

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
ANANTAPUR | FRIDAY | 28 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 36.0°C
Min: 16°C
RH: 63%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min
temp. 36/16 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula
Vidya till 9.38 am
Star: Moola till 8.05 pm
Varjyam: 6.39 pm to 8.05 pm
and from 4.54 am (Saturday)
Durmuhurtam: 8.20 am to
9.12 am; 12.39 pm to 1.31 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
HILIRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 15, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.08 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM
MOONSET 3.50 AM
MOONRISE 5.21 PM

COUNTER POINT



Not cash... he has
sent Coronil worth
₹ 1,000 crore, sir!

SHORT TAKES

Fuel price hiked 14th time in May

New Delhi: Petrol price was increased by 24 paise per litre and diesel by 29 paise a litre on Thursday, according to a price notification by fuel retailers. The increase — 14th this month — took petrol and diesel prices to an all-time high across India. The price of petrol, which had already crossed the ₹100-mark in several cities in Rajasthan, MP and Maharashtra, breached the barrier in Thane district on Thursday.

RAW, IB chiefs get 1 yr extension

New Delhi: Research and Analysis Wing chief Samant Kumar Goel and Intelligence Bureau head Arvind Kumar were given a one-year extension in their services, an official order said on Thursday. Goel, a 1984-batch IPS officer from Punjab cadre, would continue to be the Secretary of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) for a period one-year beyond the presence tenure which ends on June 30, the order said.

INSIDE

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Raj: 'Dead' man returns home after his funeral

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Efforts on to clean up Lankan coast: Officials

WEATHER | VAGARIES

Heat wave sweeps coastal Andhra

K.M.P. PATNAIK | DC
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 27

Severe heat conditions prevailed in coastal Andhra Pradesh for the second day on Thursday.
The latest India Meteorological Department reports said eight Met divisions in the state registered maximum temperature of around 40° Celsius and Tuni in East Godavari and Jangameshawarpuram in West Godavari recorded 41.4° Celsius each.
Reports said Visakhapatnam, Bapatla, Kakinada, Machilipatnam, Nandigama and Amaravati registered around 40°C.

The maximum departure of 7.1° C in Visakhapatnam which registered 40.1° C above the normal is the highest in the country.
On the other hand, the temperature dropped by 6.6°C in Nellore which recorded 33.5° C and 6.1° C in Kadapa which registered 33.6° C.
Arogyavaram is the third station which registered 33° C though the departure from normal temperature was not known.
Citing reasons for the sudden rise in the temperature, AP IMD director S. Stella said Cyclone Yaas sapped the moisture from the



Women cover up their faces with the cloth to get protected from soaring heat conditions while moving on a bike in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. The maximum temperature was 43.9°C according to MET office. — K. MURALI KRISHNA
atmosphere in the eastern India leaving the lands dry. The other reason was that hot winds from the north-westerly direction caused the mercury to



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Hong Kong reduces direct public vote



SPORTS | 8

Villarreal win Europa title in epic shootout

TABLOID

Breathing technique to reduce anxiety



Twitter cannot dictate terms to largest democracy: Centre

New Delhi, May 27: The row over Twitter's handling of certain messages escalated into an all-out war of words on Thursday, with the government saying the messaging platform was levelling baseless and false allegations to defame India and dictating terms to the world's largest democracy.
It started with Twitter calling the visit by Delhi Police to its offices a form of "intimidation" — a statement which met with vociferous protests from both the government and the Delhi Police. While the government called it "totally baseless, false and an attempt to defame India", Delhi Police said the statement was "mendacious" and designed to impede a lawful inquiry.
Twitter had marked several tweets by ruling BJP leaders on an alleged strategy document of

Tech giant terms it police 'intimidation'

New Delhi, May 27: Twitter on Thursday called the visit by Delhi Police to its offices a form of "intimidation" and said it was concerned about its employees and the potential threat to freedom of expression.
In its first official statement after the Delhi Police visited the company's offices in Delhi and in Gurugram, Twitter said it will continue to be strictly guided by principles of transparency and protecting freedom of expression. The company said it will "strive" to comply with applicable

Opposition to target the government over Covid as containing 'manipulat-

ed media', which prompted the police to visit its offices late on Monday.
law in India to keep its service available in the country. "Right now, we are concerned by recent events regarding our employees in India and the potential threat to freedom of expression for the people we serve," Twitter said.
"We, alongside many in civil society in India and around the world, have concerns with regards to the use of intimidation tactics by the police in response to enforcement of our global Terms of Service, as well as with core elements of the new IT rules." — PTI

The reference being of the alleged 'toolkit' — the one that Twitter, which uses fact-checking websites, tagged as 'manipulated media'. The Delhi Police is investigating it on a complaint by Congress of the 'toolkit' being fake.
The Ministry of Electronics and IT issued a statement saying India has a glorious tradition of free speech and democratic practices dating back centuries. "Twitter's statement is an attempt to dictate its terms to the world's largest democracy. Through its actions and deliberate defiance, Twitter seeks to undermine India's legal system," it asserted.
Stating that Twitter has refused to comply with new digital rules, the ministry said the purported commitment of the US-based firm to India not only sounds hollow but self-serving. — PTI

Yaas downs bridge on river Kanchi



A bridge at river Kanchi after it collapsed due to heavy rain triggered by cyclone Yaas, in Tamar area of Ranchi, on Thursday. A day after the 'Very Severe' Cyclone Yaas ravaged India's east coast, a thunderous rain due to depression left five persons dead in West Bengal, while in Odisha the threat of floods loomed large. — PTI

ED charges Revanth in cash-for-vote scandal

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD MAY 27

Officials of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a chargesheet against state Congress working president A. Revanth Reddy, the Malkajgiri MP, and others in the cash-for-vote scam of 2015 here on Thursday.
The others listed in the case were Sandra Venkata Veeraiiah, MLA from Sathupally, self-proclaimed bishop Harry Sebastian, Rudra Sivakumar Uday Simha, Mathaiah Jerusalem and TD ex-MLC Vem Narendar Reddy's son



A. Revanth Reddy

Vem Krishna Keerthan. The ED has provisionally attached ₹50 lakh in cash that had been allegedly offered by the accused to Elvis Stephenson, the Anglo-Indian nominated

MLA, to vote in favour of the Telugu Desam (TD) candidate.
An FIR had been registered by the Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) against Revanth Reddy, who was with the Telugu Desam at that time, and others.
The ACB had laid a trap and recorded the payment of the bribe amount of ₹50 lakh in cash to Stephenson. The ACB arrested the accused after they were caught in a trap and filed a chargesheet after the investigation.

■ Page 2: ED investigation establishes conspiracy

AP POSTPONES SSC EXAMS, REVIEW IN JULY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Under a mounting pressure from opposition, teachers, students and many sections of society, the Andhra Pradesh government has once again postponed Class 10 exams in view of the Covid-19 crisis and will take a fresh decision on the exams after reviewing the situation in July.
The SSC exams were scheduled to start on June 7, but a huge surge in Coronavirus cases in the second wave has turned a big hurdle to conduct them. Minister for education Adimulapu Suresh said that SSC and Intermediate exams are must for the good future of students hence the government is keen to conduct the exams in the coming days after reviewing the pandemic situation.
The SSC exams are usually held in March every year but due to Covid-19 crisis, the AP government postponed the exams. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewed the situation several times and announced summer holidays to the schools planning to conduct SSC exams.

■ Page 2: Minister slams Opposition

Jagan focus on 34k foundation schools

CM wants emphasis put on quality education

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy sought special focus on 34,000 Foundational Schools in order to ensure quality education to children.
He was at a review meeting with education, women and child welfare departments on Thursday. He said that 80 per cent of children develop intellectual intelligence by the age of six years, which is why special focus should be on children between 3 to 8 years.
Jagan Mohan Reddy discussed various measures on providing strong foundational education to pre-primary and primary students during the review meeting. He said that there were 34,000 pre-primary and primary schools, which would be converted into foundational schools that can provide the best possible education.
He reiterated that it was his quest to provide quality education to poor students.

● THE CM said that 80 per cent of children develop intellectual intelligence by the age of six years, which is why special focus should be on children between 3 to 8 years.

● HE SAID that there were 34,000 pre-primary and primary schools, which would be converted into foundational schools that can provide the best possible education.

● THE CM pointed out that the government is planning to set up a junior college in every mandal and directed officials to study the feasible options.

YSR pre-primary schools and foundational schools have come up from those thoughts, he said. It was towards this that Mana Badi Nadu Nedu was established and schools are being revamped as a part of the programme.
The Chief Minister pointed

ed out that the government is planning to set up a junior college in every mandal and directed officials to study the feasible options so that a decision can be taken later.
He said that foundational schools should be within a kilometre radius and high schools should be within a three-kilometre radius.
The Chief Minister directed officials to look into the impact of the new proposals and to report in the next review. If these proposals are to be implemented, Classes 3,4,5 will be elevated to upper primary or high schools. Once the work is completed, a plan should be prepared to start Nadu Nedu works in foundational schools.
He directed officials to focus on digital teaching once foundational schools are set up and go about it with a digital teaching methodology. He said that after black boards and green boards, the coming days will have digital boards.

Rahul for PM role in L'dweep

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his urgent intervention in Lakshadweep. He demanded that "anti people policies" being announced by the Lakshadweep administrator, Praful Khoda Patel, be withdrawn. Mr Gandhi also claimed that the dilu-

tion in quarantine rules by Mr Patel in Lakshadweep has led to a "lethal spike in Covid cases".
Mr Patel, a former MLA of Gujarat who served as a minister of state for home under Narendra Modi's chief ministership in Gujarat, was made administrator of the country's smallest Union Territory in December 2020. He is being blamed for the Covid-19 surge in Lakshadweep and is accused of creating social

tension in Lakshadweep where Muslims form nearly 97 per cent of the population and most are Scheduled Tribes.
Mr Gandhi, has said that the "administration demolished structures used by the fisherfolk, fired contractual workers in various government departments". Calling the moves "draconian", Mr Gandhi said these "regulations penalise dissent and undermine grassroots democracy".

SHORT TAKES

TD HOLDS 2-DAY
MAHANADU
ONLINE AGAINMD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

For the second time in a row, Telugu Desam conducted Mahanadu in virtual mode for two days considering the Coronavirus pandemic.

Former Minister Alapati Rajendra Prasad criticised the YSRC government for adopting a stubborn attitude without taking timely decisions to save the lives of students and people from the Coronavirus pandemic. He demanded that exams be cancelled altogether since many other states had already taken such a decision. He further demanded that pass certificates be issued, based on the internal evaluation.

Rajendra Prasad pointed out that the Class 10 exams were cancelled by CBSE, ICSE, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh boards. On the other hand, these exams were postponed by Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Rajasthan, Khand, West Bengal and Assam. However, the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime had blindly decided to go ahead with the exams from June 7 till the pandemic threat forced it to change the decision.

YSRC UNLEASHING
STATE TERRORISM
IN AP: NAIDUDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday slammed the YSR Congress government for perpetrating 'state terrorism' as a cover for its undemocratic, autocratic and authoritarian activities aimed at denying civil liberties and fundamental rights of the people in the state. Addressing the online Mahanadu meeting, he accused the ruling YSRC leaders, the police and the rest of the official machinery of stifling the voice of all sections of the people not to speak of the opposition parties' leaders.

Condemning the government's dictatorial tendencies, Naidu deplored that not just the TD leaders, all other dissenting voices and common public were facing the same sort of suppression.

ED INVESTIGATION
ESTABLISHES
CONSPIRACY

From page 1

The ED thereafter recorded the statements of the accused/witnesses including Revanth Reddy, Harry Sebastian and Rudra Uday Simha who were involved in the actual handing over of the bribe amount to Stephenson. They were also confronted with the available audio-visual recordings of the encounters.

Officials said the ED investigations have established that Revanth Reddy, Venkata Veeraiah and others had conspired to bribe Stephenson for securing his vote for Narendar Reddy, the TD candidate in the Legislative Council election that was slated for June 1, 2015.

In pursuance of their conspiracy, the accused had contacted Stephenson and promised him a bribe of ₹5 crore. Stephenson made a complaint to the ACB police and a 'trap' was laid. His meeting with the accused was secretly audio-video recorded.

A phone conversation between Stephenson and Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu was also verified for forensic experts and the voice was found to be that of Naidu.

As per the case, the accused persons met the complainant at his house on May 30, 2015, and made the bribe offer.

The next day, Revanth Reddy, Harry Sebastian and Rudra Uday Simha came to the house of Malcolm Taylor, a friend of Stephenson, to hand over the advance bribe amount of ₹50 lakh in cash. This was when they were trapped by the ACB and taken into custody along with the seized cash, officials said. "The cash had been handed over to the accused by Krishna Keerthan, son of Narendar Reddy, to help his father win the election," officials said.

ED's investigation has established that the accused persons committed the scheduled offence as well as the offence of money laundering by dealing with the bribe money. ED thereon filed a prosecution complaint against the accused persons, with a prayer to hold trial against them for committing the offence of money laundering.



Family members of Covid-19 patients sit under a tree outside the CSR Ward where Covid-19 patients were being treated, at the King George Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

₹88K cr spent in 2yrs
for women welfare

Government clears debt to commercial and cooperative banks

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

The government has disbursed ₹88,040.29 crore to women in two years for their empowerment.

According to officials, the government led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has implemented several revolutionary programmes in the last two years to promote the economic self-sufficiency and empowerment of women.

The government implemented many welfare schemes such as YSR Aasara, YSR Cheyuta, YSR Sunnavaddi, YSR Kapu Nestam and YSR EBC Nestam. To ensure that every woman provide her children a good education, the government allocated ₹13,022.93 crore

under the Jagananna Ammavodi scheme by depositing ₹15,000 per annum to the accounts of every poor and needy mother who sends her children to school.

In addition to enforcing liquor control and bringing peace and tranquility to families, ₹27,000 crore has been allocated for the welfare programmes such as providing 30,76,000 house-site pattas and house registrations in the names of women. This created history in the advancement of women empowerment in the country.

Under the flagship YSR Aasara, the government directly reimbursed an interest amount of ₹1,400.08 crore towards loans to 8.71 lakh SHGs in 2019-20, thereby benefiting

over 87 lakh women. Observing the plight of SHG women, the state government also promised to repay ₹27,168 crores of loan to banks under the YSR Aasara scheme in four installments. As per the promise made during the padayatra to SHG women that the government would repay their debts to commercial and co-operative banks, the first installment of ₹6,310.68 crore was disbursed to 77,75,681 women on September 11 last year.

As regards the YSR Zero Interest Scheme for women, the government paid ₹1,400 crore as interest arrears owed to banks by 90,37,255 SHG women from April 1, 2019 to March 2020. The number of eligible SHG women rose to 9.34 lakh from last

year's 8.71 lakh because of greater confidence in the government. The total count of SHG women is 1.11 crore now. This scheme has so far benefited 98,00,626 SHG women with ₹2,354.22 crore.

For YSR Cheyutha, as many 69,000 shops have been set up in rural and urban areas. As of April 2021, the government deposited ₹4,604.13 crore in the accounts of 24,55,534 women under YSR Cheyutha scheme.

Further, YSR Kapu Nestam, YSR Sampurna Poshana, YSR EBC Nestham, Jagananna Jeeva Kranthi, YSR Nethanna Nestham and several other welfare schemes helped women empowerment in all the 13 districts of AP in the last two years.

Officials propose to CM for
strong foundational schoolsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Officials of school education and women and child welfare departments have laid proposals for strong foundational education to pre-primary and primary students to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during a review meeting on Thursday.

They explained that special focus is laid on children in the three-eight years age-group for good brain development. The new proposals were laid with focus on effective utilisation of teachers and providing best education to those stu-

dents and foundational schools will be set up in this regard. YSR Sampurna Poshana will be implemented as usual in them.

The officials explained that under the proposals pre-primary-1, PP-2, preparatory, first and second class, would be turned into foundation schools. Anganwadi Centres will be merged with nearby local primary schools thus forming foundational schools.

Such anganwadi centres being converted into PP-1 and PP-2 will come under the purview of Foundational Schools. Curriculum, comprehensive teaching methods,

enhancing skill levels related to PP-1 and PP-2, and to focus on multi-level learning through foundational schools.

They stated that classes 3, 4, 5 of primary schools will be transferred to nearby upper primary schools and high schools. The upper primary schools will be converted into high schools.

The officials further stated that a proposal is laid to bring anganwadi teachers into the teaching stream as foundational schools were set up. They will be given requisite training and can get to work as SGTs in primary schools through promotions.

No decision taken on schools reopening: Govt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

The state government has submitted to the High Court that it has not taken any decision to reopen schools, but deferred conduct of Class X final exams in the state.

A division bench comprising Justices D. Ramesh and K. Suresh Reddy heard a petition filed by a teacher Y. Uma Sankar from Srikakulam with a plea to declare as illegal the state government's

move to reopen schools from June 1 and conduct Class X exams from June 7 without giving Covid jab to all teachers in the state.

Petitioner's counsel P. Suresh Kumar submitted to the court that nearly 400 teachers lost their lives due to Coronavirus in the state in the second wave of the pandemic, and prayed for allowing reopening of schools and conduct of Class X exams only after the vaccination of teachers.

Government special ple-

ader C. Sumon submitted to the court that the state government had not taken any decision to reopen schools and conduct Class X final exams. He informed the court that as the Centre had not recognised teachers as frontline workers, it was not possible to vaccinate all of them as they were administering vaccines to the people aged above 45 years.

He also informed the court that the state government deferred the conduct of Class X final exams.

Experts: Change K'patnam
formula ingredients, dosePATHRI RAJSEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, MAY 27

Reminding that almost 60,000 people took the herbal concoction of B. Anandaiah last month, an Ayurvedic doctor allayed apprehensions based on 50 to 100 people going to hospital even after using it.

Dr V. Ramakrishna Reddy of Ongole, a retired senior medical officer of the Ayush department, said herbal medicines were capable of curing ailments if they are used for 41 days. The period can be brought down to one week or two weeks by modifying the dosage.

He claimed that a team of Ayush doctors had given a report to the collector stating that the preparation that Anandaiah is giving was underdose.

Referring to Ayush team declaration that the concoction of Anandaiah is harmless, he suggested change of ingredients in the eye drops in case if there are infections.

Pointing to the immediate effect on patients with breathing problems after administering eyedrops, Dr Ramakrishna Reddy, underlined the need to produce the eye drops in hygienic conditions and increase the usage.

Reminding that there is no drug to kill the virus in allopathy, a senior medical officer in Ayush department stressed the need to refine Anandaiah's preparation and standardise the dosage.

He called for in-depth research into the Krishnapatnam concoction to make the best use of it.

SOMIREDDY: YSRC
MEN CONFINING
ANANDAIAHDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 27

Telugu Desam senior leader S. Chandramohan Reddy slammed the ruling party for detaining Anandaiah at the CVR Foundation premises in Krishnapatnam Port and forcing him to prepare the medication for politicians and other VIPs.

In a statement released on Thursday, Chandrashekar Reddy said the ruling party leaders have been demanding that he prepare the medication under the pretext of scientific analysis.

Chandrashekar Reddy questioned the rationale behind delaying the distribution of the medicine to the public even after the Commissioner of Ayush, and AP Health Secretary said the medication had no harmful substances and side effects.

While the state government is delaying the distribution activity on one hand, the ruling party leaders are supplying it to many important people across the state.

Reputed labs to study
Anandaiah's formulaDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 27

The Ayush department has sent the preparation used for eye drops by self-proclaimed Ayurvedic practitioner Bonigi Anandaiah to reputed institutions involved in eye care for in-depth study at the instance of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Though it is a herbal mixture, the CM is particular on the validation of the drops by allopathic method as well so as not to give any scope for complaints over the use of the concoction.

The Chief Minister issued the instructions during a recent meeting with the Ayush officials on Anandaiah's preparation, official sources said.

Ayush commissioner Col V. Ramulu, stated that they found no harmful ingredients in the herbs being used by Anandaiah during their recent visit to Krishnapatnam last

week. "When I specifically said that ingredients are harmless based on the Ayurveda system, I was quoted as saying that the preparation is safe. How can I talk about it without lab tests as we are not aware of the quality of ingredients and production conditions," he asked.

Speaking to this newspaper on Thursday, Col Ramulu said they were waiting for lab reports pertaining to microbial, pesticide residue and heavy metals tests. He said they would get reports in a couple of days from the Ayush lab in Hyderabad.

On the safety factor of eye drops produced by Anandaiah, Col Ramulu said the use of ingredients such as mulla vankaya, thoka miriyalu and honey was accepted in the Ayurveda system but the safety and efficacy of the compound needed to be studied in laboratories.

HC asks AP to decide
on concoction swiftlyDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday directed the state government to take a decision expeditiously on the distribution of the concoction made by self-proclaimed Ayurvedic practitioner B. Anandaiah to treat Coronavirus-infected patients.

A division bench comprising Justices D. Ramesh and K. Suresh Reddy heard the petitions filed by P. Mallikarjuna Rao and M. Uma Maheswara Naidu on Thursday. The bench observed that it would be unfair to delay a decision on the distribution of the concoction of Krishnapatnam fame, when it was informed by special government pleader C. Sumon that a report on the concoction was awaited from the Ayush department on May 29. It then directed both the state government and the centre to submit details on the medicinal preparation and posted the next hearing to May 31.

The government counsel submitted that the Ayush department collected samples of concoction prepared by Anandaiah and sent them to labs for analysis. Their report was expected to be received on May 29. He informed the court that Anandaiah did not register with the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences and the government had no objection to its distribution if it was found to be good for human consumption to

treat Covid patients.

The court observed that it would be better to take a decision on the distribution of the preparation in the wake of a large number of people willing to take it to get cure from Covid.

Additional Solicitor General representing the centre submitted that if they were approached by Anandaiah to use it for public purpose, they would conduct tests and take a decision on allowing its use as per the norms of Drugs and Cosmetics Act. However, the court directed the centre to submit in writing whether such medicinal preparation could be used for public consumption or not, without going much into technical details.

Meanwhile, Anandaiah's counsel N. Ashwani Kumar submitted to the court that he was being subjected to pressure to disclose ingredients and the formula used in the preparation of concoction by the officials, and sought a direction from the court to stop it.

In a related development, Anandaiah filed a petition in the High Court, stating that he was being subjected to pressure by the officials to disclose ingredients and formula being used for preparation of concoction and sought direction from the court to stop it. He submitted to the court that district officials and Ayush Commissioner were mounting pressure on him for disclosure and subjecting him to trouble.

CM TO VIRTUALLY SET STONE FOR MEDICAL COLLEGE ON MAY 30

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 27

District Collector M. Hari Narayanan on Thursday informed that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy would lay the foundation stone virtually for the government medical college to be constructed

at Arogyavaram near Madanapalle town on May 30.

The Collector along with local MLA Nawaz Bhasha and Madanapalle Sub-Collector Y. Jahnvi inspected the land earmarked for the construction. He said the CM sanctioned the medical college for Madanapalle division

under Rajampeta parliamentary constituency with the intention of setting up at least one medical college in each parliamentary constituency across the state.

The construction of the medical college is expected to be completed in two years.

RIVER | WORK At present 21 gates are lifted to a height at 40 metres to facilitate flood water flow

Officials make arrangements for Godavari diversion

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Marking a major milestone in the execution of the prestigious multipurpose Polavaram irrigation project, works to divert Godavari river from right to left canal from its main course by about 6.5 km to rejoin it again have commenced. The works will involve closure of the upstream cofferdam in a phased manner at Angaluru in Devipatnam mandal in East Godavari district.

Water resources authorities say that for the construction of earth-cum-rock-fill dam of the project, cofferdams both

upstream and downstream need to be built so that the dam will come up in between them.

The upstream cofferdam will be raised to a height of 42.5 metres and spread across the river bed for a length of nearly 2,480 metres. The entire length of cofferdam is divided into four reaches or gaps and these gaps which facilitate flow of water in its main course, are being filled up at present one by one. So far, 7.56 lakh cubic metres of rock filling works in the gaps have been taken up.

Reach-1 started from zero point to 480 metres across the river and its present height is 35 metres. Reach-

2, spread from 480 metres to 1,700 metres length, is raised to 38 metres. The heights of Reach-3 spread from 1,700 metres to 2,100 metres and also Reach-4, spread from 2,100 metres to 2,480, are being raised to 34 metres. By the end of June, the height of all four reaches will be raised to 38 metres and by the end of July, it will be 42.5 metres.

In a first-of-its-kind diversion of the natural course of Godavari river by raising the upstream cofferdam, water will be routed through an approach channel to the spillway by lifting the crest gates to the pilot channel. The water will rejoin the main course of

the original river downstream towards Dowleswaram near Rajahmundry. The whole diversion will be for a distance of about 6.5 km.

As the Godavari river is expected to witness floods with the onset of southwest monsoon in June, works are being expedited to fill up the gaps of upstream cofferdam so that water flow will be stopped and released through spillway by lifting the radial crest gates. Out of 42 crest gates fixed at a height of 42.75 metres, 21 gates are lifted to a height at 40 metres at present to facilitate the flow of flood water from the river downstream. The works to raise

the remaining 21 crest gates will be completed by the first or second week of June.

Similarly, the cofferdam downstream will also be raised to a height of 30 metres. It has reached 22 metres and the works would be over by July.

Following a direction from Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to complete the Polavaram project by the end of 2021 and ensure supply of water for irrigation for the next kharif, the project executing agency MEIL (Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited) has increased the pace of works. Polavaram project chief engineer B.

Sudhakar Babu said, "We have started filling up the gaps of upper cofferdam in a phased manner to divert river water from the main course through spillway back to its original course downstream by the time the river witnesses floods, to facilitate construction of Earth-Cum-Rock-Fill as per direction from Irrigation Advisory Board to divert river water by June 15. However, as some part of the diaphragm wall suffered damage, we will take up its repair at first and later take up execution of lower cofferdam and Earth-Cum-Rock-Fill to complete whole project works as per schedule."

SHORT TAKES

I&PR dept gets new Dy Director

Kurnool: K. Jayamma assumed charge as the deputy director in the information and public relations department here on Thursday. She was transferred from Anantapur. After taking charge, she said she would strive to take the policies of the government to the public through print and electronic media. She replaced P. Thimmappa who has been attached to I&PR commissionerate at Vijayawada.

INCREASE IN BED CAPACITY BOLSTERS PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 27

With the rising number of Covid-19 cases in Nandyal division, the district hospital has ramped up its bed capacity with an additional 50 beds through German Hangars.

The dashboard showed a total of 70 beds in the hospital, of which 10 were occupied by ICU patients and another 10 by patients on ventilators. The remaining 50 oxygenated beds are in general wards. But this capacity was inadequate considering the caseload coming from rural areas and Nandyal town, said district medical and health officer Dr Rama Giddaiah.

He said that in order to increase the bed-availability, authorities have completed construction of German Hangar beds. At least 100 beds would be made available at the makeshift site, which has all facilities like provision for oxygen connections, patient beds, and other paraphernalia, he said.

To extend facilities, the district administration has arranged Germany technology based temporary sheds with a capacity of 250-bed strength at four different places in the district. These newly arranged bed facilities were handed over to the respective hospitals on Thursday, R&B superintendent engineer Jayarami Reddy said.

He said that 100-bed strength high-technology sheds were also arranged in Kurnool GGH, 50 at Kurnool Tidco Covid care centre, 50 were coming up in Nandyal government district hospital and another 50 were available at Nandyal Tidco Covid care centre. These were all ready to treat Covid-19 patients at sheds, he stated.

Kurnool GGH superintendent Dr Narendranath Reddy said that the newly-arranged beds will be used from Friday onwards based on demand. Nearly 1,300 beds, including new ones, in the Kurnool GGH and almost all beds have oxygen supply facility to Covid-19 patients, he added.

On Thursday, district joint collector (development) Manajeer Jilani Samul visited the hospital and observed the German Technology sheds. He told officials of the hospital and senior doctors to use oxygen carefully. He asked about the availability of remdesvir, oxygen, and other needs.

SPURT IN COVID-19 DEATHS WORRIES ADMINISTRATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 27

Deaths due to Covid-19 were slowly increasing compared with previous days in the district with six deaths reported in a span of 24 hours.

On an average, at least six deaths were reported every day over the past weekdays. The death toll since May 10 has touched 70, taking the overall count to 709.

DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah said when compared to last year, the second wave of infection has turned deadly with unknown complications like black fungus.

On the other hand, the daily count of positive cases followed the same trend as the total cases were at 1,12,228 with Thursday's 981 new cases. Around 1,03,991 have recovered while 7,528 are undergoing treatment across the district.

Though curfew measures are being strictly implemented, the rise in positive cases has awakened district officials, who are trying to examine reasons for the situation. On an average, Kurnool district reported 997 positive cases every day and at least six deaths in the past ten days.

District in-charge Collector S. Rama Sundhar Reddy appealed to the public not to panic as the district administration has taken all steps to tackle the situation at any stage.

More Covid-19 tests conducted



A health worker takes samples for a Covid-19 test at a centre in Vijayawada on Thursday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Health official says no Covid surge in rural AP

Percentage of population affected in villages smaller, says Singhal

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal has denied reports of a surge in Coronavirus infections in rural Andhra Pradesh.

He told the media here on Thursday that all such reports were incorrect. Out of the 1,42,707 Covid cases registered from May 16 to 22, some 56,058 were from urban and 86,649 from rural areas. As per the 2011 Census, the 1.46 crore population lived in urban areas and 3.49 crore in rural areas.

The urban percentage of population was 29.46 while that of rural 70.54, he said and added that 383 persons were infected with the virus in urban and 248 in rural areas in the state.

The official said that based on directions from Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, an expert committee will be appointed with senior government officials to

16,167 new Coronavirus cases, deaths at 104 in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 16,167 fresh Coronavirus infections and 104 deaths in the last 24 hours ended Thursday morning. The medical and health authorities reported here on Thursday that out of 84,224 samples tested, 16,167 persons were found infected with confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,89,24,545 samples tested so far in the state, 16,43,557 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 14,46,244 were recovered

while 1,86,782 are still active with the virus. Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Chittoor topped the state with 2,967, followed by 2,325 in East Godavari, 1,472 in Anantapur, 1,434 in Visakhapatnam, 1,137 in Nellore, 1,092 in West Godavari, 1,069 in Prakasam, 991 in Guntur, 981 in Kurnool, 776 in Kadapa, 682 in Krishna, 679 in Sriakulam and 562 in Vizianagaram.

East Godavari remains the worst affected with the highest number of Coronavirus active cases at 32,714, followed by 21,726 in Prakasam and 21,448 in Chittoor.

Junior docs to get sr resident status

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Junior doctors in the state have received an assurance from the state government that their request for senior resident status to the PG final year students will be considered.

The junior doctors earlier threatened to boycott duties if their request for senior resident status and hike in stipend for senior residents is not considered by the government by May 27. They received a communication from the office of Director of Medical Examination that the PG final year students would be considered for getting senior resident status soon.

The PG final year students also want a hike in their stipend for senior resident status to the tune of ₹80,000; it is ₹40,000 at present. The junior residents of first year get a monthly stipend of ₹45,000, second year residents get ₹46,000 and those in final year are paid ₹48,000. The PG first, second and some final year students are attending all Covid and non-Covid duties at government, private hospitals and medical colleges at present following a spike in the caseload of Covid to help the state government tackle the pandemic.

AP Junior Doctors' Association president Dr Rahul Roy said, "We are thankful to the government, however, we want the government to consider a hike in stipend for senior residents."

Bapatla is pilot mandal for menstrual hygiene

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Andhra Pradesh Human Resource Development Institute (APHRDI) in association with UNICEF is holding the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) week through a series of programmes in Bapatla mandal from May 24 to 28 for all the line departments. Bapatla mandal has been identified by the Director General of AP HRDI as the pilot Mandar for MHM interventions on a common platform involving all the line departments.

The APHRDI officials stated that UNICEF Hyderabad field office set up the Centre for Sustainable Development Goals (CSDG) at its campus in Bapatla in Guntur district in 2018.

As part of CSDG, HRDI set up a working committee on menstrual hygiene management in collaboration with all major line departments for implementing menstrual hygiene interventions in Andhra Pradesh.

UNICEF is providing technical support for the effective implementation of the recommendations of the committee to benefit the adolescent

and women population of Andhra Pradesh which was recognised by the AP government. This Committee is unique in South India and has members from all the major line departments.

AP HRDI is organising an Online MHM Day for all the departments of AP on Friday in association with UNICEF, during which, a poster would be released and a meet held on 'MHM Pilot Mandar — Importance of Pilot Project, Key Indicators, Strategies, Baseline data and other relevant information.' It will be followed by other programmes for a week.

Coronavirus—infected patients in the state and said that they had already imposed a penalty on erring hospitals. He said the ministers' sub-committee would monitor the bills from private hospitals to ensure there is no fleecing of patients.

The official said AP registered 579 black fungus infection cases so far. The health department gave away 1,800 Amphotericin B injections for treatment of patients in various districts on Thursday. Directions have been issued for giving the second dose of Covaxin and the first dose of Covishield in the next four days.

He said the department was availing the services of 1,400 additional health staff for Covid care in addition to roping in 2,364 PG medical students, 3,086 house surgeons, 806 MBBS final year students, 2,386 nursing students and 315 dental students for the purpose.

AP GETS ₹6.72 CR AID IN 10 DAYS, ₹8 CR ON THE WAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 27

Andhra Pradesh government received Covid aid worth of ₹6.72 crore in the last ten days and nearly ₹8 crore worth additional aid is in the pipeline.

Based on a call given by the state government to several organisations, trusts, societies, donors, NRIs, PSUs and others across the country and overseas, to provide assistance like medicines, oxygen concentrators/cylinders, surgical masks, respirators, medical equipment and others, to equip all government hospitals and provide better healthcare to Covid-19 patients, AP government received overwhelming response.

TTD expert: No proof for seer's claim on Hanuman

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, MAY 27

The controversy over the birthplace of Lord Hanuman have set the stage for a scholarly debate between the Pandit Parishad Committee of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams and Govindananda Saraswathi Swami, the founder of Sri Hanumad Janmabhoomi Tirtha Kshetra Trust of Karnataka's Kishkinda-Pampa Kshetra.

TTD has announced the 'Anjanadri Hillock' at Tirumala as the birth place of Lord Anjaneya with evidence on the auspicious day of Srirama Navami at the hill town here on April 21.

The scholars committee of TTD have presented evidence it collected from 12 puranas to conclude that the Anjanadri hills is the birthplace of Hanuman. It added that anyone having a different view was free to discuss the matter with them.

Govindananda Saraswathi Swami, the founder of Karnataka-based trust of Kishkinda, was not enthused at the claim from the TTD. The actual birthplace of Lord Hanuman is located in Pampa-Kshetra, Hampi, he averred.

He sent a letter to the TTD, expressing his disagreement over the claim of the TTD's scholars panel.

In a reply, chairman of the scholars committee and vice-chancellor of National Sanskrit University, Prof. V. Muralidhar Sharma, expressed the panel's disagreement over the views expressed by the Swami and invited him for a debate.

On Thursday morning, the scholars committee and Govindananda Saraswathi met at Sanskrit University in Tirupati. A discussion

● **THE SCHOLARS** committee of TTD presented evidence that it had collected from 12 puranas to conclude that the Anjanadri hills is the birthplace of Hanuman. It added that anyone having a different view was free to discuss the matter with them.

● **GOVINDANANDA SARASWATHI** Swami, the founder of Karnataka-based trust of Kishkinda, was not enthused at the claim from the TTD. The actual birthplace of Lord Hanuman is located in Pampa-Kshetra, Hampi, he averred during a three-hour debate

were held for three hours on the issue with the Scholar Kuppa Vishwanatha Sharma as its moderator.

Speaking to the media later, Prof Sharma refuted the claims made by the Swami. He said the Swamiji was not able to prove his point with evidence and the arguments propounded by him were challenged with material evidence at the debate.

Asserting that many Puranas, epical evidences, clearly indicated that the holy shrine of Tirumala is the birthplace of Anjaneya, Prof. Sharma appealed to the Swami to not belittle the TTD's endeavour.

Meanwhile, after the debate, moderator Sharma declared that the findings of TTD Pundit Parishad Committee were concrete and that the arguments of the Hampi Swami were not backed by evidence. Members of the committee Acharya Ramakrishna, Acharya Shankara Narayana, Acharya Rani Sadasiva Murthy, and its convenor Dr Akella Vibhishana Sharma were also present.

Most panchayats in Kadapa district lack own buildings

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 27

Recently elections were held to the panchayats in the district. Out of 807 panchayats, elections were conducted in 793 gram panchayats and the new governing bodies were formed.

Now, the elected bodies face a predicament. Only few panchayats have their own buildings in the district. Most are in small, old buildings with no infrastructure worth speaking of. Now, the sarpanches and other councilors are faced with a huge task of meeting the needs of around 6,18,985 rural

● **PANCHAYAT OFFICE** buildings details were being collected from the field level, says officer.

households with a total population of over 19.53 lakhs.

After the YSRC government has come to power. It has revamped the village administration and has set up a village secretariat system. All services to villagers are being rendered from one place with modern facilities at these secretariats. Government spent about ₹40 lakh on each building.

With the government focussed on ensuring village development through its village secretariats,

now an important question concerns buildings and other amenities for panchayat offices.

With poor facilities and the dilapidated state of cramped buildings, sarpanches want their meetings and even activities to be allowed at the village secretariats. When contacted, District Panchayat Officer Dhanireddy Prabhakara Reddy said that the details of panchayat office buildings were being collected from the field level. New buildings and infrastructure would be provided wherever needed as per funds availability, he added.

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SHORT TAKES

ODISHA: 816 INMATES TEST POSITIVE IN MAY

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 27

As the second wave of Covid-19 infections sweeps Odisha, as many as 816 prisoners have tested positive for disease in the state in May, a statement released by the state prison headquarters revealed on Thursday.

As per the release, at least 420 prisoners have recovered from the virus while others are under treatment as per the protocols of the Odisha health and family welfare department.

Till May 26, 658 prisoners were shifted from over-crowded jails with permission of trying courts to Covid care centres, said the prisons department statement. 54 out of 87 jails in the state have not been touched by the Covid pandemic which is a major relief for the government.

As a precautionary measure, the government has released an amount of ₹15,000 to each sub-jails and ₹25,000 to each district and special jails towards procurement of Covid kits, preventive medicines.

According to the data furnished by the prisons headquarters, the prisoner population in the state had surged to 20,150 in comparison to the scheduled capacity of 19,824 as of May 1, 2021. Citing serious concerns on the overcrowding of jails amid the second wave of the pandemic, a High Power Committee had suggested several measures for decongestion of jails.

RAJNATH LAUNCHES ONLINE OPD PORTAL

New Delhi, May 27: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday formally launched an online medical consultation platform to facilitate hassle-free health services for armed forces' personnel, veterans and their families.

Singh said the online outpatient platform will ensure widespread access to quality health services in remote areas besides reducing the load on the hospitals. "This is a very important step taken at a very critical time for the health of service personnel," the defence minister said launching the service at a virtual event. The defence ministry said the services can be availed by registering on the website <https://ehatopd.in/>.

The trial version of the platform was made functional in August last year and over 6,500 medical consultations have been already carried out through it. The defence minister said the 'SeHAT OPD' portal reflected the government's commitment to 'Digital India' and 'e-governance'.

"It has always been our endeavour to provide better, faster and transparent facilities to our countrymen," he said describing the launch of the portal as a great example of innovation, especially at a time when the nation is fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

HC ASKS MAHA TO PROBE HOW CELEBS GOT VIRUS DRUGS

Mumbai, May 27: The Bombay High Court on Thursday directed the Maharashtra government to investigate how celebrities and politicians procured anti-Covid-19 drugs and injections to help those in need when the same were available only in scarce quantities across the country.

A vacation bench of Justices Amjad Sayyad and G.S. Kulkarni said such celebrities might have had the noble intention of helping others, but only the Union government was authorised to allocate those drugs.

These people (celebrities) might not realise that they are acting in defiance of the legal set up, it noted.

Therefore, an inquiry must be conducted to rule out issues such as illegal procurement, hoarding, black-marketing and providing spurious drugs.

The court's order came after Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, who appeared for the Maharashtra government, submitted that the state had issued show cause notices to Mumbai Congress MLA Zeeshan Siddique, actor Sonu Sood's charity foundation, and some others over the matter.

Kumbhakoni said Siddique and Sood had sent their replies saying they neither purchased nor stocked the medicines and injections.



A municipality worker sanitises the area before a special Covid-19 vaccination drive for boatmen at the banks of Dal Lake in Srinagar on Thursday.

— PTI

Controlling Covid-19 is my only focus, says BSY

Bengaluru, May 27:

With speculations rife that some attempts were on within the ruling BJP to replace him, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Thursday said controlling the Covid-19 pandemic and protecting the interests of the people were his only priorities now. In a veiled attack on those trying to exert pressure for unseating him, he said those who had gone to Delhi have been sent back with answers as he asserted that addressing the Covid situation should be the priority of all ministers and legislators.

"The only thing before me is Covid, controlling it and protecting the interest of the people is my priority. If some have gone somewhere (referring to some legislators going to Delhi to meet high command), they have been given the right answers (by the high command) and sent back,"

● **IN A veiled attack on those trying to exert pressure for unseating him, he said those who had gone to Delhi have been sent back with answers as he asserted that addressing the Covid situation should be the priority of all ministers and legislators.**

Yediyurappa said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said when people are in distress and deaths are increasing due to Covid, controlling it together should be the priority of legislators, ministers and everyone.

"We should focus towards it (controlling Covid), there is no other matter in front of me, facing Covid is my first priority," he added.

Asked whether he will call a legislature party meeting, the Chief Minister merely said, "there is no need to discuss it, with you (media)." Even as the state is bat-

tling the second wave of Covid-19, speculations were rife on Wednesday that some efforts were on within the ruling BJP for replacing Yediyurappa. Some ministers and MLAs, for the first time, have openly admitted to such moves to exert pressure to unseat the Karnataka BJP strongman.

Several legislators considered close to the Chief Minister have rallied around him, questioning the need for such a change and asserted that the 78-year-old veteran will complete the term and will even lead the party during the next Assembly polls two years away.

Citing certain decisions taken by the government, its handling of the Covid crisis, alleged instances of corruption, a few legislators are said to be pushing for convening a legislature party meeting after June 7, the last day of the lockdown. — PTI

STALIN WRITES TO MODI ON VAX COMPLEX

T. SUDHEESH | DC CHENNAI, MAY 27

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that the Centre hand over the now-defunct multi-crore Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) at Thirukazhukundram in Chengalpattu district on lease. The state government will make the facility, with an annual production capacity of 585 million doses, operational to produce Covid vaccine, he said in the letter.

The development comes close on the heels of Stalin's visit to the IVC on Tuesday.

Deccan Chronicle had published a series of reports on the necessity of reviving the IVC ever since the pandemic outbreak reported in the state in March last year. "The state is ready to take over the facilities on lease without bearing past liabilities," Stalin wrote to Modi.

States continue to extend curbs

WB extends lockdown, TN may follow suit

DC CORRESPONDENTS NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Even as the nationwide trend of decline in fresh cases continues, several states are not ready to take any chance and have decided to continue with restrictions albeit with some relaxations.

The Mamata Banerjee government on Thursday extended the restrictions due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic in West Bengal for another two weeks from May 31 till June 15. It also declared the fresh schedule of the higher secondary and secondary examinations, which were recently postponed, in July and August respectively.

Announcing another round of extension of the curbs, the chief minister said, "We are not calling it lockdown. Punjab has been requesting us to increase the ceiling in the jute industries due to a demand. So the workforce attendance for daily production in the jute industries will be allowed from 30% to 40% in a shift. The construction workers can also start their job if they are vaccinated even in private. We are now focussing on superspreaders like hawkers, rickshaw-pullers, fish-sellers at markets in a model."

Similarly, certain minor relaxations to the total lockdown that is now in force could be expected from next week in Chennai and other districts that have shown a decline in the number of daily infections when the government formally makes the announcement on Friday or Saturday.

At a meeting of high level officials and Ministers at the Secretariat, presided over by Chief Minister M K Stalin, on Thursday, to take stock of the Covid-19 situation and chalk out plans to contain the spread of the virus, there was a suggestion for the relaxations, sources said.

However, with the numbers shooting through the roof in many parts of the state, particularly

Covid containment norms unchanged

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 27

With Covid-19 cases still significantly high and the virus now spreading into rural areas, the Centre on Thursday directed states and Union Territories to continue the ongoing Covid-19 guidelines till June 30 and go for 'intensive and local containment measures' in districts reporting high cases. In the last 24 hours 2.11 lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 and 3, 847 fatalities from the deadly virus were recorded.

In a fresh order, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla said strict implementation of containment and other measures has led to a decline in new and active cases in majority of states and UTs barring some areas in South

● **THE NUMBER of active cases presently is still very high which is why containment measures need to be implemented.**

and North East India. He, however, said that in spite of the declining trend, the number of active cases presently is still very high which is why containment measures need to be implemented strictly.

"Any relaxation by states and UTs, may be considered at an appropriate time, in a graded manner, after assessing the local situation, requirements and resources," Bhalla said. The order comes at a time when some of the states have started easing up the strict restrictions imposed at the time when cases were very high.

Coimbatore, there is no possibility of lifting the lockdown all over, the sources said, adding that even the relaxations would be to just allow groceries, vegetable and meat shops to open for a few hours daily and nothing more than that.

Delhi that has been under strict lockdown since April 17 is now witnessing a significant decline in fresh infections and on Thursday the new cases came down to 1,072 and the positivity rate dipped to 1.53% while deaths in the city were 117.

It is expected that Delhi Chief Minister Mr Arvind Kejriwal may announce graded opening up of lockdown from June 1.

Maharashtra, which has witnessed the worst of the pandemic, has decided not to lift all Covid-19 restrictions as 21 districts in the state still have more than 10% positivity rate. "Relaxations could be given in the districts

where cases are declining but not in the entire state. The guidelines will be issued in a few days," Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope said.

Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday decided to unlock the state partially from June 1.

The decision was taken following recommendation by a ministerial panel constituted by chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan to study the current pandemic situation in different districts in the state and suggest if restrictions imposed in the districts could be relaxed from June one.

Meanwhile, the Chhattisgarh government has opened up partially 15 out of 27 districts in the state following dip in positivity rates in these districts. Sources said the state government was seriously contemplating to partially lift restrictions imposed in the rest 12 districts from June one.

No safety



Beneficiaries do not adhere to social distancing norms as they wait to receive the Covid-19 vaccine dose at Badshah Khan hospital in Faridabad on Thursday.

— PTI

FIGHTING | TERROR

Many policemen, security personnel test positive for virus

J&K: Covid hampers anti-militancy ops

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MAY 27

The lingering Coronavirus pandemic has hampered greatly if not halted completely counterinsurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir. Stating this, J&K Director General of Police Dilbag Singh said on Thursday that a large number of policemen and other security forces personnel too have contracted Covid-19, thereby making it difficult for the counter-militancy grid to continue its operations with the pace it would conduct these until recently.

The other reason he said is the huge deployment of uniformed forces on the

roads and other public places to enforce lockdown which entered the 28th day on Thursday.

Singh, while speaking to reporters in southern Kulgam district said, "Covid pandemic has affected anti-militancy operations to some extent. But it is not like we are leaving areas free for terrorists to roam around".

He said "many policemen and security forces personnel have tested positive for the virus. But despite the fact that the J&K police are fighting Covid pandemic and enforcing lockdown through their deployments on roads and streets across the Valley, specific lead based anti-militancy

operations are being conducted in South Kashmir and other parts of Kashmir".

Asked if it was true that the recruitment into militant outfits from among the local youth has plummeted in the recent past, the police chief said, "Unfortunately, the recruitment is still taking place, but the graph is very less compared to previous years. The J&K police have been doing a lot on this front and making concerted efforts to plug it completely. I believe more steps need to be taken to stop it fully."

He, however, also said "we don't want local youth to turn to guns. The police have been working hard to

prevent misguided youth who have joined various terror outfits to return and live peaceful and dignified lives. Here in Kulgam itself a group of youth which was about to join militancy was brought back and each of the boys was united with their family." He added, "Likewise, in other districts too many such youths were stopped from treading on the wrong path."

He claimed that proscribed outfits like Jaish-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Al-Badr "continue to get oxygen from across the Line of Control and continue to try to lure Kashmiri boys into their fold".

Singh said that the police authorities have in many instances succeeded in persuading militants to lay down their arms and surrender before the security forces even during live encounters. "Young boys do agree to surrender but older ones aren't ready. From our end, efforts are on to reach out to misguided youth to help them come back," he asserted.

Replying to another question, the DGP said that the number of active militants keeps fluctuating and, as of now, intelligence reports suggest there are about 100 of them active in the four districts of south Kashmir—Kulgam, Shopian, Pulwama and Anantnag.

SHORT TAKES

ARMENIA: SIX SOLDIERS HELD BY AZERBAIJAN

Yerevan, May 27: The Armenian military said Thursday that six of its troops have been taken prisoner by neighbouring Azerbaijan, an incident that further exacerbates tensions between the two ex-Soviet nations in the wake of an outbreak of hostilities over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijan's Defence Ministry claimed that the Armenian soldiers were seized early Thursday when they attempted to cross the border and place mines on supply routes leading to the Azerbaijani positions. The Armenian authorities insisted that its soldiers were captured on Armenia's side of the border while conducting engineering works, and demanded their immediate release. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan told a government meeting that the soldiers were planting a minefield with warning signs on Armenian territory near the border.

TALIBAN LEADER KILLED IN BALOCHISTAN

Karachi, May 27: A top commander of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, who was believed to be involved in the deadly attack on the Civil Hospital in Quetta in 2016, has been killed, along with three members of the banned militant outfit in Balochistan province, police said on Thursday. Based on a tip-off, the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) launched an operation in Agbara area of the restive Balochistan province on Tuesday and killed Riaz Thekedar. "Four of the terrorists were killed in heavy firing, while two of them managed to escape," police said. A large cache of guns, ammunition and weapons was seized from the spot. A CTD spokesman said top Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan leader Thekedar, was killed in the encounter. "Thekadar was involved in several attacks on security forces and the attack on the Civil Hospital in Quetta in 2016," he said.

REVIEW CASE OF FEMALE ACTIVIST, EU ASKS IRAN

Dubai, May 27: The European Union on Thursday called on Iran to review a case of a prominent female human rights activist who was sentenced to 30 months in prison and 80 lashes on charges of protesting against the killing of protesters during the country's 2019 unrest. A spokesperson for the bloc urged Iran to look into the case of Narges Mohammadi under "applicable international human rights law and taking into account her deteriorating health condition." Earlier this week, Mohammadi confirmed her sentence in an Instagram post and said she does not "accept any of these sentences." "The recent sentencing of the Iranian human rights defender Mrs Narges Mohammadi to prison term and flogging is a worrying development," the EU said. In the post, Mohammadi said one of the charges against her is having a party and dancing in jail. She was released from jail in October 2020, after serving eight and a half years in prison.

TIGRAY REBELS KILL 22 OFFICIALS IN ETHIOPIA

Johannesburg, May 27: Rebels have killed 22 officials of the war-hit Tigray region's interim administration, Ethiopia's government said on Wednesday. An additional 20 interim officials had been "kidnapped" by forces loyal to the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, or TPLF, which ruled the region until it was toppled by an offensive ordered by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in November. A further four have been "wounded and hospitalised", said the statement issued on Twitter. Abiy declared victory four weeks after the offensive began and replaced the TPLF's regional administration with an interim one headed by officials appointed by the federal government based in Addis Ababa. But six months on, fighting continues in Tigray as pro-TPLF fighters wage an insurgent campaign in the region's countryside. The attacks on the officials have been carried out by TPLF fighters who claim to fight for the people of Tigray but have rather been killing members of the administration that are tasked with bringing stability,"the statement said.

New taxiway at NY airport



A Southwest aircraft moves along a new taxiway at LaGuardia Airport, in New York, on Thursday, becoming the first aircraft to pass beneath the pedestrian sky bridge that connects gates with the new Terminal B.

— AP

Rwanda genocide: Macron stops short of an apology

Says France has to recognise suffering inflicted on Rwandans

Kigali, May 27: In a key speech on his visit to Rwanda, French President Emmanuel Macron said he recognises that France bears a heavy responsibility in the 1994 genocide in the central African country. Macron solemnly detailed how France had failed the 800,000 victims of the genocide but he stopped short of an apology.

France "was not an accomplice" in the genocide but ended up siding with Rwanda's "genocidal regime" and bore an "overwhelming responsibility" in the slide toward the massacres, the French leader said, speaking Thursday at the genocide memorial in the capital, Kigali. "France has a role, a history and a political responsibility in Rwanda. It has a duty: That of looking history in the face and recognising the suffering that it inflicted on the Rwandan people by favouring silence over the examination of truth for too long," Macron said. When the genocide started, "the international community took close to three months, three interminable months, before reacting and we, all of us, abandoned hundreds of thousands of

Speech 'more valuable' than atonement: Kagame

Kigali, May 27: Rwandan President Paul Kagame on Thursday hailed a speech by his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron recognising France's role and responsibility in the 1994 genocide. "His words were something more valuable than an apology. They were the truth," he told a joint press conference after the two leaders met in Kigali.

Macron said he "recognises" France's role which included backing the former genocidal regime in Rwanda and ignoring warnings of the impending massacres which left some 800,000 mostly Tutsis dead. His highly anticipated speech did not contain a formal apology, but he went further than his predecessors and said that

SURVIVORS' GROUP DISAPPOINTED

Kigali, May 27: Rwanda's main genocide survivor group said Thursday it was disappointed President Emmanuel Macron did not "present a clear apology" for France's role in the 1994 genocide during his visit to Rwanda. Egide Nkuranga, president of the Ibuka association, said Macron did not "ask forgiveness".

— AFP

only those who had survived the horrors "can maybe forgive, give us the

gift of forgiveness." Macron's visit is aimed at turning the page on decades of diplomatic tensions over the genocide and Kagame said relations would only strengthen going forward. "France and Rwanda are going to relate much better to the benefit of both our peoples, economically, politically and in terms of culture," he said. "But the relationship between our two countries will never be entirely conventional. There is a special familiarity resulting from the complex and terrible history we share, for better or for worse. "We have chosen to make it for the better. We wish to form a strong and sustainable relationship, based on priorities that matter to both Rwanda and France."

and met President Paul Kagame at the presidential residence.

— AP

CHINA TRYING SINO-OZ WRITER OVER ESPIONAGE

Beijing, May 27: China on Thursday put a Chinese-Australian writer on trial for alleged espionage and denied the Australian ambassador in Beijing access to the hearing. Yang Hengjun has been held since arriving in China in January 2019 and has had no access to family and only limited contact with his lawyer, the Australian government has said. Ambassador Graham Fletcher walked to the court complex gate in Beijing and returned after he was denied entry, telling journalists it was "regrettable" that diplomats were prevented from observing the trial. His government had been told earlier that a representative would not be allowed to attend the trial because it is a national security case.

— AP

EU could hit key Belarus exports

Lisbon, May 27: The EU is intent on making Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko pay a high price for the forced landing of a European airliner to arrest regime opponents, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. "The heads of state and government asked us on Monday (at a summit) to propose sectoral economic sanctions, something that we are not used to doing in the EU, and there are some that immediately come to mind," Borrell said in an interview Wednesday in Lisbon on the eve of an informal meeting of foreign ministers. "Belarus is a big exporter of potash: \$2.5 billion. Everything goes through the Baltic countries. It's easy to control it, if you really want to," he said. "One can also imagine that the gas which arrives

in Europe via Belarus could come to Europe via another pipeline, and Belarus would lose the transit fees, which is not negligible," he added. Lukashenko sparked international outrage by dispatching a fighter jet Sunday to intercept a Ryanair flight from Athens to Vilnius carrying dissident reporter Roman Protasevich, 26, and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega. EU leaders hit back at Minsk, agreeing to ban Belarusian airlines from the bloc and urging EU-based carriers not to fly over its airspace. The leaders also tasked Borrell with coming up with further "targeted economic sanctions" against the Belarusian authorities to add to the 88 regime figures and seven companies already on a blacklist over a crackdown on the opposition.

— AFP

UK's 15-YEAR VOTING CAP FOR EXPATS MAY GO

London, May 27: Britain's government on Thursday detailed plans to scrap a restriction that deprived expats of their right to vote after 15 years of living abroad, calling it outdated in a globalised world. Long a bane of expatriate Britons, the limit will be replaced with "votes for life" in forthcoming legislation that will also controversially introduce voter identification for the first time in UK elections. "In an increasingly global and connected world, most British citizens living overseas retain deep ties to the United Kingdom," Cabinet Office minister Nicholas True said in a statement. "These measures support our vision for a truly global Britain, opening up our democracy to British citizens living overseas."

— AFP

HK Bill amends poll law, reduces direct public vote

Hong Kong, May 27: Hong Kong's legislature on Thursday passed a bill amending electoral laws that drastically reduces the public's ability to vote and increases the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city.

The new law empowers the city's national security department to check the backgrounds of potential candidates for public office and a sets up a new committee to ensure candidates are patriotic.

The number of seats in Hong Kong's legislature will be expanded to 90, with 40 of them elected by a largely pro-Beijing election committee.

The number of legislators elected directly by Hong Kong voters will be cut to 20, from the previous 35.

The bill, passed by a 40-2 vote, was met with little opposition, as most of the legislators are largely pro-Beijing. Their pro-democracy colleagues resigned en masse last year in protest over the ousting of four lawmakers deemed to be insufficiently loyal to Beijing.

Pro-Beijing lawmakers lauded the bill during the debate on Wednesday and Thursday, saying that reforms would prevent those not loyal to Hong Kong from running for office.

Some pointed out that multiple bills that impact people's livelihoods have been passed with more ease this year compared to in 2020, when pro-democracy lawmakers would at times filibuster or behave disruptively during meetings to stall the passage of bills that they disagreed with.

The changes to Hong Kong's elections come as Beijing further tightens control over the semi-autonomous city that saw months of anti-govern-

ment protest and political strife in 2019. Authorities have arrested and charged most of the city's outspoken pro-democracy advocates, such as Joshua Wong, who was a student leader of 2014 protests, as well as media tycoon Jimmy Lai, who founded the *Apple Daily* newspaper.

China's rubber-stamp parliament in March endorsed changes to the city's electoral system, which then led to Hong Kong's proposals. They are the latest in a string of moves to ensure people elected to office or serving the city are loyal to Beijing. An amendment the legislature approved earlier this month requires the city's over 400 district councilors who mainly deal with municipal matters to take an oath pledging loyalty to Hong Kong and to upholding its mini-constitution.

The oath was previously required only of legislators and government officials such as the chief executive.

— AP

CONSTITUTIONAL BENCH TO HEAR NEPAL PLEAS

Kathmandu, May 27: Nepal's Supreme Court on Thursday sent all the 19 petitions challenging the dissolution of the House of Representatives by the President to the Constitutional Bench. As many as 30 petitions, including one by the Opposition alliance, have been filed at the Supreme Court, challenging Friday's House dissolution by President Bidya Devi Bhandari and rejection of Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba's claim by the President for the post of prime minister.

After a preliminary hearing on the 19 petitions, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Chandra Shumsher Rana decided to send them all to the Constitutional Bench, the *Kathmandu Post* reported. "A single bench of Chief Justice Rana has decided to send all the petitions related to the House dissolution to the Constitutional Bench," Kishor Poudel, a communication expert at the Supreme Court, told the newspaper. These cases will now be heard along with 11 others, including the one filed by 146 lawmakers demanding appointment of Nepali Congress President Deuba as the prime minister.

Eleven petitions were directly registered at the Constitutional Bench. Some of the petitioners had demanded an interim against the dissolution and calling of the House meeting to present the national budget. Rana, however, refused.

According to the constitutional provision, the government must present the federal budget at the federal Parliament on Jestha 15, which is May 29 this year. Since there is no Parliament, the government is planning to bring the budget through an ordinance.

— PTI

Efforts on to clean up Lankan coast: Officials

Oz kids can't block coal mine expansion

Colombo, May 27: Sri Lanka's apex environment body on Thursday said a Singapore-flagged cargo vessel, which caught fire near the Colombo beach last week, is in the process of sinking, and that preparations are underway to tackle the resulting oil spill.

Top Marine Environmental Protection Authority (MEPA) official Turney Pradeep Kumara said the government would file for damages to responsible parties for the damages done to the marine ecosystem. "The crew will be questioned and statements will be recorded. There will be legal action through the Attorney General," Kumara said. All 25 crew members of MV 'X-PRESS PEARL' — of Indian, Chinese, Filipino and Russian nationality — were rescued on Tuesday after a 'fire alarm' dispatch was sent.

"We have set in motion the process to manage the oil spill when it occurs. Equipment necessary is already in place," Kumara said. The National Aquatic Resource Research and Development Agency (NARA) said chemicals and other materials washed ashore from the ship along the western coast area from Colombo to

Canberra, May 27: A group of Australian child environmentalists lost their court bid Thursday to force the federal government to ban a coal mine expansion.

The eight children, aged 13 to 17, had argued in the Federal Court that Environment Minister Sussan Ley had a duty of care to protect younger people against climate change.

Ley is considering whether to approve the Vickery mine expansion in New South Wales state, and the children sought an injunction preventing the expansion. Justice Mordy Bromberg rejected their application while noting the mine expansion would lead to an additional 33 million metric tons of coal being extracted over 25 years and 100 million metric tons of car-

bon dioxide being released into the atmosphere.

Ley did owe the children a duty of care under the law of negligence, the judge found, but said he was not satisfied a reasonable understanding had been established that Ley would breach her duty of care to the children.

Bromberg found there was a "real" risk that the extension of the mine near the town of Gunnedah would likely cause a "tiny but measurable increase to global average surface temperatures."

— AP

Marawila would be collected and analysed. Based on the analysis, the NARA officials would state the degree of damage done to the marine ecosystem.

Apart from the 325 metric tonnes of fuel in its tanks, it was loaded with 1,486 containers carrying about 25 tonnes of hazardous nitric acid.

— PTI

CLIMATE | TRENDS

Chances of tropical cyclones in the Atlantic, increased rainfall in high-latitude regions

World may breach 1.5°C warming within 5 years: WMO

Paris, May 27: The world may temporarily breach the 1.5-Celsius warming mark within the next five years, according to an updated assessment of global climate trends released Thursday The World Meteorological Organisation and Britain's Met Office said there was a 40 percent chance of the annual average global temperature surpassing 1.5C above pre-industrial temperatures — the aspirational warming limit of the Paris climate accord. According to the Met Off-

ice's updated global 10-year climate prediction, there is a 90 percent chance of at least one year between 2021-2025 being the hottest on record. "The annual average global temperature over the next five years is likely to be at least 1C warmer than pre-industrial levels, within a range of 0.9C-1.8C warmer, it said. "These are more than just statistics," said WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas. "Increasing temperatures mean more melting ice,

higher sea levels, more heatwaves and other extreme weather, and greater impacts on food security, health, the environment and sustainable development." The landmark 2015 Paris climate deal saw nations commit to limit global temperature rises to "well below" 2C above pre-industrial levels. The accord strives towards a safer cap of 1.5C, but pledges made by nations under the Paris accord to date leave Earth on the path to warming roughly

twice as much by the end of the century. Experts greeted Thursday's announcement with caution. Joeri Rogelj, director of research at the Grantham Institute at Imperial College London, said a single year above 1.5C would not mean the Paris goals had been breached. "But this is nevertheless very bad news," he said. "It tells us once again that climate action to date is wholly insufficient and emissions need to be reduced urgently to zero to

halt global warming." The Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update, released on Thursday, showed that the chance of breaching 1.5C had roughly doubled compared to a similar assessment made last year. The WMO said this increase was largely down to improved datasets used to predict temperatures, rather than a sudden increase in the rate of warming. It said the new assessment showed an increased likelihood of tropical cyclones in the Atla-

ntic, as well as increased rainfall in high-latitude regions and the Sahel compared with the recent past. Ed Hawkins, climate research scientist at the University of Reading, said Thursday's assessment was "an indication that we are fast approaching the temperature levels that the Paris Agreement aims to avoid". He said that some months in 2016 — the hottest year on record — had already breached the 1.5C warming mark. "As global temperatures

continue to rise, it is inevitable that we will continue to temporarily cross 1.5C before we exceed it for more sustained periods," he said. "To limit global warming to 1.5C — or what the parties to the Paris Agreement thought 1.5C meant when they signed it — we need to hit the brakes on emissions now and stop global warming in the next 30 years or so," said Myles Allen, professor of geosystem science at the University of Oxford.

— AFP



DECCAN Chronicle

28 MAY 2021

Stop govt repression of Lakshadweep residents

The quiet life of about 70,000 people in Lakshadweep, an archipelago of 36 islands in the Arabian Sea about 300 km off the Kerala coast, has been in turmoil for the last six months, in direct consequence to the efforts of Praful Khoda Patel, a BJP leader from Gujarat, who landed in the Union territory as administrator in December last year. Mr Patel has been working over-time to overturn, both through legal and administrative measures, every system that has been existing there — some for centuries, some recent — creating deep resentment among the people.

The administrator has taken over the powers of the local self-governments with respect to agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, health and education, virtually denuding the elected representatives of whatever little say they have in the administration of their society. The newly introduced Lakshadweep Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Regulation 2021 provides for preventive detention of people whom the administration feels engaged in or preparing for activities which include crimes are normally tried under IPC and Information Technology Act, 2000. That the goonda act, as the new regulation

The government must instead strengthen the local self-government system in Lakshadweep. It must act, and act quickly and undo the damage the administrator has done.

is called, is sought to be imposed in a place which has reported hardly a heinous crime in decades shows the intentions of the administrator in poor light. The Lakshadweep Animal Preservation Regulation 2021 the administrator has introduced seeks to ban cow slaughter and consumption or sale of beef in any form in a place where an estimated 65 per cent of the population consumes meat. The draft Lakshadweep Town and Country Planning Regulation 2021 virtually ends the rights of landowners once that land falls under the development plan of the administration.

Apart from the legal route, Mr Patel has launched a series of administrative actions that has left the islanders high and dry. Among them are the demolition of makeshift-yards where the fishermen keep their boats to save them from the marauding cyclones which never fail to touch the island and the introduction of bureaucratic procedures for emergency evacuation of medical cases to Kerala, depriving the people of their assurance of emergency medical help.

Union territories are formed with a view to taking to tiny communities the benefits of the best of Indian democracy; it is undemocratic, unfair and unjust to serve them the worst of it. Every single act of Mr Patel is aimed at unsettling the lives of the people with little regard to their welfare or opinion. It is nothing less than an assault by the mighty Indian State on a hapless people and an attempt to impose its will and lifestyle on a society which is made up of 93 per cent indigenous people who have been classified as Scheduled Tribes.

The Union government must immediately recall Mr Patel and stop the process he initiated in the island at the earliest. The government must instead strengthen its local self-government system to administer the people taking the best of Indian democratic traditions.

Lakshadweep and its people are geo-politically and strategically important to India. Short-sighted, thoughtless and haphazard acts of administrators sent from Delhi should not be allowed to play havoc with it. The Union government must act, and act quickly and undo the damage the administrator has done.

Minimise curbs on social media

The new IT laws that have kicked in seek to moderate content on social media and most major platforms are planning to fall in line. Accountability in hosting content in media is desirable but the grave danger is the government, in its zeal to thwart what it sees as content aimed at denigrating its leaders, might use the laws to abridge the freedom of expression which has been a great feature of Indian democracy.

The reaction to WhatsApp going to court on the premise that users will lose their privacy protection has been projected as a challenge to India's sovereignty, which it is not. As a platform that essentially enables communications, WhatsApp has apprehensions regarding its end-to-end encryption which ensures confidentiality of messages shared between individuals and groups. There is a need for further engagement on this count as over 500 million users, including many departments of the Government of India, use WhatsApp regularly.

If a law challenged is seen as an affront to official India it only betrays the authoritarian nature of government. What is needed is a more nuanced approach to find a balance between the right to privacy and the need to allow action against malicious content, like those which have harmed Indian society as in rumours spread on internet platforms leading to the exodus of northeastern people, the lynching of "child kidnappers", and denigration of minorities, etc.

As the county with the most recorded objections to social media content, India must realise it needs to liberalise laws on content that are way too draconian, respect the right to privacy in matters that do not transgress the laws of the land and face up to the Internet age freedoms without trampling upon them.

The knotty issue involving those wishing to establish a wholesome degree of control over social media just to aggregate more power and the millions of Indians who use global platforms for their sheer convenience must be resolved by placing the most reasonable restrictions on fundamental rights through fair grievance redressal mechanisms.

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Subhani



7 yrs of PM Modi: Can he lead us out of the abyss?



Karan Thapar

As I See It

As we approach Narendra Modi's seventh anniversary as Prime Minister I think I've realised why so many are disappointed with him. The one quality we looked for when we voted for him in 2014 — and which some believe they had found in the immediate years thereafter — is what is missing today when we most need it. And it's called Leadership.

Let me explain what I mean. I'm not simply referring to assertiveness and conviction. They are necessary but not sufficient. What I have in mind is the capacity to paint a vision for the future, convince the country to ascribe to it and then boldly lead towards its realisation. It might sound fanciful but it's not unlike Moses leading the Israelites through the parted waters of the Red Sea to the promised land he had committed himself to deliver.

Think back to 2014. Perhaps he was misunderstood but Dr Manmohan Singh was widely perceived as a paralysed Prime Minister. Not just silent but also a prisoner of his own coalition and, even, his own party. He was not his own man and, therefore, could not be our leader either. The country saw him as Mrs Sonia Gandhi's "poodle" and he did precious little to change that impression.

Mr Modi, on the other hand, presented himself as the chief minister who had worked miracles in Gujarat. Many accepted that as fact and refused to entertain any doubts because they wanted a saviour. Here was a self-made man who had risen by his own efforts and talent. He didn't carry the burden of family nor the taint of compromise. He also had the gift of oratory and thus knew how to pre-

sent himself. During the 2013-14 campaign he sold himself to us and we readily bought him.

Yet behind this truth lies another and it's possibly more important. Each of us saw in him what we wanted to see even if it wasn't there. The Narendra Modi that we voted for was probably more our creation and less of his own making.

So you could say disappointment and disillusionment were perhaps inevitable. The real Narendra Modi was bound to be different from the image we had created and convinced ourselves we were acquiring. But in the early years so strong was our belief in him that we overlooked — foolishly and myopically — the first signs our faith had been misplaced. We found excuses for his impetuous and thoughtless demonetisation. We accepted his silence when Muslims were baited and lynched or dalits thrashed for being uppity, on the grounds that the Prime Minister can't speak on every occasion. Indeed, most people didn't even pay heed when he mistook mythology for science. Finally, the way the diaspora cheered him and foreign leaders like Barack Obama, Theresa May, the Asean heads of government and Middle Eastern potentates courted him convinced us that this was

Mr Modi defied his own scientists and continued with massive political rallies and shahi snans. He didn't care this could fan the flames. Ultimately, when the pot boiled over, he handed the problem to the state governments.

quite a man.

Even when the scales began to drop — and for some they did fast and furiously — there was a reluctance to accept that the Prime Minister lacked the one quality we so badly wanted: Leadership. His promises of a \$5 trillion economy or doubling farmers' incomes in five years were a beguiling illusion many refused to see through. His boast of standing up to Pakistan and making India feel good again was bombast but we failed to recognise it as hot air. His talk of reform was tantalising — because we knew we needed it badly — but he didn't deliver, yet many kept hoping that he would.

Of course, there's no doubt on some things he has made a difference — Swachhh Bharat, Jan Dhan, Ujjwala Yojana, rural roads and houses, medical insurance and electricity in villages. We applauded him for this, forgetting that it's what governments are elected to do. These aren't extraordinary achievements. They are just the simple expectations of needy people. Perhaps this is why he gets little credit for them today.

It was against this background the Covid-19 pandemic hit us and we suddenly realised that our colossus has feet of clay. He had nothing to say beyond the trite and the foolish. He reduced us to banging dishes and lighting candles, all in the hope this "mahabharat" could be won in 21 days. Even his flabbed oratory took flight. In the early months he didn't stop speaking, but what he said was leaden. I suspect he realised this because he soon opted

for silence.

The last year has revealed a Prime Minister who has failed repeatedly and has only himself to blame. He failed to anticipate how many vaccines we need and we are, as a result, woefully short. Yet all he had to do was enhance capacity by supporting our own vaccine manufacturers. It would have been "atma nirbhar", but he didn't do it. After that he defied his own scientists and continued with massive political rallies and *shahi snans*. He didn't care this could fan the flames. Ultimately, when the pot boiled over, he handed the problem to the state governments. He told them to acquire their own vaccines, knowing it would be both expensive and difficult to do, whilst exacerbating the problem by opening up vaccinations for every adult in the country although he knew the jabs did not exist. In one single stroke he made a bad problem considerably worse.

So if I were to say our great leader — the man we thought could be our Moses — has led us into a blind alley, would I be wrong? If I were to say the qualities of strength and decisiveness that we identified in 2014 have turned into obstinacy, defiance and recklessness, would I be wrong? If I were to say the power of speech that mesmerised us when we heard it from Madison Square Garden has become theatrical and, even, exasperating, would I be wrong?

Now the only question is this: Is Mr Modi the Prime Minister to lead us to the other shore? The truth is that we have no other. We have to believe he is. We have three years to find out, but for all our sakes I hope he has it in him. We can't change captains mid-sea, particularly when we don't know if there is another cyclone heading our way. But when we reach dry land, we must ask ourselves two simple questions: Why did we err in our judgment? And can we be certain it won't happen again?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

RISING CASES

Despite partial lockdown in AP, there is no let up in the daily number of Covid-19 cases (18,285 new Covid cases, 99 deaths reported in AP, DC, May 27). It is highly distressing and alarming. The reasons for this are not far to seek. People are not adhering to protocols when lockdown is relaxed.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

ABSCONDERS

Since ages we are fed with the news that the greatest swindlers of India — Vijay Mallya, Mehul Choksi, Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi — to name a few, will be extradited to India soon and will be prosecuted (*Fugitive Mehul Choksi captured in Dominica, DC, May 27*). They claim that our jails and hospitals are not suitable for them. Once they cross Indian borders these affluent and refined scammers cannot be brought back due to extradition bottlenecks.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

RIGHT TO SPEECH

Time and again the Supreme Court has been stating that Right to Expression and Right to Privacy cannot be denied to any individual in this country. With the advent of Social Media people in general and the youth in particular are able to express themselves rather freely and fearlessly. As long as the authorities apply the new digital rules sensibly it won't matter much.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

More powers to States demanded

MADRAS, May 27. The Rajamannar committee on Centre-State relations, appointed by the Tamil Nadu Government has recommended the setting up of a high power commission for re-distribution of powers between the Centre and the States.

The committee has also recommended the transfer of a number of subjects like development of oilfield and mineral resources and lotteries from the Union List to the State List, and the inclusion of corporation tax, customs and export duties and tax on the capital value of assets in the divisible pools to be shared by the centre and the states.

Devi Kar



Blame schools if India's kids can't show creativity or be innovative

We often hear educators lamenting the lack of creativity and innovativeness in Indians as a whole. Indeed, it is shocking that hardly any inventions have emerged from India in the past 50 years. However, we can't continue to blame our colonial shackles for the lack of creativity in terms of inventions and patents.

It is upsetting to learn from the latest data compiled by WIPO, the Geneva-based World Intellectual Property Organisation, that in 2019, companies like Samsung and Huawei filed more international patent applications *each* than the whole of India. India was responsible for less than one per cent of the total global applications for patents that year. It is also disturbing to know that unlike colleges and universities abroad, our higher educational institutions have no presence at all in this area. It has been inferred that not only do these figures indicate the sad state of innovative initiatives in India, they also confirm the low spending in research and development by our government. It is important to explore the reasons for this sad state of affairs.

There are many deep-rooted reasons

for this intellectual famine that our country has been experiencing. Most people cite rote learning in schools, which steadily destroys imagination and creativity in young minds, as the main culprit. This article will deal with a single major reason — that is the unconscious but constant reinforcement of plagiarism in our entire educational system.

First, the very concept and awareness of plagiarism is woefully absent in our school education. This year, when we announced in school that we would be tackling the issue of plagiarism, one of our senior students spoke up, saying: "No offence meant, but why is it we were not warned about this when we produced cut-and-paste projects and presentations in the lower classes?" She was spot on. Schools always looked out for factually correct and visually attractive presentations rather than original work. Unfortunately, our board examiners too reward students who produced attractive portfolios, the contents of which were gleaned from the Internet. Before the advent of the Information Age, the cut-and-paste jobs were carried out with the help of illustrated books and magazines, scissors

and glue.

Forget about projects and presentations, even answers to questions and essays have been written with the help of readymade notes and guidebooks. Since these fetched enviably high scores, including in the board exams, they were in great demand, making it unnecessary for students to think for themselves and to do their own research or write their own notes. I remember an oft-repeated joke that you could write a good essay on almost any topic if you prepared just a single essay on God. So, if you were asked to write an essay on "a rainy day", you could write about God's natural creations, which included the sky and earth, sun and of course rain, and then move on to a rainy day. Moreover, students have always been encouraged to quote at length, to enhance the richness of an answer or essay. Even in undergraduate class, students quoted writers to support an argument, but seldom presented research-based evidence of his or her own.

In art class children have been made to copy images and patterns. Imaginative composition — if set as an assignment — was usually "corrected"

and modified to conform to the teacher's ideas. Where music is concerned, how many children are encouraged to compose their own tunes? It is a shame that creative writing is not part of the regular school curriculum. In language and grammar classes, a child's originality is killed at the primary level itself. A schoolboy, asked to write a sentence with "mother", had his simple sentence: "My mother has big eyes". But this was crossed out with a thick red marker and changed to: "My mother is a noble lady". The next sentence, "I hate drinking milk", using the word "milk", was rejected in favour of: "Milk is a nutritious drink". The poor boy was being set in a mould created by his unimaginative teacher.

Also, looking upon the prescribed textbook as the students' Bible causes considerable damage to creative minds. If an answer was based on the subject-related textbook, it was marked correct, but if certain "key" phrases and terms were not used but explained in the student's own words, it was more than likely that the student would be heavily penalised. This is what defeats the making of independent minds.

It is extremely urgent today that we

correct all these mistakes and the lacunae of the past and begin by introducing the concepts of plagiarism and intellectual property right from the junior classes. It is true that much of early learning happens by observing and imitating. But children are imaginative too. We teachers must learn to foster this natural gift and be less rigid about the need to conform. As Picasso said: "All children are born artists. The problem is to remain an artist as we grow up."

As children grow older, they could be taught to consciously acknowledge the sources from where they have taken content. This practice, if well inculcated in our young, will go a long way to making them intellectually honest. Apart from developing academic honesty, educators should encourage and celebrate original work. When our children join school in the kindergarten, they are curious, imaginative and creative. It is we adults who cramp their style and freedom by straitjacketing them. The fault that India does not produce inventors lies in ourselves.

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,115.22	0.19
Nifty 50	15,337.90	0.24
S&P 500*	4,206.76	0.26
Dollar (₹)	72.59	0.27
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.49	0.63
Euro (₹)	88.49	0.78
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,223*319	0.66
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.16	0.42
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.987	0.25
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.617	0.043

* As of 8:30 PM IST

US first quarter GDP unchanged at robust 6.4%

The US economy grew at a robust annual rate of 6.4 per cent in the first three months of this year, unchanged from the government's initial estimate. The recovery from last year's deep recession gained steam at the beginning of this year, helped by vaccines to combat the virus and trillions of dollars in government assistance. The rise in the GDP was the same as the government's first look one month ago.

Sun Pharma Q4 net zooms over 2-fold to ₹894 cr



Sun Pharmaceutical Industries reported a more than two-fold jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 894.15 crore for the March quarter, from Rs 399.84 crore a year ago, mainly on a robust performance in the Indian market. Consolidated total revenue from operations stood at Rs 8,522.98 crore against Rs 8,184.94 crore. For the full year 2020-21, Sun posted a net profit of Rs 2,903.82 crore against Rs 3,764.93 crore.

Ikea launches shopping app in India

Swedish home furnishing retailer Ikea announced the launch of its shopping app in India, in a bid to expand its omni-channel approach in the country. The Ikea app would be available on both iOS and Android platforms and will offer 7,000 home furnishing products, Ikea said in a statement. Customers from cities Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Surat, and Baroda will be able to buy products with the app, Ikea said.

BPCL says no plans to sell stake in Petronet, IGL

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) said it has no intention to sell a part of its stake in Petronet LNG Ltd and Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) to help its new owner avoid making an open offer for the two gas companies. "We have no intention to pare down our stake in IGL or Petronet. Any paring down will be value destruction," BPCL director (finance) N. Vijayagopal said at an earnings call with investors.



Health crisis more pervasive and debilitating than financial crises Near-term outlook clouded: RBI

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MAY 27

The Covid-19 pandemic has unleashed a once-in-a-lifetime crisis on the world economy and the outlook remains grim. India's near-term outlook is clouded, with an accentuation of downside risks and potential externalities of global spillovers, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its annual report for 2020-21, published on Thursday. Faster vaccination holds the key to an escape from the pandemic, said the RBI.

The central bank warned that compared to "financial crises, a health crisis can be more pervasive, persistent and debilitating in its impact on the real economy. Letting down the guard is perilous; it is best to prepare for future waves."

It also rued the fact that private investment is the missing piece in the story

FROM THE RBI ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

- ▶ RBI balance sheet size increased by ₹3.72 lakh crore to ₹57.07 lakh crore as on March 31, 2021, up 6.99 % from ₹53.34 L cr on June 30, 2020
- ▶ Covid 2.0 biggest risk to growth forecast
- ▶ For a self-sustaining GDP growth trajectory post-Covid, a durable revival in private consumption and investment demand would be critical as they account for around 85% of GDP
- ▶ Services sector contraction unprecedented in Indian history
- ▶ Inflation remains a key concern, constraining monetary policy from using any available room to support growth

of the Indian economy in 2020-21 and reviving it awaits an environment in which 'animal spirits' are rekindled and entrepreneurial energies are released so that backward and forward linkages and multipliers prepare the ground for a durable investment-

driven recovery.

"Embattled by new waves of infections and mutant strains of Covid-19, the slow pace of inoculation in several parts of the world and visceral vaccine protectionism, the global and domestic outlook has once again turned grim and

overcast with extreme uncertainty and downside risks," the RBI said.

The central bank said the impact and the duration of the second wave of the pandemic are the biggest threats to its growth estimates for the country for the ongoing financial year, with consensus gravitating towards its earlier forecast of 10.5 per cent.

The report said the deterioration in major fiscal indicators in 2020-21 may be attributed to the pandemic superimposed on a cyclical slowdown in tax revenues and a counter-pandemic fiscal push through higher government expenditure.

"Going forward, as growth revives and the economy gets back on track, it is important for the government to adhere to a clear exit strategy and build fiscal buffers, which can be tapped into in events of future shocks to

growth," the RBI said.

It also said that it will ensure a comfortable level of liquidity in the system during the current financial year and monetary transmission will continue "unimpeded".

The apex bank asked banks to closely monitor their bad loans and prepare themselves for higher provisioning in the wake of the second wave and the Supreme Court order lifting the ban on classification of non-performing assets. The waiver of compound interest on all loan accounts which opted for moratorium during March-August 2020 may put stress on banks' financial health. The RBI, however, noted that banks are better positioned than before in managing stress in their balance sheets in view of higher capital buffers, improvement in recoveries and a return to profitability.

Prices of edible oils, pulses to pressure inflation

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 27

The sharp price rise in edible oils and pulses had led to historically high inflation in March. Pressure from these food items is likely to persist in view of supply-demand imbalances, says the RBI.

Oils and fats went through a sharp price build-up, leading to a historically high inflation of 24.9 per cent in March 2021. Precautionary buying on account of the pandemic and rise in interna-

tional prices of edible oils led to this adverse development. In fact, international food prices firmed up from June 2020, primarily led by palm oil, sunflower oil and soybean oil prices, driven by supply shortfalls as well as depreciation of the US dollar, the RBI said in its annual report.

In order to contain the price escalation, basic customs duty (BCD) on crude palm oil was revised down to 27.5 per cent from 37.5 per cent with effect from November 27, 2020. However, it got revised fur-

ther to 32.5 per cent when the agricultural infrastructure development cess was introduced in the budget. Increasing global prices, increase in export levy on crude palm oil by Indonesia from December 2020 and imposition of 8 per cent export tax on crude palm oil by Malaysia from January 2021 kept prices high.

Similarly, prices of pulses recorded a 45-month high inflation of 22.8 per cent in April 2020 primarily led by tur and urad. Prices witnessed robust

growth during the months of April-May and September-November 2020, reflecting stockpiling by consumers, lockdown and rain related supply disruption and a decline in kharif pulses production, higher exports and lower imports during April-February 2020-21.

The government released 2 lakh tonnes of tur from the buffer stock through open market sales, extended the time limit for import of tur under an import quota of 4 lakh tonnes for 2020-21 as

on December 31, 2020, expedited imports of urad under the already issued import quota of 1.5 lakh tonnes and extended the MoU with Mozambique for import of 2 lakh tonnes of tur for another five years. With pulses production rising by 6 per cent for 2020-21 over 2019-20, tur, gram and masur prices eased during December 2020-February 2021.

However, the RBI expects that pressures from pulses and edible oils might persist in view of supply-demand imbalances.

BEZOS WILL PASS BATON TO NEW CEO ON JULY 5



Jeff Bezos Andy Jassy

New York, May 27: Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has picked a date to step down as CEO.

Bezos, who grew Amazon from an internet bookstore to an online shopping behemoth, said on Wednesday that Amazon executive Andy Jassy will take over the CEO role on July 5.

"We chose that date because it's sentimental for me," Bezos said during an Amazon shareholder meeting. He explained that it was exactly 27 years ago on that date in 1994 that Amazon was incorporated.

Seattle-based Amazon.com Inc announced that Bezos was stepping down as CEO in February, but didn't provide a specific date. Jassy, his replacement, currently runs the company's cloud-computing business.

— AP

Cadila seeks human trial nod for antibody cocktail

May 27: Zydus Cadila has sought regulatory approval for clinical trials of its antibody cocktail to treat mild Covid-19, as the country grapples with a shortage of medicines and vaccines needed to effectively tackle a devastating second wave of the pandemic.

The treatment candidate, ZRC-3308, was earlier shown to reduce lung damage during animal trials, the drugmaker said, adding it was found to be safe and well-tolerated.

The therapy is a cocktail of two monoclonal antibodies, which mimic natural antibodies that the body generates to fight infection.

"At this juncture, there is a critical need to explore safer and more efficacious treatments to combat Covid," Zydus Cadila's managing director, Sharvil Patel, said in a stock exchange filing.

The company is seeking permission to conduct early-to late-stage human clinical trials from the Drugs Controller General of India.

The US FDA has given emergency use authorisations to similar treatments developed by Vir Biotechnology and GlaxoSmith-Kline as well as ones made

Paytm eyes \$3 bn IPO, more than \$25 bn valuation

SARITHA RAI
MAY 27

Paytm, India's leading digital payments provider, is aiming to raise about ₹21,800 crore (\$3 billion) in an initial public offering late this year, according to a person familiar with the deal, in what could be the country's largest debut ever.

The startup, backed by investors including Berkshire Hathaway Inc, SoftBank Group Corp and Ant Group Co, plans to list in India around November and its offering could coincide with the Diwali festival season, said the person, asking not to be named because the details are private.

Paytm, formally called One97 Communications Ltd, is targeting a valuation of around \$25 billion to \$30 billion. The One97 board plans to meet this Friday to formally approve the IPO, said the person. Paytm declined to comment in response to emailed questions.

If successful, Paytm's initial share sale would surpass Coal India Ltd's offering, which raised more than Rs 15,000 crore in 2010 in the country's largest IPO so far. Banks shortlisted to run the Paytm offering include Morgan Stanley, Citigroup Inc and JPMorgan Chase & Co, with Morgan Stanley the leading contender, the person said. The process is expected to get rolling in late June or early July. The banks did not immediately respond



Vijay Shekhar Sharma

to requests for comment.

The public market debut will include a mix of new and existing shares to meet regulatory obligations in India. The country's regulations require that 10 per cent of shares are floated within two years and 25 per cent within five years. Paytm, led by founder and chief executive officer Vijay Shekhar Sharma, has been focusing on ramping up revenue and monetising its services over the past year. It's expanded beyond digital payments into banking, credit cards, financial services, wealth management and digital wallets. It also supports India's financial payments backbone, the Unified Payments Interface or UPI.

Paytm has fended off stiff competition from a swathe of global players including Walmart Inc-owned PhonePe, Google Pay, Amazon Pay as well as Facebook Inc-owned WhatsApp Pay. It has the biggest market share of India's merchant payments. Paytm has over 20 million merchant partners and its users make 1.4 billion monthly transactions. — Bloomberg

ASCI ASKS INFLUENCERS TO DISCLOSE PAID BRAND PITCHES



Dolly Singh

Mumbai, May 27: Come June 14, 'influencers' with wide following on social media who advertise brands from their accounts will have to disclose paid partnerships, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) said on Thursday.

The self-regulatory body pegged the size of the digital influencers industry at \$150 million, with digital marketing coming a long way over the past few years.

It has been engaged in stakeholder interactions since last year and released a draft of the influencer advertising guidelines in February 2021.

Dhruv Chitgopekar, founding partner of the Collective Artists Network and the chief executive of Bigbang.Social, who was among those consulted, told reporters that influencers started off as "guerillas" on the marketing scene but are now at the forefront.

He exuded confidence that the guidelines will not result in any dip in revenues for such influencers and there will be better transparency.

Dolly Singh, a digital influencer, admitted that she has seen a dip in engagement ever since she started disclosing a paid partnership but urged everyone to be more optimistic.

ASCI secretary-general Manisha Kapoor said the organisation has hired technology firms to trawl content to identify non-disclosure.

Its chairman Subhash Kamath said so far it has seen 95 per cent compliance with its actions after flagging norm violations, and if nothing works, the body can also escalate it to the sectoral regulators. — PTI

EXTRAORDINARY | YEAR

Consumer staples, healthcare sectors generated highest listing gains

IPOs give decadal high listing returns in FY21

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 27

The RBI annual report, released on Thursday, throws light on primary equity market dynamics as FY20-21 proved to be a year of decadal high average IPO listing returns at 36 per cent, which according to the RBI, might have been fuelled by oversubscription along with other factors in play like underpricing of IPO as well as consumer-focused businesses attracting listing premium.

"The exuberance witnessed in the secondary market gripped the pri-

mary market, with the year 2020-21 turning out to be an extraordinary one for initial public offers (IPOs) by Indian companies, as 21 out of 29 IPOs have generated positive returns for investors on listing," the RBI said.

"A sector wise analysis of 201 IPOs over the last 10 years (2011-12 to 2020-21) indicates that IPOs from consumer staples and healthcare sectors generated the highest listing gains in India."

Main board IPO average listing returns in the last 10 years (sector-wise) were —consumer staples (27.5 per cent), healthcare (21.4

per cent), industrials (16.5 per cent), materials (15.4 per cent), information technology (15.2 per cent), consumer discretionary (14.6 per cent), financials (12.7 per cent) and communication services (4.3 per cent).

"The firm specific characteristics are found to be not statistically significant in explaining the price run-ups on the IPO listing day," RBI said and felt oversubscription as a major factor for the listing gains/returns.

"Thus, the decadal high average IPO listing returns of 36 per cent realised during 2020-21



might have been fuelled by an average oversubscription rate of 71.3 times of IPO issue size."

Delving on underpricing of IPOs as one of the reasons for higher listing gains, the RBI said, "Information asymmetry is regarded as the root

cause of underpricing wherein the issuer deliberately under prices its IPO to attract uninformed investors. Other reasons are providing compensation to investors by the issuers for undertaking ex-ante uncertainty risk."

"Intuitively, a higher oversubscription rate is a signal to the investors in the secondary market on the potential increase in share prices and expected returns."

Also, RBI's study of last 10 years IPOs on BSE and NSE suggest's that IPOs issued during the boom period are relatively more underpriced,

The primary segment witnessed increased activity during 2020-21. Resource mobilisation through IPOs, follow-on public offers (FPOs) and rights issues increased by 43.1 per cent to Rs 1.1 lakh crore during 2020-21 from Rs 76,965 crore in the previous year, the RBI said.

Of these, Rs 46,060 crore were mobilised through 57 IPO/FPO issues, out of which 27 issues amounting to Rs 246 crore were listed on the SME platform of BSE and the NSE. Resource mobilisation through rights issues rose to Rs 64,059 crore in 2020-21 from Rs 55,642 crore.

SHORT TAKES

Nadal, Djokovic & Roger in same half

Paris: Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, the three most successful men in Grand Slam tennis history, were on Thursday all drawn in the same half of the French Open.

Having slipped to number three in the world, it was always likely that Nadal, the 13-time champion, would face top-ranked Djokovic before the final.

The two great rivals could now meet in the semi-finals this year.

Djokovic is top seed and could possibly face 2009 winner Federer in the quarterfinals.

All three men are chasing history at the French Open which starts on Sunday. Nadal and Federer are locked on 20 Grand Slams each while Djokovic, who has 18, can become the first man in over half a century to win all four majors on more than one occasion. — *AFP*

Nagal misses French Open cut

Paris: India's top player Sumit Nagal could not make a hat-trick of Grand Slam main draw appearances following a straight-set defeat in the second round of the French Open.

Qualifying event here.

The Haryana youngster crashed out of the Clay Court major with a 3-6, 3-6 loss to Alejandro Tabilo from Chile, last night.

In the engrossing contest that lasted one-and-a-half-hours, Nagal could break the serve of his rival, ranked 23 places below him at 146, only twice while he himself dropped his serve five times.

With the defeat of the 23-year-old from Jhajjar, India's challenge has ended in the Qualifiers.

Ramkumar Ramanathan, Prajnesh Guneshwaran and Ankita Raina have already exited from the tournament. — *PTI*

Osaka won't talk to media in France

Paris: Tennis star Naomi Osaka says she is not going to speak to the media during the upcoming French Open.

The world's highest-earning female athlete wrote in a Twitter post on Wednesday that she hopes the considerable amount that I get fined for this will go towards a mental health charity.

The French Open is scheduled to begin Sunday in Paris. Osaka heads into the clay-court tournament ranked No. 2 in the world. The 23-year-old Osaka has won four Grand Slam titles.

That includes last year's U.S. Open and the Australian Open this February.

"I've often felt that people have no regard for athletes' mental health and this very true whenever I see a press conference or partake in one," wrote Osaka. — *AP*

Athletes to be vaccinated for Oly

New Delhi: Indian Olympic Association (IOA) on Thursday said all the Tokyo Games-bound athletes and officials have got their first Covid-19 vaccine and they will get their second doses before their departure from the country for the multi-sporting spectacle.

"The IOA is ... ensuring that all the participants through the IOA for the Tokyo Olympics including athletes, technical officials and delegate members will follow all precautions and will be vaccinated before leaving for Japan," the IOA said.

"... presently each of the above (athletes, technical officials and delegate members) has had the first vaccination and 2nd will happen as per vaccination protocols," IOA President Narinder Batra and Secretary General Rajiv Mehta said. — *PTI*

76ers exorcise Wizards 120-95

Los Angeles: Ben Simmons silenced the critics with a 22 point, nine rebound, eight assist performance as the Philadelphia 76ers routed the Washington Wizards 120-95 to grab a 2-0 playoff series lead on Wednesday.

Joel Embiid also scored 22 points and grabbed seven rebounds while Tobias Harris garnered 19 points. Simmons too scored 12 points in 76ers win. — *AFP*

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Villarreal players celebrate winning the Europa League final against Manchester United in Gdansk, Poland, on Wednesday.

— AP

WILL-A-REAL!

Gutsy Villarreal kill Man U with last kick in sudden death

Gdansk (Poland), May 27: Villarreal defeated Manchester United 11-10 on penalties to win their first major trophy after a 1-1 draw in the Europa League final as goalkeeper David de Gea missed the decisive spot-kick in a remarkable shootout.

Gerard Moreno gave Villarreal the lead 29 minutes into the Spanish club's first European final, but Edinson Cavani equalised early in the second half before Unai Emery's team prevailed on spot-kicks, extending United's four-year trophy drought.

Eric Bailly replaced the injured Harry Maguire in central defence, with the United captain surprisingly named among the substitutes despite suffering ankle ligament damage two weeks ago.

De Gea started ahead of Dean Henderson in goal, while Paul Pogba took up a more orthodox midfield role as Fred was only deemed fit enough for a spot on the bench.

An early collision between Juan Foyth and Pogba left the former Tottenham defender bloodied but both sides were slow to click into gear on a damp and chilly night on the Baltic coast.

Carlos Bacca's clever rabona cross created an opportunity for Pau



Villarreal players throw their coach Unai Emery into the air as they celebrate winning the Europa League final match against Manchester United in Gdansk, Poland, on Wednesday.

— AP

Torres, the centre-back linked with a summer move to United, while Marcus Rashford tested Geronimo Rulli with a dipping effort from distance.

Jeremy Pino scuffed wide on the counter, but Villarreal were soon ahead.

Dani Parejo swung in a free-kick from the left and Moreno peeled away from

Luke Shaw and Victor Lindelof, steering beyond

De Gea as the Swede desperately tugged at his shirt.

Moreno's 82nd goal for Villarreal equalled the club record of former Manchester United forward Giuseppe Rossi.

United continued to dominate possession as Villarreal soaked up the pressure, but the Spaniards remained a threat as Torres curled

over at the end of normal time.

Weariness and a raft of substitutions slowed the tempo in the closing stages as the rain intensified with penalties almost inevitable.

The first 21 penalties were successfully converted before De Gea had his attempt palmed away by Rulli as United lost for the sixth time in seven shootouts, handing Emery a record fourth Europa League crown.

— *AFP*

RASHFORD FACES RACIST ABUSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Gdansk (Poland), May 27: Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford said on Thursday he faced "at least 70 racial slurs" on social media after his team's loss on penalties to Villarreal in the Europa League final.

"At least 70 racial slurs on my social accounts counted so far," Rashford wrote on *Twitter* less than 90 minutes after the game finished.

"For those working to make me feel any worse than I already do, good luck trying," the tweet added.

Rashford added he was outraged that he was sent a mountain of monkey emojis in a message from a person using a profile which identified them as a teacher.

"Yes I'm a black man and I live every day proud that I am, he wrote at the time.

No one, or no one comment, is going to make me feel any different. So sorry if you were looking for a strong reaction, you're just simply not going to get it here," he further added. — *AP*

Zidane resigns as R. Madrid coach with immediate effect

Madrid, May 27: Zinedine Zidane has resigned as Real Madrid manager with immediate effect, the Spanish club said Thursday just days after they were beaten to the La Liga title by Atletico Madrid.

The Frenchman's departure comes at the end of a disappointing campaign for the 13-time European champions, who also lost to Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals, as they failed to win a trophy for the first time in 11 seasons.

"We must now respect his decision and express our gratitude for his pro-



Zinedine Zidane

fessionalism, dedication and passion over the years and what he means to Real Madrid," a club statement said.

"Zidane is one of Real Madrid's great icons and his legacy extends beyond what he has achieved as a coach and player at our club," it added.

Only 10 days ago Zidane, who has a contract until 2022, denied press speculation he had already told his players he would be leaving at the end of the season.

"How am I going to tell my players that I am going now? It's a lie," he said after a 1-0 win at Athletic Bilbao.

"I'm focused on this season. There is a game left and we are going to give everything. I only care what happens in this finale," he said.

But, perhaps tellingly, he added: "The rest, we will see at the end of the season." — *AFP*

Ex-F1 driver Karun subjected to racism

New Delhi, May 27: Denied entry into a restaurant on the basis of his skin colour recently, former Grand Prix driver-turned TV expert Karun Chandhok says more awareness needs to be created against racism through Formula 1 though it has already taken "impressive" steps to address the issue.

Chandhok competed in Formula 1 between 2009-2010. He is now a well-respected commentator and alongside seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton, one of the few non-white faces seen in

the paddock.

After posting about his recent experience at a restaurant during the Monaco GP last week, Chandhok said on social media that he would not dwell on the past but focus on contributing to make the sport more diverse including having more Indians on board. He didn't reveal in which country the incident took place.

"I'm not really interested in talking about the past (about that incident) - the key is to talk about the future. We need to understand and learn why more



Karun Chandhok

people from non-white haven't been able to get involved in the sport and Formula 1 plus Lewis via his Hamilton Commission are doing some very important research to understand that,"

Chandhok said.

"Formula 1 at the moment has really taken up the cause of improving diversity within the sport.

"Historically, this is a sport where over 90 per cent of the people involved have been white and therefore as one of the few people from a minority ethnic background, I'm very encouraged to see that F1 as a sport and the teams as participants are taking steps to change that balance," said Chandhok.

Formula 1 has shown more intent in addressing racism after Hamilton

said the sport was not doing enough for the cause.

He also lamented the lack of support from some of the fellow drivers.

"While drivers are of course the most high profile and someone like Lewis has been very vocal about the topic, the reality is that the drivers are a small number of people when compared to engineers, mechanics, commercial and marketing people, TV pundits and journalists, marshals and officials, etc that make up the sport," he further added. — *PTI*

Mark not happy with ECB's take

London, May 27: Former opener Mark Butcher feels the ECB should have agreed to the BCCI's request to change the Test series schedule to accommodate the remaining games of IPL as it would have given the England Board the leverage to get top Indian players for its 'Hundred' tournament.

The Indian Board had informally made a request to shift the five-match Test series between India and England, starting August 4, by a week in order to accommodate the remaining 31 IPL games but it has not met with any favourable response from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

"Well, listen. I take a deep breath here ... as does the nation. I think it's a massive missed opportunity," Butcher said during the latest Wisden Cricket Weekly Podcast.

Butcher said accepting the request would have given ECB the leverage to get top Indian cricketers such as Virat Kohli and M. S. Dhoni for 'The Hundred' tournament, the ECB's flagship project.

"...the ECB is absolutely desperate to make this (Hundred) work. They have to be, they have bet the house on The Hundred, but at every turn, it seems a greater power doesn't want it to happen," said Butcher.

"And so for me, this was the opportunity where you'll say 'Okay, we'll bite the bullet...' We would do this for the BCCI on the proviso that we get Kohli, Dhoni, whoever we like, signed up for three years to play in The Hundred, starting 2022," he added.

The inaugural edition of 'The Hundred', a 100-ball tournament involving eight men's and women's



I think it's a massive missed opportunity. The ECB is absolutely desperate to make this (Hundred) work. They have to be, they have bet the house on The Hundred, but at every turn, it seems a greater power doesn't want it to happen.

— MARK BUTCHER
former England player

teams, was scheduled to take place last year but was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"And you have leverage for the first time ever: you have something that they need, that they want. Obviously, the BCCI will lose a lot of money if they don't get the IPL in the window," Butcher said.

"You also have the extraordinary spectacle of the IPL being finished at the behest or because of English cricket. And you use that lever in order to get something you desperately need. So I think there's an opportunity missed," he added.

The IPL was suspended early this month after multiple Covid-19 cases were reported inside its bio-bubble. — *PTI*

PHYSICIAN WARNS ABOUT VIRUS THREAT IN GAMES

Tokyo, May 27: A physician representing a Japanese medical body warned Thursday that holding the postponed Tokyo Olympics in two months could lead to the spread of variants of the Coronavirus.

Dr. Naoto Ueyama, chairman of the Japan Doctors Union, said the International Olympic Committee and the Japanese government had underestimated the risks of bringing 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes into the country, joined by tens of thousands of officials, judges, media and broadcasters from more than 200 countries and territories.

"Since the emergence of Covid-19 there has not been such a dangerous gathering of people coming together in one place from so many different places around the world," Ueyama said, speaking in Tokyo at the Foreign

Correspondents' Club of Japan. "It's very difficult to predict what this could lead to," he added.

Ueyama continually likened the virus to a conventional war situation, and said he was speaking from his own experience as a hospital physician who works just outside Tokyo. He has not been involved in any of the Olympic planning.

"I think the key here is if a new mutant strain of the virus were to arise as a result of this, the Olympics," he added.

The IOC and local organisers said they have been relying on the WHO for public-health guidance. They say the Olympics and Paralympics will be safe and secure, focused on extensive testing, strict protocols, social distancing, and keeping athletes largely isolated in the Olympic Village alongside Tokyo Bay. — *AP*

Mary stands tall, cruises into final

Dubai, May 27: Six-time world champion M. C. Mary Kom (51kg) and Sakshi (54kg) stormed into the Asian Boxing Championship finals after notching up gruelling victories in their last-four stage bouts here on Thursday.

While Mary Kom prevailed 4-1 over Mongolia's Lutsaikhan Altantsetseg, two-time youth world champion Sakshi upstaged top-seeded Kazakh Dina Zholaman 3-2.

However, Monika (48kg) settled for a bronze medal after going down 0-5 to second-seeded Alua Balkibekova of Kazakhstan. The top-seeded Mary Kom dug from her huge reservoir of experience to outwit the sprightly Altantsetseg.

The veteran's right hooks were particularly impressive in a compelling performance. She fought with a perilously low guard despite the aggressive intent shown by her rival and relied on her sharp reflexes to score on counter-attacks. The 38-year-old

will now be gunning for her sixth gold medal at the continental showpiece. She will be up against Kazakhstan's Nazym Kyzaibay.

Sakshi also endured a tough one against Zholaman but came out trumps, riding on her grit.

Earlier, in an intense contest, Monika just could not keep pace with Balkibekova, who craftily dodged the Indian's attacks and connected some eye-catching combination punches to dominate the proceedings.

On Wednesday night, Ashish Kumar (75kg) lost 2-3 to Asian Games silver-medallist Abilkhan Amankul of Kazakhstan in the quarterfinal. Also going down in the quarters was Narender (+91kg). He lost 0-5 to Kazakhstan's Kamshibek Kunkabayev.

On Friday, five Indian men — Amit Panghal (52kg), Varinder Singh (60kg), Shiva Thapa (64kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) — will fight it out in the semifinals. — *PTI*