Visiting the region,

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Israel has "the right to defend itself against such unacceptable attacks." But he also expressed concern about the rising number of civilian victims and voiced support for truce efforts.

Even as the diplomatic efforts appeared to gather

strength, an Israeli airstrike smashed into the Khawaldi family's two-story house in Khan Younis, destroying it. The 11 residents, who were sleeping outside of the home out of fear, were all wounded and hospitalised, said Shaker al-Khozondar, a neighbour.

— AP

countries, sends a clear message: "Stop the violence." He responded to Israel's claims of acting in self-defence by saying: "How can an occupying power have the right to defend itself when a whole people under occupation is deprived of the very same rights?" He said the Palestinians have informed the Biden administration.

— AP

Another 10 launches are planned to deliver the station's other two modules, various components and supplies, and a three-person crew. The launch of Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, was considered a success although China was criticised for allowing the uncontrolled reentry of part of the rocket that carried it into space.

Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

Nasa Administrator Sen. Bill Nelson said at the time that China had failed to meet responsible standards regarding space debris. China's space programme has suffered relatively few setbacks since it first put an astronaut into orbit in 2003, although the space station launch was delayed by the failure of an earlier version of the massive Long March 5B rocket.

Earlier this month, China also landed a probe and its accompanying rover on

Lavrov says talks with Blinken constructive

Reykjavik, May 20: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday praised his talks with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken as "constructive" and "useful", saying both sides understand the need to mend ties.

"The conversation appeared constructive to me," Lavrov was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies after nearly two hours of talks with Blinken in Reykjavik.

The discussions were the first high-level ones between the two countries since Joe Biden became president.

"There is an understanding of the need to overcome the unhealthy situation in ties between Moscow and Washington," Lavrov told Russian reporters after meeting Blinken on the sidelines of the Arctic Council meeting in Iceland.

Since taking over the White House in January, Biden has taken a strong line against Russia, going as far as describing Putin as a "killer" — in sharp contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump, who was accused of complacency towards the Russian president. But signs have emerged that the two sides are seeking to appease each other.

Lavrov said there were "a lot of logjams" in the two countries' ties and working through them was not easy.

"But I sensed the determination of Antony Blinken and his team to do it. We will not be found wanting," he said.

"I believe the talks were useful," he added, saying the two sides also looked into the work of US and

● **THE DISCUSSIONS** were the first high-level ones between the two countries since Joe Biden became president.

● **SINCE TAKING** over the White House in January, Biden has taken a strong line against Russia, going as far as describing Putin as a "killer" — in sharp contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump.

● **BUT SIGNS** have emerged that the two sides are seeking to appease each other.

Russian diplomatic missions following tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats.

"We've agreed to continue our joint actions — which are developing rather successfully — on regional conflicts where US and Russian interests overlap," he also said.

Lavrov and Blinken discussed Washington's proposal to organise a summit between the Russian and US leaders, possibly in June. But asked by reporters if Russia formally agreed to the summit between Biden and Vladimir Putin, Lavrov did not reply.

He said however that the two had agreed to prepare proposals for the top-level summit, including those on strategic stability. He said he had reiterated Moscow's suggestion of beginning broad dialogue with the United States on strategic stability, stressing that Blinken did not refuse.

"But experts will have yet to work on it," he added.

— AFP

UK TO REUNIFY RAIL NETWORK UNDER GOVT

London, May 20: Britain plans to bring the national rail network back under government control, reversing one of the most controversial elements of the privatisation drive carried out by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Under plans announced Thursday, the government will create a new entity known as Great British Railways that will own all railroad infrastructure, set most fares and schedules, collect ticket revenue and run a single ticketing website. Private companies will continue to operate trains under contracts with the state.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government said the move would end "a quarter-century of fragmentation" that created a confusing, expensive patchwork of privately run rail franchises. That system was created after the railroads were privatised in the 1990s under former Prime Minister John Major who, like Johnson, led a Conservative Party government. "I am a great believer in rail, but for too long passengers have not had the level of service they deserve," Johnson said in a statement.

The privatisation of Britain's railroads followed the sell off of other state-owned assets that began under PM Margaret Thatcher.

China 2nd protest over US navy move

Beijing, May 20: China on Thursday issued its second protest in as many days over US naval activity in the region, accusing a US ship of intruding into its territorial waters surrounding the Paracel island group in the South China Sea.

A statement from the Southern Theater Command said the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur committed the "illegal" action on Thursday, prompting Chinese forces to mobilise and demand it leave the area.

The US action "artificially increases regional security risks, and is prone to misunderstandings, misjudgments, and accidents at sea," the statement said. It called the ship's manoeuvres "unprofessional and irresponsible," saying Chinese forces were determined to defend the country's sovereign claims while maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea.

The US refuses to recognise China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea and regularly conducts what it calls freedom of navigation operations to assert its right to sail in international waters. China on Wednesday issued a complaint over the Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region. While the strait is in international waters, China claims self-

MOBS ATTACK SYRIANS HEADING FOR PREZ VOTE

Beirut, May 20: Lebanese mobs attacked buses and cars carrying Syrians expatriates and those who fled the war heading to the Syrian embassy in Beirut on Thursday, protesting against what they said was an organised vote for President Bashar Assad.

Assad is running for a fourth seven-year term facing symbolic competition from two candidates in a vote all but guaranteed to bring him back as president.

The in-country vote is expected next week, while Syrians abroad are casting their votes Thursday.

The election is the second since the country's civil war broke out 10 years ago and is seen by the opposition as well as Western and some Arab countries as a sham designed to give the incumbent a new mandate with a veneer of legitimacy. Scattered mobs of anti-Syrian Lebanese, most of them from the Christian rightwing Forces group, waited for convoys of cars and buses carrying Syrian voters at intersections in Beirut, outside the capital and in the eastern Bekaa region. They pelted them with rocks and smashed windows with sticks. In one incident near Nahr el-Kalb on the highway north or Beirut, one attacker poked a wooden stick inside the car, poking the driver as others smashed the windshield.

Buses carrying hundreds of voters featured pictures of the incumbent president on the windows. They don't need to carry pictures and flags for an absurd criminal regime, said Fadi Nader, one of the protesters.

— AP

● **CHINA** ON Wednesday issued a complaint over the Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region.

● **CHINA HAS** fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea.

governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the US Navy's presence near the island as providing support for its independence-leaning democratically elected government.

Along with building the world's largest navy and coast guard by numbers of vessels, China has fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea and created new island outposts by piling sand cement on coral reefs and topping them with airstrips and other infrastructure. It has ignored rival territorial claims by its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours, as well as an international arbitral ruling that declared most of China's claims in the South China Sea invalid.

An emboldened China faced with the scaling up of US military operations in the area has increasingly raised concerns about a possible clash or confrontation, whether intended or not.

— AP

Nasa says Beijing failed to meet standards regarding debris

TECH | REASONS

China delays mission to space station

Beijing, May 20: China postponed a supply mission to its new space station Thursday for unspecified technical reasons.

The Tianzhou-2 cargo spacecraft was expected to have been launched early Thursday morning. China Manned Space announced the delay on its website but didn't say when the rescheduled launch may occur. It would be the first mission to head to the main Tianhe module of the space station that was launched on April 29.

Another 10 launches are planned to deliver the station's other two modules, various components and supplies, and a three-person crew. The launch of Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, was considered a success although China was criticised for allowing the uncontrolled reentry of part of the rocket that carried it into space.

Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

Nasa Administrator Sen. Bill Nelson said at the time that China had failed to meet responsible standards regarding space debris. China's space programme has suffered relatively few setbacks since it first put an astronaut into orbit in 2003, although the space station launch was delayed by the failure of an earlier version of the massive Long March 5B rocket.

Earlier this month, China also landed a probe and its accompanying rover on

Mars and has begun sending back pictures from the surface of the red planet.

Only the United States has successfully landed and operated a spacecraft on Mars — nine times, beginning with the twin Vikings in 1976 and, most recently, with the Perseverance rover in February.

China also recently brought back lunar samples, the first by any country's space programme since the 1970s, and also landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far

side. China earlier launched two smaller experimental space stations. It has been excluded from the International Space Station largely at the insistence of the United States, which is wary of the secrecy surrounding the Chinese space programme and its close military links.

Despite that, China has entered into increasingly close cooperation in space with various European and other countries.

— AP

He said that at present the work of firing the boiler was in progress.

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	49,564.86	-0.68
Nifty 50	14,906.00	-0.83
S&P 500*	4,161.83	1.12
Dollar (₹)	73.10	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.23	0.39
Euro (₹)	89.09	0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,994,237	0.49
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.37	-1.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.968	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.642	-0.041

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sugar exports subsidy cut to ₹4,000/ tonne

The Centre slashed subsidy on sugar exports from Rs 6,000 per tonne to Rs 4,000 per tonne with immediate effect in view of firm global prices. For the ongoing 2020-21 marketing year (Oct.-Sept.), the government had fixed a subsidy of Rs 6,000 per tonne to facilitate exports. Sugar mills were mandated to export 6 million tonne of sugar in the current year. So far, 5.7 million tonne of sugar has been contracted for export.

Bosch Q4 net jumps six-fold to ₹482 crore



Auto component major Bosch posted a six-fold increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 482 crore for the fourth quarter, from Rs 81 crore a year ago, driven by robust sales. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 3,218 crore from Rs 2,237 crore. For FY21, Bosch reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 481 crore against Rs 650 crore in 2019-20. Revenue from operations stood at Rs 9,716 crore as compared with Rs 9,842 crore in FY20.

Mindtree to buy L&T's NxT Digital Business

Mindtree said it will acquire the NxT Digital Business from Larsen and Toubro for Rs 198 crore, a move that will enable the mid-sized IT firm to capture opportunities in the IoT and Industry 4.0 space. The total consideration for the deal was "Rs 198 crore including earnouts". Mindtree said in a filing. L&T is the promoter/holding company of Mindtree with a 61.03 per cent stake in the Bengaluru-based company.

Nucleus Software gets Bank of Sydney contract

Nucleus Software, a provider of lending and transaction banking products, said Bank of Sydney has chosen its lending solution, FinnOne Neo, to accelerate its digital lending transformation strategy. Bank of Sydney wanted a sophisticated lending solution to automate and digitize the origination processes for mortgages and credit cards. With FinnOne Neo, Bank of Sydney will be able to launch new products faster, it said.



■ ₹250 kit to give result in 15 minutes Covid home test kit to hit market next week

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 20

A Pune-based research laboratory's indigenously developed self-use rapid antigen test (RAT) kit called CoviSelf, which enables Covid-19 test at home for as little as Rs 250, would be available across pharmacies from next week.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the nodal body in the fight against the tricky virus, on Wednesday officially approved the test kit, India's first such.

"This test at home will take just two minutes and results will be available in 15 minutes flat," Sujet Jain, director at Mylab Discovery Solutions, told Financial Chronicle.

"The CoviSelf test kit will be priced Rs 250 inclusive of taxes," Jain said, adding that the firm was ready to produce 10 lakh test kits every day and the production would be ramped up to 15 lakh units daily within 15 days.

He said the kits would be available by the end of next week in more than seven lakh pharmacies and the company's online pharmacy partners across India.

"After meeting the needs of our country, we will also export the kits," he said, adding that about 40 scientists and technicians had worked on the project for about five-six months to develop the kit.

Jain said the firm had spent over Rs 150 crore on the product in capex and on operating expenses.



"This test is for self-use. If you test positive via this there is no need for RT-PCR test, as per ICMR. Any adult can use this kit by reading our manual," he explained.

The kit has been designed in a way that it is extremely simple to use and it is not a biohazard. There is a disposal bag that comes along for safely disposing off the items after use.

Meanwhile, the ICMR said only symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of people who have tested positive in laboratory-conducted tests should use this kit. "Indiscriminate testing is not advised," the top medical body said while issuing detailed guidelines on the kit's use.

"All symptomatic individuals who test negative by RAT should get themselves immediately tested by RT-PCR," the ICMR said.

The testing will be monitored using Mylab's mobile phone application, through which users are

advised to click a picture of the test strip after completing the test procedure.

"This easy-to-use test combines with Mylab's AI-powered mobile app so that a user can know his/her positive status, submit the result to ICMR directly for traceability, and know what to do next in either case of result," Jain said.

Data transmitted by the phone will be centrally captured in a secure server that is connected to the ICMR's Covid-19 testing portal, where all data will be eventually stored.

Experts say these home-based tests are useful when a runaway infection pattern is observed.

"These tests are used in developed countries such as US and UK. Since these tests have high specificity, it can be used at places where positivity rate is high so as to be able to detect cases early. Positive cases through RAT are mostly true positives," Dr G.C. Khilnani, former head, pulmonology department at AIIMS, Delhi, said.

HOME LOAN MARKET GROWS 9.6%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 20

The home loan market grew 9.6 per cent in the December 2020 quarter over the year-ago period despite the pandemic impact.

With a 9.6 per cent growth, the home loan market made a recovery towards pre-Covid December 2019 level, when the growth was 10.4 per cent. Active housing loan borrowers' base as of December 2020 stood higher than pre-pandemic levels in December 2019, with a yearly growth of nearly 5 per cent, as per the data from CRIF High Mark.

The affordable housing segment constituted 60 per cent of the market by value and nearly 90 per cent by volume. Tier-II and III geographies witnessed a higher annual growth rate in home loan book compared to metros, with a large part of the growth coming in from the affordable and mid-market segment. Visakhapatnam and Coimbatore were among the top 10 cities, having the largest yearly growth of over 10 per cent.

BANKS MAY SHIFT ABOUT 80 LARGE NPA A/Cs TO NARCL

New Delhi, May 20:

Banks are likely to transfer about 80 large NPA accounts for resolution to the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL), expected to be operational soon.

NARCL is the name coined for the bad bank announced in the Budget 2021-22. A bad bank refers to a financial institution that takes over the bad assets of lenders and undertakes resolution.

The size of each of these NPA accounts is over Rs 500 crore and the banks have identified about 70-80 such accounts to be transferred to the proposed bad bank, sources said. NPAs of over Rs 2 lakh crore could move out of the books of the banks to the bad bank.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget 2021-22 announced that the high level of provisioning by public sector banks of their stressed assets calls for measures to clean up the bank books. —PTI

Gold to gain from crypto fall, dollar weakness

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 20

The fall in the value of cryptocurrencies and a subdued dollar index will be supportive of gold. Once the speculative money starts moving from cryptocurrencies to gold, the yellow metal prices are likely to touch fresh highs.

"Cryptocurrency is neither a currency nor an asset class. But we have seen enormous amounts of speculative money going into them in the past one year as Bitcoin value moved up from \$8,000 to \$60,000 levels. Single day drop of 40 per cent has made investors realise that cryptocurrency movement has been just speculation," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

According to him, the movement of speculative money into cryptocurrencies had led to sluggishness in gold in the past few months despite strong fundamentals. However, now the trend shall see a reversal and this has been evident from the gold price movement in the past few sessions.



"Gold prices in the international markets have gained by around 11 per cent while on the MCX futures it has gained by around 10 per cent between March 8 and May 19," said Prathamesh Mallya, AVP-research, non-agri

commodities and currencies, Angel Broking.

Analysts at JPMorgan Chase too have found that large institutional investors are dumping bitcoin in favour of gold. The bank in January had predicted that bitcoin could conceivably become an alternative to gold, hitting \$146,000 in the long term.

The fall in the value of the dollar in recent weeks also increased optimism in gold prices. The dollar index on May 19 came down to 89, lowest level in a year.

Mallya expects gold prices to move higher towards Rs 51,000 per 10 gm mark in a month. According to Kedia, it will take at least a month's time for the speculative money to move into gold. Once this happens, international prices can move towards \$2,100 per ounce in a couple of months.

FY21 ITR filing deadline extended till Sept. 30

New Delhi, May 20:

The government on Thursday extended the due date of filing income tax returns for 2020-21 for individuals by two months till September 30.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30.

As per the income tax law, for individuals whose accounts are not required to be audited and who usually file their income tax

return using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms the deadline to file ITR is July 31. The deadline for taxpayers, like companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31.

In a circular, the CBDT said an extension of time limits is being given for certain tax compliances "to provide relief to taxpayers in view of the severe pandemic".

Also, the deadline for issuing Form 16 by employers to employees has been

extended by a month till July 15, 2021, the CBDT said.

The due date for filing the tax audit report and transfer pricing certificate has been extended by a month till October 31 and November 30, respectively. For filing belated or revised return of income, the due date is now January 31, 2022.

Besides, the deadline for financial institutions to furnish the Statement of Financial Transaction

(SFT) report has been extended till June 30, from May 31, 2021.

Also, the Income Tax Department is expected to launch a new e-filing web portal for taxpayers, which they use to file routine ITRs and perform other tax-related works, early next month, officials said.

The existing web portal will be shut for six days between June 1 and 6. The officials said the new portal will be made more user-friendly. —PTI

‘Not very social’ ByteDance founder to hand CEO reins to college buddy

ECHO WANG &
YINGZHI YANG
MAY 20

Zhang Yiming announced he will step down as CEO of TikTok-owner ByteDance, saying he lacked the social skills to be an ideal manager and naming his college roommate Liang Rubo as his successor to navigate a rising tide of Big Tech regulations.

In a surprise announcement to employees on Thursday, Zhang said the change would enable him "to have greater impact on longer-term initiatives". He will move to a "key strategy" position at the end of the year, ByteDance said.

The 38-year-old will be succeeded by Liang, a long-time colleague and the current head of human resources at ByteDance, one of the world's biggest private tech companies with an estimated value of about \$300 billion in recent trades.

The management shake-up - ByteDance's biggest since its launch in 2012 - comes as Chinese regulators are increasing scrutiny of the country's biggest



Zhang Yiming

technology firms.

In April, they handed e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd with a \$2.8 billion fine for anti-competitive practices, and last year suspended fintech affiliate Ant Group's initial public offering (IPO).

Anti-trust regulators have also told Tencent Holdings Ltd they are preparing to fine the gaming giant as much as \$1.55 billion.

Zhang, who turned ByteDance into a social media force, said he was not in fact a social person.

He blamed the day-to-day challenges of a CEO as being a hurdle to research and innovation, while calling Liang "an invaluable partner" with "strengths in management, organization, and social engage-

ment".

"I'm more interested in analysing organisational and market principles, and leveraging these theories to further reduce management work, rather than actually managing people," Zhang, who will remain in his role as chairman, wrote in the memo.

"Similarly, I'm not very social, preferring solitary activities like being online, reading, listening to music, and contemplating what may be possible."

In an internal memo seen by Reuters, Liang - also 38 - said the new role represented a "huge challenge" with "a lot of pressure".

Liang, not a household name in China, roomed with Zhang at Nankai University in Tianjin, China. He also worked with him at real estate website 99fang.com prior to joining ByteDance.

Liang on his LinkedIn profile said he is a ByteDance co-founder. ByteDance, which employs over 100,000 people worldwide, had been preparing for a much-anticipated IPO this year, but halted the plans in April. —Reuters

DBS HAS FUNDS TO BUY CITI INDIA UNIT: BERNSTEIN

CHANYAPORN
CHANJAROEN
MAY 20

DBS Group Holdings Ltd has sufficient capital to bid for Citigroup Inc's consumer assets in India valued at \$82.7 billion (\$2 billion) without needing to raise additional funds, Sanford C. Bernstein & Co analysts said.

It's a case of "either go big or go home" for DBS to further expand in India where the Singapore-based bank also acquired Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd in November, Bernstein analysts led by Kevin Kwek wrote in a report on Thursday. DBS chief executive officer Piyush Gupta last month said he is interested in the US bank's assets that are for sale in the South Asian country, as well as in China, Taiwan and Indonesia.

A takeover of Citi's India unit would be DBS's largest acquisition since 2001, when the Singapore firm spent \$5.4 billion buying the Hong Kong unit formerly known as Dao Heng Bank Group Ltd. Among the US bank's assets for sale, India stands out as "the crown jewel," Kwek wrote. Its credit card and wealth business would be attractive to any bidder given the country's economic growth rate and population size, he added.

DBS has pledged to make more income outside its home turf, where the bank derived 70 per cent of its \$84.7 billion profit in 2020.

DBS remains very disciplined on acquisitions and wouldn't be drawn into any "bidding frenzy," Gupta said April 30 when asked about his interest in Citi's asset sale.

Citi plans to exit retail banking in 13 markets across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, as part of a strategy by CEO Jane Fraser, who took over in March.

In April, DBS said it would pay \$81.1 billion for a 13 per cent chunk in China's Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank Corp., and Gupta has indicated an interest to raise the size of that stake. —Bloomberg

BADGE OF HONOUR

Verification application to appear in Account Settings tab

Twitter starts verification for blue tick

New Delhi, May 20:

Twitter will start rolling out its verification application process from Thursday after which approved user accounts can sport the 'blue verified badge'.

Twitter had paused its public verification programme a few years ago. However, last year, Twitter said it would re-launch the account verification process in 2021.

On Thursday, Twitter highlighted that it has also started automatically removing the verified badge from those accounts that no longer meet the updated criteria.

We're excited to share that starting today, we'll begin rolling out our new verification application process and reviewing

public applications for verification on Twitter. Today's application rollout marks the next milestone in our plans to give more transparency, credibility, and clarity to verification on Twitter, Twitter said in a blog.

Verified accounts that repeatedly violate the Twitter Rules are subject to have the blue badge removed, it added.

The microblogging platform said over the past several months, it has been working to bring clarity to the verification eligibility criteria and has launched a new policy shaped by public feedback.

Twitter highlighted that it has also started enforcing that policy by automatically removing the veri-



fied badge from accounts that no longer meet the updated criteria for verification, such as those that are inactive or incomplete. The coveted 'blue badge' is one of the ways Twitter helps people distinguish the authenticity of accounts that are of high public interest, and gives Twitter users more context about who they're hav-

ing conversations with.

With today's application launch, we're also introducing new guidelines for verified accounts on Twitter. These verification guidelines are intended to encourage healthy conversations for the betterment of the Twitter community overall, the US-based company said.

To qualify for verification, users must belong to one of the six categories—government; companies/brands/organisations; news organisations and journalists; entertainment; sports and gaming; and activists/organisers/other influential individuals.

Twitter pointed out that it is planning to introduce more categories later this

year, such as those for scientists, academics, and religious leaders.

It said users must also provide a profile name, a profile image, and either a confirmed email address or phone number. The account must also be active within the last six months and have a record of adherence to the Twitter Rules.

Over the next few weeks, everyone on Twitter will start to see the new verification application directly in the Account Settings tab, Twitter said, adding that once the application is submitted, users will get an emailed response. If the application is approved, users will see the blue badge automatically on their profile. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Legendary Milkha Singh is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh has tested positive for Covid-19 and is in isolation at his Chandigarh residence. The 91-year-old, popularly known as Flying Sikh, is asymptomatic and claims to be in "high spirits". "A couple of our helpers earlier tested positive and so all the family members did the tests. Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha said. "I am fine and there is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," he added. None of the other family members, including Milkha's wife Nirmal Kaur returned a positive test. — PTI

Shooting coach Monali dies at 44

New Delhi: In a big loss to the Indian shooting fraternity, coach and technical official Monali Gorhe died of mucormycosis on Thursday. She was 44 and is survived by her mother and a sister. Monali was admitted to a hospital after being diagnosed with Covid-19 but was discharged, only to get re-admitted to treat mucormycosis. Many people recovering from Covid-19 have of late been afflicted by black fungus — or mucormycosis — disease. It is a fungal infection that affects the nose, eye and sometimes the brain. A few hours before her death, her father Manohar Gorhe too succumbed to Covid-19. Monali was the coach of the pistol core group. She had also served as the national coach of the Sri Lankan shooting team. — PTI

Bhuvneshwar's dad passes away

New Delhi: India pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar's father, Kiran Pal Singh on Thursday died at his Meerut residence after battling liver cancer for the last eight months. He was 63 and is survived by his wife Indresh Devi and son and daughter Bhuvneshwar and Rekha respectively. According to *ESPNCricinfo*, Singh was first detected with the illness in September last year when Bhuvneshwar was playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in UAE for the IPL. "It is understood that Bhuvneshwar's return from the IPL in UAE, where he was representing Sunrisers Hyderabad, was mainly due to his father's health condition," the report said. Singh was undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy, at the All Institute of Medical Science here after consulting doctors in the UK. — PTI

Archer doubtful for India series

London: England pacer Jofra Archer will undergo a surgery on his right elbow on Friday, which could effectively rule him out of the first part of the five-match Test series against visiting India beginning on August 4. Archer is already out of the upcoming two-match Test series against New Zealand and this will be his second surgery after being operated upon on his right hand. "Jofra has been reviewed by a medical consultant in respect of his right elbow soreness. He will now proceed to surgery tomorrow," the ECB said. — PTI

Medical insurance for sportspersons

New Delhi: The government has decided to widen its medical insurance cover for sportspersons by increasing the number of beneficiary athletes and including contractual coaches and support staff from this year in the wake of the pandemic. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Thursday said that with this decision, the coverage would increase to more than 13,000 athletes, coaches and support staff. Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said the well-being of athletes, coaches and support staff are his ministry's priority. "We want to ensure that all our athletes and contractual staff have health cover during these difficult times and even after," he said. — PTI

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REJUVENTUS

Dethroned as league champs, Juventus claw back to claim Italian Cup

Reggio Emilia (Italy), May 20: Dethroned league champions Juventus beat Atalanta 2-1 to win the Italian Cup for the 14th time on Wednesday as fans returned to the stadium for the first time in over a year.

Goals in either half from Dejan Kulusevski and Federico Chiesa gave coach Andrea Pirlo his second second trophy of the season after the Italian Super Cup, on the day he turned 42. Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was denied a first trophy of his coaching career, and Atalanta's second trophy after the 1963 Coppa Italia.

It was a boost for Juventus who go into the final weekend of the season with their Champions League qualification going down to the wire after Inter Milan ended their nine-year league reign. Gianluigi Buffon was in the Juventus goal for the final time in his career and the veteran keeper was solid on the night winning his sixth Coppa Italia 22 years after his first with Parma.

The veteran pulled off a big save just after kickoff at the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia.

Duvan Zapata had pulled back for Jose Luis Palomino with 43-year-old Buffon using his legs to stop the ball.

Despite the Bergamo side's early domination Juve made the breakthrough after half an hour. Cristiano Ronaldo went down but amid a scramble in front of goal Weston McKennie sent the ball across to Kulusevski who curled into the net.

But ten minutes later Ruslan Malinovskyi blasted in the equaliser.

Pierluigi Gollini denied Kulusevski a second just before the hour after good work from Chiesa.

Chiesa then clipped the post after latching onto a Ronaldo backheel flick. But the former Fiorentina forward made no mistake with quarter of an hour remaining after combining with Kulusevski to beat Gollini. — AFP



Juventus' Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (centre) holds the winners trophy as his teammates celebrate winning the final of the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) match against Atalanta at the Citta del Tricolore stadium in Reggio Emilia on Wednesday. — AFP

Liverpool move into top 4; Spurs' Euro hopes dented

London, May 20: Liverpool set up a dramatic final-day battle to qualify for the Champions League with a vital 3-0 win at Burnley, while Tottenham's bid to reach the Europa League suffered a blow in a 2-1 defeat against Aston Villa on Wednesday.

Jurgen Klopp's side moved into fourth place in the Premier League thanks to goals from Roberto Firmino, Nathaniel Phillips and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.

Liverpool are above fifth-placed Leicester on goal difference, with the Reds on +24 and the Foxes on +20. If Liverpool win

their final game at home to Crystal Palace on Sunday, they should finish in the top four and salvage a difficult campaign that saw them tamely surrender the title to Manchester City.

Leicester host Tottenham on Sunday, while third-placed Chelsea travel to Aston Villa. Firmino put Liverpool on course for their fourth consecutive victory with a clinical finish from Andy Robertson's 43rd minute cross. Phillips got the second goal in the 52nd minute with a header from Sadio Mane's cross for his first goal for the club. Oxlade-Chamberlain lashed in Liverpool's

third in the 88th minute.

Fifth and sixth place finishes secure a spot in next season's Europa League, while seventh place brings entry into a play-off for the new Europa Conference League.

Tottenham will have to wait until their last game of the season to discover their European destiny. A second defeat in their last three games left them in seventh place, level on points with eighth-placed Everton and three points behind sixth-placed West Ham.

They will have to beat Leicester and hope West Ham lose to Southampton to pip their London rivals on goal difference. — AFP

MBAPPE DAZZLES AS PSG CROWNED WITH FRENCH CUP

Paris, May 20: Paris Saint-Germain have a domestic double in their sights after they won the French Cup by beating Monaco 2-0 in Wednesday's final at the Stade de France.

Goals from Mauro Icardi and Kylian Mbappe won a largely uninspiring final for PSG who now go into the weekend's final round of French league fixtures with 10th league title still a possibility. PSG have now won the French Cup six times in the last seven seasons having reached the final every year since 2015. It was also the second trophy of coach Mauricio Pochettino's managerial career. — AFP



Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate with the trophy after winning the French Cup final match against Monaco at the Stade de France stadium in Saint Denis, North of Paris, on Wednesday. Paris Saint-Germain won 2-0. — AP

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM AWAIT COVID TEST RESULTS AFTER REACHING DOHA

Doha, May 20: The Indian football team players underwent Covid-19 tests on arrival and are waiting for results before starting their preparatory camp ahead of the joint Qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup. The 28-member squad and support staff landed here on Wednesday night from New Delhi.

"The 28 players and the support staff are in compulsory quarantine till they receive the test results of the conducted RT-PCR tests in Doha," the All India Football Federation said in a release.

"The squad will, thereafter, be allowed to kick-off their preparatory camp as part of their preparation for the

matches," it added.

The team, bolstered by the return of Sunil Chhetri, will have a preparatory camp inside a bio-bubble here before its first match on June 3 against hosts Qatar. The round of matches are being played in Doha in view of the pandemic which doesn't allow the original format of home and away matches. — PTI

PEREZ LEADS 1ST PRACTICE SESSION, HAMILTON FIFTH

Monaco, May 20: Red Bull driver Sergio Perez clocked the fastest time Thursday during the first practice session for the Monaco Grand Prix.

Perez had a best lap of 1 minute, 12.49 seconds on the sinewy 3.4-kilometre circuit that snakes around the picturesque Principality. Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz Jr. and Max Verstappen, Perez's teammate, were next. AlphaTauri driver Pierre Gasly had the fourth fastest time. He was followed by F1 champion Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

Hamilton is 14 points ahead of Verstappen in the standings after they finished 1-2 in the first four races. Hamilton will be aiming for his 101st career pole position on Saturday and his 99th win on Sunday. — AP

Dravid to coach India on SL tour

New Delhi, May 20: National Cricket Academy chief and former India captain Rahul Dravid is set to be the head coach of the Indian white-ball squad that will tour Sri Lanka in July.

Dravid, who stopped travelling with the India 'A' and U-19 teams after taking over as NCA head in Bengaluru, will be the head coach of the second-string side in the absence of Ravi Shastri, who will be busy with the Test side in England at the same time.

"He will travel with the team to Sri Lanka in all likelihood," a BCCI source said.

It was reported on May 17 that Dravid was being considered for the assignment. Bowling coach Paras Mhambrey will also be a part of the support staff.

India are expected to play three ODIs and as many T20s in Sri Lanka in July though the schedule has not been announced yet.

The squad will have plenty of fringe players and some established white-



Rahul Dravid

● **Rahul Dravid will be the head coach of the second-string side for Sri Lanka tour in the absence of Ravi Shastri, who will be busy with the Test side in England at the same time.**

ball specialists. Hardik Pandya, Shikhar Dhawan and Shreyas Iyer are in the running for captaincy.

It remains to be seen if Iyer recovers in time from his shoulder surgery to play in Sri Lanka. — PTI

4,000 FANS TO BE ALLOWED FOR INDIA vs NZ WTC FINAL

Southampton, May 20: The World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in Southampton will be held in the presence of 4000 spectators, Hampshire County Club head Rod Bransgrove has said.

The Covid-19 situation has improved in the UK and around 1500 people were allowed to watch the county game between Leicestershire and Hampshire at the Ageas Bowl, which hosts the WTC final from June 18.

"We're staging a four-day county game from today and for the first time since September 2019 fans were allowed for a cricket match in England. The other county games of this round will begin tomorrow and those games too will see crowds," Rod Bransgrove, the head of Hampshire County Club said.

Bransgrove told the website that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the ICC are permitting a crowd of "4000 people" in the eagerly-awaited clash. "I understand 50 per cent of the permitted crowds will be taken by the ICC for its sponsors and other stake holders and we will be selling the rest 2000 tickets. We have already received more than double applications from the fans," Bransgrove said.

"It is a high interest game and there is a good demand for it," Bransgrove added.

The Indian team, currently quarantining in Mumbai for two weeks, depart for the UK on June 2. — PTI

India not safe for T20 WC: Hussey

Sydney, May 20: Former Australia batsman Mike Hussey, who tested positive for Covid-19 in IPL's bio-bubble, has advocated moving this year's T20 World Cup from India to the UAE as he feels teams will be "nervous" to travel there because of the raging pandemic.

Batting coach Hussey was among three members of the Chennai Super Kings contingent who contracted the virus during the IPL, which had to be suspended after cases were detected in four teams.

"I think it's going to be very difficult in my view to play that tournament in India," Hussey told *Fox Cricket* upon his return to Sydney.

Hussey had also spent two weeks isolating in India after testing positive for the virus in Delhi from where he was transported to Chennai in an air ambulance.

"We're talking about eight teams in the IPL. I think there are probably similar number, maybe more teams coming in from overseas (for the T20 World Cup), there'd be more venues. As I said ear-

I think it's going to be very difficult in my view to play that tournament in India. I think they'll have to look some pretty big contingency plans, perhaps looking at the UAE or somewhere like that that could host the World T20.

— **MIKE HUSSEY**
former Australia player

lier, if they're playing in different cities, that is when the risk goes up.

"I think they'll have to look some pretty big contingency plans, perhaps looking at the UAE or somewhere like that that could host the World T20. I think there will be a lot of cricket boards around the world that'd be pretty nervous about going back to India for a cricket tournament," said Hussey.

UAE has already emerged as the back up venue and the ICC is likely to take a call on the tournament on June 1. Talking about his ordeal in India, Hussey said he had symptoms but he never feared for his life. — PTI

There's got to be much more to the ball-tampering story



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Cameron Bancroft wittingly or otherwise has etched his name in the annals of cricket history. The Australian opener who has yet to score 500 runs in 10 Test matches so far in his career, was caught by the television cameras trying to rough up one side of the

cricket ball in the third Test between the Aussies and South Africa in Cape Town in 2018. The sorry tale shook up Australian cricket with skipper Steve Smith and David Warner getting one year bans and Bancroft being out for nine months. Just when people thought the water had

flowed under the bridge Bancroft opened the can once again when, in an interview, he hinted that more players were aware of what's called 'sandpaper gate.' The interview pointed fingers at the bowlers who most former players believe were equally conscious that a foreign substitute (sandpaper) was being to tinker with the ball in the Test.

While Cricket Australia (CA) said that the incident was thoroughly investigated and they had reached out to Bancroft to see if he was willing to speak fur-

ther, many believe that whole affair was brushed under the carpet which, now was showing a bump on the far side. Former Aussie skippers Ian Chappell and Michael Clarke have stated that there had to be more people involved (than the punished trio), with Clarke questioning the integrity of the bowlers saying: "Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it?"

Ball management, on the field of play, is as old as the game. Picking the seam

with a overgrown thumb-nail to help movement or using foreign substitutes from bottle caps to strips laden with Vaseline is a been-there, done-that situation, if one peeks into the history of cricket.

The Aussie pack of bowlers in the Cape Town Test including Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins seem to have smoked the peace pipe with Bancroft.

The incident when looked at from a practical cricketing perspective makes no sense. One cannot imagine a bowler playing at a serious level not

knowing if the ball has been played around with. The new episode in this saga brought back a memory which goes to show that not just the bowlers but even the batsmen can tell from the changing pattern of the ball.

As a schoolboy one was privy to an episode which involved Mansur Ali Khan, a.k.a. Tiger Pataudi. While playing against us (schoolboys) in a Sunday friendly in 1974-75, Tiger showed us kids his remarkable knowledge and understanding of the game. Getting out in the first

over post a hearty lunch, the former Indian skipper gently asked if the ball had been changed? No, said the vehement umpires and yes, said the bowler who had quietly replaced the ball during the break as he couldn't get a decent grip on the old one.

It was just the feel of the ball on his bat that prompted Tiger to raise a doubt. What the most iconic cricketer of that era could surmise in a minute with one good eye, international bowlers couldn't do at Newlands, Cape Town — hard to believe!