

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | THURSDAY 27 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 35°C
Min: 21°C
Rainfall: 3%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 13
Tithi: Pradhamai
Star: Kettai
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
Yamagandam: 6 am to 7.30 am
PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.25 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.27 pm
Maghrib: 6.29 pm
Isha: 7.46 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.40 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.58 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 7.48 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 8.40 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,03,091)	(+3,578)
2,73,59,751	3,15,000

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+33,764) 475
TN: 19,45,260 21,815

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,88,53,162

DEATHS

35,06,157

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES **219**

worldometers.info

World won't be same after COVID: Jaishankar

New York: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said that the world will not remain the same after the COVID-19 pandemic and this warrants the need of a better, safer world which works for everybody. He Speaking to former US National Security Adviser General HR McMaster at an event.

IMA sends notice to Ramdev for defamation

Dehradun: The Indian Medical Association has served a defamation notice on yoga guru Ramdev for alleged disparaging remarks against modern medicine and modern medicine doctors, demanding an apology from him within 15 days, failing which it said it will demand a compensation of Rs 1,000 crore from him.

COUNTER

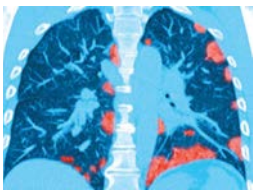
POINT



We have to enforce lockdown more strictly... hike fuel prices!

CITY | 2

TPR dips, death toll mounts in Chennai



WORLD | 5

UK study finds long-term lung damage after Covid

SPORT | 8

Djokovic wins in Belgrade opener



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MEKEDATU DAM

TN vows to foil Karnataka bid

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Water resources minister Durai Murugan's averment on Wednesday that the state would not allow the construction of the Mekedatu dam, an ambitious ₹9,000 crore project that Karnataka has envisaged across the River Cauvery, set the tone for another showdown between the neighbouring states having a long history of water sharing dispute.

Though the plan for the dam at a deep gorge in the confluence of Cauvery and its tributary, Arkavati, at Ontigondlu, about 100 km from Bengaluru, was prepared by Karnataka way back in 2017, Tamil Nadu managed to stall it by approaching courts on the ground the an upper riparian state cannot not monopolise the water of an interstate river.

But with recent reports emerging that preparatory work on the building of the dam has begun with the laying of roads and gathering of construction materials, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) took a suo motu stand and send notices to the Union ministry of environment and forests (MoEF), depart-

ment of water resources and Central Water Commission.

Mr Murugan, in his statement on Wednesday, said the NGT's southern bench has set up a committee comprising officers from the integrated regional office of MoEF, Cauvery Water Management Authority, Karnataka's Cauvery Neeravari Nigam and the forest department to present a report on the alleged violation of norms by July 5. The NGT has also made Tamil Nadu's chief secretary, forest department secretary, PWD secretary and Cauvery Water Management Authority as respondents and asked them to file affidavits before the next hearing on July 5.

Though Mr Murugan exuded hope on Mekedatu not getting the due permission from the various agencies concerned going by the developments of the past, he has also girded his loins for a fight with Karnataka in the event of it trying to block the Cauvery waters for its use.

He said that the MoEF and experts of the river valley and hydro electric projects had already assured that permission would not be granted to Karnataka for building the dam without Tamil Nadu's consent.

Yaas pummels east coast; 1 cr people affected, says Mamata

■ Low lying areas inundated ■ 20 lakh people evacuated

DC CORRESPONDENTS
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
BALASORE/KOLKATA, MAY 26

Cyclone Yaas, packing winds of up to 130-145 kmph, whiplashed the country's eastern coasts on Wednesday, dumping heavy rain, flooding several areas, damaging houses and farmlands, and leaving at least four persons dead - three in Odisha and one in West Bengal.

Thick sheets of rain blurred India's vast coastline in the east as the cyclone made landfall around 9 am near Dhamra port in Odisha, with surging waters swamping mud-and-thatch houses in the low-lying areas of various districts, where a massive evacuation drive has been undertaken to move more than 20 lakh people to safety.

Massive tides ranging from two to four metres high gushed into seaside villages resulting in marooning of innumerable households. Several rivers were also in spate owing to the phenomenal rise in water level -- caused by the dual effect of storm surge and the astronomical tide due to the full



Indian Coast Guard personnel carry out rescue and relief works during landfall process of Cyclone Yaas in Odisha, Wednesday.

moon.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has stationed herself at the state secretariat Nabanna since Tuesday to monitor rescue and relief operations, claimed that her state is the "worst-affected" and said that three lakh houses and 134 embankments have been damaged due to the cyclone.

"At least one crore people were affected and three

lakh houses have been damaged in West Bengal due to the rough weather conditions arising out of cyclone Yaas," Ms Banerjee said.

"We could evacuate 15,04,506 people so far to our relief centres. But around one crore people were affected by the disaster which damaged nearly three lakh houses and destroyed at least 134 dams the number of which may go up. A field survey will

be done later. Around 14,000 relief camps are running now," she said.

In certain areas, waves as high as the coconut trees that line the popular beaches, were seen surging.

The scenic West Bengal town of Digha, which shares the border with Odisha's Balasore district, lay swamped, with the Army being called in for rescue operations, a defence official said.

Farmers take out black day protest

New Delhi, May 26: Farmers agitating at three Delhi border points raised black flags, shouted anti-government slogans, burnt effigies and took out protest marches as they observed 'black day' on Wednesday to mark the completion of six months of their stir against the three Central agri laws.

A brief ruckus was also reported from the Ghazipur protest site where farmers burnt an effigy of the central government amid heavy police deployment.

As part of their 'black day' protest, the farmers put up black flags and burnt effigies of government leaders at the three border points -- Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri -- to register their protest against the three laws as well as the Centre.

The Delhi Police has urged people not to hold gatherings due to the Covid-19 situation and the ongoing lockdown and said it is keeping a tight vigil to deal with any situation at the protest sites.

Senior farmer leader Avtar Singh Mehra said that black flags have been hoisted not only at the protest sites but also in villages in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar

RAGING ANGER

■ **THE PROTESTING farmers put up black flags and burnt effigies of government leaders at the three border points -- Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri.**

Pradesh, adding that villagers have put up black flags atop their houses as well as on their vehicles.

"Effigies of government leaders were burnt. This day is to reiterate the fact that it has been six months since we have been protesting, but the government, which also completes seven years in office today, is not listening to us," said Mr Mehra.

All those in solidarity of their movement also donned black turbans and dupattas.

At the Singhu border, protestors gathered at the Kajaria Tiles office, held meetings, and took out a march towards the stage.

Farmer leader Kulwant Singh said, "the protestors took out a march carrying black flags. They burnt Prime Minister Narendra Modi's effigy while raising slogans against the three farm laws." —PTI

STALIN ORDERS RECORDING OF ONLINE CLASSES

Chennai, May 26: With a case of sexual harassment of school students during online classes coming to light in Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday issued a slew of directives to authorities to regulate and streamline the virtual mode of teaching.

This included recording of online classes by the school management concerned and its periodical review by a committee comprising members from the institution as well as the Parents Teachers Association.

Mr Stalin held a review meeting in the wake of the arrest of a teacher of a well-known CBSE school here for alleged sexual harassment of girls by sending lewd messages. According to an official release, the Chief Minister directed framing guidelines by a committee of officials to prevent sexual harassment in online education within a week. Taking action against violators under the PoCSO Act and starting a helpline for students were the other directions.

The Chief Minister also directed the cyber crime wing of the police to expeditiously solve complaints and without affecting the students concerned, it said. —PTI

CM hints at lockdown extension

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday hinted at the government extending the total lockdown that is now in place all through the state with a view to combating the increase in Coronavirus cases in the second wave of the pandemic.

"The total lockdown so far has yielded some results but that is not satisfactory; so, we shall decide what to do next later," the Chief Minister told the media after



■ **IT WAS** the failure to check the first wave of the pandemic that brought about this second wave, the Chief Minister said.

inspecting a vaccination camp at a public health centre at Nemam village in Thiruvallur district.

It was the failure to check the first wave of the pandemic that brought about this second wave, he said, suggesting that the DMK government was doing better than the previous AIADMK regime.

Expressing the hope that

the government would overcome the second wave effectively, Mr Stalin said the lockdown was imposed because the number of infections was going up.

Urging the people to adhere to the regulations by not stepping out of their homes, he asked them all to go for vaccination, which was the only shield from Coronavirus.

Caseload rises after dip; Delhi, Mumbai improve

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Delhi, the nation's capital, on Wednesday recorded a positivity rate lower than two per cent as fresh Covid-19 cases dipped to 1,491. This is the first time in nine weeks that the cases were so low as fatalities due to Covid-related complications remain high, at 130 on a single day. Wednesday's fatality figures are, however, the lowest since April 15.

Another megacity, Mumbai, the nation's financial capital, also saw a significant drop in its daily count -- with 1,362 new positive cases and 34 deaths, as 1,021 were discharged from medical supervision in 24 hours.

Across India, the daily cases showed a rise in the last 24 hours after a brief dip on Tuesday. In the last 24 hours, 2.09 lakh fresh cases were detected while the deaths crossed 4,000. Union health ministry

officials said Covid-19 cases are on a declining trajectory for the last 10 days and the country's active caseload had come down to 24.95 lakhs -- a fall of 91,191 in active cases in the last 24 hours, with nearly three lakh recoveries. India's recovery rate is now 89.66 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate is 11.45 per cent. Officials said the daily positivity rate was 9.42 per cent and was less than 10 per cent for two consecutive days.

WhatsApp moves HC, says new rules put activists, scribes at risk

SANGEETHA G. | FC
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Messaging app major WhatsApp has filed a lawsuit in the Delhi High Court challenging the Union government's new digital rules that came into effect on Wednesday, saying the rules will compel the company to break privacy protection of users.

In the petition filed on Tuesday evening, WhatApp maintained that the new rules required the message service provider to identify the first originator of a message and this was a violation of privacy rights pro-

vided by the constitution.

"We have consistently joined civil society and experts around the world in opposing requirements that would violate the privacy of our users," WhatsApp spokesperson said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Requiring messages to trace chats is the equivalent of asking us to keep a fingerprint of every single message sent on WhatsApp which would break end-to-end encryption and fundamentally undermines people's right to privacy," he added.

In its petition, WhatsApp said that identification of the first originator of infor-

INDIA HAS

53 crore WhatsApp users
41 crore Facebook subscribers
21 crore Instagram subscribers
1.75 crore Twitter account holders.



Requiring messages to trace chats is the equivalent of asking us to keep a fingerprint of every single message sent on WhatsApp which would break end-to-end encryption and fundamentally undermines people's right to privacy" — **WhatsApp spokesperson**

mation in India would potentially put journalists and civil and political activists at risk and said that no other country compels intermediaries to change their systems to enable the identification of the first originator of infor-

mation on end-to-end encrypted messaging services.

Social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp previously enjoyed immunity as "intermediaries" for con-

tent posted by any third party user on their platforms. The new rules announced on February 25 require them to take down any content flagged by the authorities within 36 hours and set up a mechanism to respond to complaints. Google and Facebook on Tuesday had said that they were ready to comply with the new rules.

"We will also continue to engage with the government of India on practical solutions aimed at keeping people safe, including responding to valid legal requests for the information available to us," WhatsApp spokesperson said.

Govt firm, asks for compliance report

FC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
CHENNAI, MAY 26

The Union government on Wednesday termed the last moment challenge by WhatsApp to the intermediary guidelines as an unfortunate attempt to prevent the norms from coming into effect.

The government also sought a compliance

report from social media firms.

In a statement, the government said it respects the right to privacy and the requirement of tracing origin of flagged messages under the new IT rules is for prevention and investigation of "very serious offences" related to the sovereignty of India or public order. ■ **P4**

New Delhi, May 26:

Fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi, who had recently fled from Antigua and Barbuda, was captured in neighbouring Dominica after an Interpol 'yellow notice' was issued against him by Antigua and Barbuda, the local media reported on Wednesday.

Police in Dominica captured Mr Choksi on Tuesday night (local time). Mr Choksi had been living in Antigua and Barbuda since 2018 after taking the citizenship, *Antigua News Room* reported.

The 'yellow notice' is issued by the Interpol to track missing persons.

Mr Choksi, who is wanted in a Rs 13,500 crore loan fraud in Punjab National Bank, was last seen going for dinner in his car in Antigua and Barbuda on Sunday.

His staff and lawyer had reported him missing after his car was found since Sunday. —PTI



FUGITIVE BIZMAN MEHUL CHOKSI HELD IN DOMINICA

SHORT TAKES

NCPCR seeks report on sexual abuse in Chennai school

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Taking a serious view on the alleged sexual abuse of students by a teacher in Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan (PSBB) Senior Secondary School in KK Nagar, Chennai, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has directed DGP J.K. Tripathi to file a report about the incident.

Initiating suo motu cognizance based on reports in newspapers, television channels and social media regarding alleged complaints of sexual harassment from students and alumni against a teacher, NCPCR member Dr R G Anand requested the chief secretary and DGP to inquire into the matter and take strict action against the teacher under relevant sections of the PoCSO Act and Indian Penal Code.

The member said all children should be provided with counselling as they will be under psychological trauma. An action taken report along with relevant documents should be submitted to the commission within three days.

The teacher has been suspended and an inquiry has been conducted by the district chief education officer, Chennai and school management has been asked to submit a report about the issue.

The NCPCR is a statutory body constituted under Section 3 of the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 to protect the rights of children in the country.

IIT-M to launch new science mag

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Indian Institute of Technology, Madras (IIT-M) has decided to launch a tech magazine, 'IIT Madras Shastra,' to articulate Indian and global trends.

The magazine's print edition will come out bimonthly. The web version can also be accessed online at shastramag.org. Subscriptions will be open to potential readers in India and abroad.

It will feature a wide range of topics in science and technology as well as developments in innovation happening around the world. The readers will learn about the latest developments in the sector and their potential impact on Indian society and industry.

CM raises relief to journalists to ₹10 L

Chennai, May 26: Families of journalists succumbing to Coronavirus would be entitled for a compensation of ₹ 10 lakh from now on, which is double that of the earlier relief of ₹5 lakh.

Chief Minister M K Stalin has also announced that the ₹ 3,000 paid to journalists would also be increased to ₹5,000, an official press release said on Wednesday.

DCB donates 50 oxygen cylinders

Tiruchy, May 26: Urban development minister K.N. Nehru has called upon the corporates and private industrialists to join hands with the government in its fight against the pandemic.

Nehru made this appeal while receiving 50 47-liter capacity oxygen cylinders worth ₹15 lakh donated by the Dalmia Cement Bharat Ltd, Dalmiapuram to government hospital, Lalgudi, from DCB plant head M.K. Vinayagamurthy.



VEGGIES WASTED

Tonnes of vegetables thrown away everyday at Koyambedu wholesale market.

—DC

VEGGIES AT DOORSTEP



People buying vegetables at their doorstep arranged by Greater Chennai Corporation during the lockdown period.

—DC

Lockdown violations: Cops book 2,650 cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

The Greater Chennai police on Tuesday booked 2,650 cases and seized 1,822 vehicles, found flouting Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

In addition to these cases,

1,876 were booked for not wearing masks and 220 cases against those who did not follow social distancing norms.

According to the Greater Chennai Police, till Tuesday night, the traffic police in the city registered 1,620 cases and seized

337 vehicles, out of which 311 were two-wheelers, 20 were autos and 6 light vehicles, while the law and order police booked 1,038 cases and seized 1,485 vehicles – 1,419 two-wheelers, 52 autos and 14 light vehicles.

Besides the police

booked 1,876 individuals for not wearing masks and 220 cases for not following physical distancing.

The GCP has deployed 20,000 policemen to enforce a strict lockdown that came into effect early Monday and will continue till May 31.

Petition in HC to vaccinate homeless sans ID card

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

A petition has been filed in the Madras high court to direct the authorities to take immediate steps to vaccinate the homeless people in the state and to protect them from the infection of Corona virus, without demanding production of their Identity Cards.

A division bench comprising Justices G.Jeyachandran and C.Saravanan before whom the petition filed by advocate M.Muruganatham came up for hearing, directed the Registry to tag this petition along with the batch of petitions pending before the First Bench for hearing.

When this petition came up for

hearing on Wednesday, Advocate general R.Shanmugasundaram submitted that the state government has been taking steps to vaccinate the homeless people in the state.

According to the petitioner, it was obligatory on the part of the authorities to protect the homeless people from the Corona virus and thereby protect the other citizens, who may get infected from the infection caused to the homeless people when left unprotected and unvaccinated. Most of the homeless people have no Identity Cards, he added.

He said the authorities were demanding production of Identity Cards from the citizens to get vaccinated. The homeless

people were already identified as persons who lost their Identity Cards and the authorities cannot demand Identity Cards from them for administering vaccine. Vaccination was highly recommended to protect them and others around them. Vaccination alone can break the chain of spread of Corona virus in respect of the homeless people. In case of infection, the homeless people cannot even quarantine themselves as there were around 15 persons living within 100 sq.ft of land area. They cannot afford treatment in hospitals or can avail the facility for self quarantine. Therefore, the homeless people should be administered a vaccine to protect their life, he added.

TPR dips, death toll mounts in Chennai

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Though Chennai has started witnessing a decreasing trend of test positivity rate (TPR) of Covid-19, the mounting death toll remains a concern.

The Covid-19 claimed the lives of 843 Chennai residents in the last 10 days, according to the data. For the last three days ending May 25, at least 250 people have succumbed to Covid-19. While Sunday and Monday reported 81 deaths each, the cases went up to 88 on Tuesday taking the total to 6,546. The death toll in the city on May 15 was 5,703.

Teynampet continues to retain the top slot in death toll among zones with 775

cases followed by Anna Nagar with 773 cases. The zonewise total death toll goes as follows: Kodambakkam (749), Tondiarpet (469), Royapuram (497), Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar (691), Ambattur (500), Adyar (517), Madhavram (190), Valasaravakkam (339), Alandur (271) and Perungudi (246).

The TPR came down to 4,446 on Tuesday from 5,870 on Monday and 5,169 on Sunday. Active cases in the city also recorded a slight decrease during the last three days. On Sunday the city registered 49,055 active cases and 48,151 on Monday. The number came down to 47,553 on Tuesday.

According to the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) data, four zones

including Ambattur, Anna Nagar, Kodambakkam and Adyar have been reporting 4,000-plus active cases for over a week now. Before the lockdown, the number of active cases in these zones was little more than 3,000.

However, other critical zones such as Teynampet (3,997), Thiru.Vi.Ka. Nagar (3,222) and Valasaravakkam (3,759) continue to report 3,000-plus active cases.

Meanwhile, Tondiarpet and Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar zones have reported a drop in the active cases. The cases in Tondiarpet fell to 2,983 from 3,175 last week. Cases in Thiru.Vi.Ka. Nagar dropped from 3,859 on May 15.

However, the GCC has administered at least

18,84,064 doses of vaccines with 24,809 doses on Tuesday alone.

GCC commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi said the stock of vaccines for the 18-44 age group is limited. 'The government has given priority to groups including newspaper vendors, physically challenged people and other vulnerable groups. We are now focussing them to get vaccinated with the available vaccines as per the government guidelines', he said. The GCC earlier this month had decided to intensify the fever clinics across 200 wards with two clinics in each ward so that they could detect the virus in the early stage itself and reduce the number of deaths.

Five cops test positive for Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Five personnel at the Thiruppurur police station in Chengalpet district tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday. The station was fumigated, police sources said.

According to the police, A writer, two head constables and two grade-2 policemen were among the infected. After the police personnel began displaying Covid-19 symptoms, they got themselves tested at the Kelambakkam Primary health care centre two days back and the results came in positive for the five personnel on Wednesday.

They all went into isolation, sources said. The health officials initiated the process of identifying all those persons who came in contact with the cops and they were to be tested.

Fear of Covid-19 makes 29-yr-old woman end life

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

A 29-year-old woman allegedly ended her life on Wednesday at the house in Peerkankaranai near Tambaram.

The deceased, Dhivyabharathi, mother of a four-year-old boy, reportedly took her life due to the fear of Covid-19. According to the police, Dhivyabharathi's husband Ramachandran (32) worked as a software engineer in a private company in Chengalpet and the family lived in

Kamarajar Nagar in Peerkankaranai.

A senior police officer said that despite a surge in the Covid-19 cases in the city and suburbs, Ramachandran went to work daily. Dhivyabharathi requested him to work from home due to the pandemic situation, however, he refused and left for work on Wednesday morning.

Upset over this, she hanged herself in the bedroom. Neighbours who saw the four-year-old crying, broke the door open and found the woman

hanging dead and subsequently alerted them.

Peerkankaranai police rushed to the spot, recovered the body and sent the corpse to Chromepet Government Hospital for post-mortem.

A case has been registered by the Peerkankaranai police.

An RDO investigation is also initiated in the case. An RDO investigation is done when a married woman, who has been married for seven or less, dies under suspicious circumstances. Further investigations are on.

CM flags off oxygen cylinder and other accessories

Frog P1

The government had taken up the vaccination programme on a war footing and was also creating awareness on it. The twin objectives of the government was to prevent the spread of the virus and to save the infected persons, he said.

More RT-PCR tests were being conducted now, about 50,000 per day, than between April 8 to May 7, Mr Stalin said, adding

that there was no shortage of beds or oxygen supply.

He said the number of cases in Chennai was coming down, though in places like Coimbatore it was going up and said that the government was addressing all the complaints on lack of medical facilities in the state.

Besides inspecting the vaccination camp at the PHC, the Chief Minister also visited a vaccination programme conducted at the Daimler India Plant

and also the oxygen plant of INOX.

Apart from these visits, Mr Stalin flagged off truckloads of oxygen cylinders and other accessories like regulators, flow meters, concentrators and so on to various hospitals in the districts.

The oxygen and accessories were procured by SIPCOT. Most of them were imported from Singapore, Dubai and other middle eastern countries.

Only essential staff to come for work

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Only employees whose presence in office was highly essential are required to come for work at the State Secretariat in view of the pandemic situation, Chief Secretary V Irani Anbu said on Wednesday.

Irai Anbu, in a note to Secretaries of the various government departments, urged them to take a call on the matter emphasizing that not all employees need to attend office now.

Government servants with comorbidities, cancer patients, pregnant women and lactating mothers should be essential given exemption from work, he made it clear.

He said that all efforts should be made to prevent the spread of the virus.

Meanwhile, the president of Tamil Nadu Secretariat Association S Peter Antony Sami, thanked the Chief Minister M K Stalin for acceding to their demand to exempt employees not on essential services from coming to work.



Minister Gandhi inspects the Covid ward with 250 additional beds set up at Adukkamparai medical college hospital in Vellore on Wednesday.

—K.Senthil Nathan

3 tipplers drink paint thinner, one dies and two hospitalised

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

An alcoholic gang that ran out of alcohol as liquor was unavailable owing to the state-wide lockdown decided to consume 'Paint thinner' instead, a decision that left one dead and two fighting for life in the Kanchipuram district.

The incident happened in Kunnavakkam Village near Oragadam in the Kanchipuram district.

The police identified the deceased as, Shankar (40), a painter, resident of Kunnavakkam. He consumed Paint thinner with his friends, Krishnan (50),

Shivasankar (60) and Suresh (40), of which two of them are undergoing treatment, whereas one person is missing.

According to the police, the four men reportedly ran out of liquor stocks as all wine shops are shut. As per the preliminary probe by the police, they could not get liquor from anywhere, so had been drinking 'paint thinner', which also contains a substantial amount of alcohol. They had it mixed with lemon juice.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday morning, while drinking, Shankar com-

plained of stomach burns, vomiting and giddiness. He was rushed to the Sriperumbudur government hospital, however, died on arrival at the hospital. Police said Krishnan was admitted to the same hospital, whereas Shivasankar is undergoing treatment at Chengalpet government hospital. Police also said that they could not find Suresh. They have launched a search for him.

Sriperumbudur police have lodged an accidental death case, the body has been sent for autopsy and further investigations are underway.

HC orders notice to SHRC, govt on cops' plea

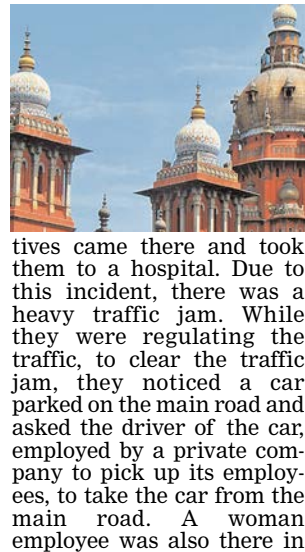
DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

The Madras high court has ordered notice to the State Human Rights Commission and the State government on a petition filed by a head constable and the then SI (Traffic), which sought to quash the order of the SHRC, directing the government to pay Rs 3 lakh as compensation to the legal heirs of the deceased car driver and to take disciplinary action against the two police personnel for allegedly harassing the car driver, due to which he committed suicide on January 25, 2019 at Tambaram.

A division bench comprising Justices

G.Jeyachandran and C.Saravanan who ordered notice, adjourned after three weeks, further hearing of the petition filed by S.Perumal, the head constable (Traffic) and S.Thangam, a formerly Sub-Inspector of Police (Traffic).

According to the petitioners, on January 25, 2019, the duo were on traffic duty at Thirumangalam near Anna Nagar singal between 8 and 10 a.m. A two wheeler rider came along with his wife as pillion rider near Anbu Colony bus stop fell down while applying a sudden brake to avoid an accident. The duo rushed to the spot and attempted to make arrangements to send them to a hospital. But their rela-



tives came there and took them to a hospital. Due to this incident, there was a heavy traffic jam. While they were regulating the traffic, to clear the traffic jam, they noticed a car parked on the main road and asked the driver of the car, employed by a private company to pick up its employees, to take the car from the main road. A woman employee was also there in

the car. While so, around 12 noon the car driver committed suicide by jumping before a train near Tambaram and recorded a message in his cell phone that due to abusive language used by the two traffic police and the harassment meted out to him by them, he committed suicide. This was published in a magazine namely Vikatan. Based on the same, the SHRC initiated suo motu proceedings. Subsequently, on a complaint, given by the brother of the deceased a case was also registered. Thereafter, the SHRC passed the present order. Aggrieved, they filed the present petition, they added.

In their petition, they con-

tended that in his message, the car driver has not mentioned the name of the police personnel. The occupant of the car namely, the woman employee was not at all examined. In the absence of non-examination of witnesses, the order passed by the SHRC has to be set aside. Moreover, they never abused the general public at the time of regulating the traffic. The video recording by the deceased Rajesh was made with ulterior motive to defame the police department. Some vested interest has chosen to create a video, as if the police personnel were scolding the public at the traffic point, they alleged.

OTHER STORIES

Rare owl species rescued in Nagapattinam

DC CORRESPONDENT
NAGAPATTINAM, MAY 26

A rare owl fell on the farm-land of one Jayachandran at Therku Poigainallur village near Nagapattinam in the heavy wind on Wednesday. On seeing this, Sugumar, son of Jayachandran, secured the bird and kept it in a cage and informed the district forest officer, Nagapattinam.

Following this, a group of forest guards came to the spot and secured the bird and let it off to the nearby forest.

Lakshminarayanan appointed pro-tem speaker of Puducherry Assembly

Puducherry, May 26: Puducherry Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan on Wednesday appointed AINRC MLA K Lakshminarayanan as pro-tem speaker of the territorial assembly here.

The Lt Governor administered the oaths of office and affirmation in Tamil to Lakshminarayanan at Raj Nivas here.

Lakshminarayanan, a law graduate, has been holding the Raj Bhavan constituency since his first win in 2001.

According to official sources, Lakshminarayanan would administer the oaths of office and affirmation to all the elected and nominated legislators of the Assembly later at the chamber of the Speaker.

Puducherry is yet to have a full-fledged cabinet although the AINRC and BJP together would form a coalition ministry here.

— PTI

ICAR-CIBA develops seed tech of red snapper fish

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

The ICAR-Central Institute of Brackishwater Aquaculture (CIBA) here has developed seed production technology of red snapper (*Lutjanus argentemaculatus*), a high-value fish.

Dr K. K. Vijayan, CIBA director, said with the new achievement, fish farmers would get diversified options to choose their candidate species for aquaculture. "It will help increase the domestic production through brackishwater aquaculture in the country. The CIBA has introduced one more candidate species for brackishwater aquaculture diversification and sustainability. This would help solve lack of hatchery-produced quality seeds on a consistent basis in aquaculture of red snapper and would open up the country's brackishwater aquaculture ventures in near future", he said.

Dr J. K. Jena, deputy director general of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), pointed out that the achievement in captive breeding would become the backbone for mass scale hatchery-based seeds in coming years which would be highly beneficial to the farming community.

The first batch of fingerlings bred by CIBA was distributed to selected fish farmers from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. "The farmers will grow the fingerlings at their respective farms and will return the selected broodstock to the CIBA on a buy-back mode for further breeding in the hatchery", said Dr M. Kailasam, who led the team of researchers.



Corporation commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi displays the 20 oxygen concentrators to be distributed to Kolathur on Wednesday. CM Stalin also seen. — DC

'Irregularities' in dairy dept postings: PIL against ex-min

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

A Public Interest Litigation has been filed in the Madras high court to declare as null and void, the appointment of 48 persons to various posts in the Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries department allegedly at the instance of former AIADMK minister Rajendra Balaji for extraneous consideration. In his PIL, Anand Raj of Madurai district submitted that pursuant to three advertisements issued by the Tamil Nadu Co-operative Milk Producers' Federation Limited to fill up 62 posts, the Employment Exchange had sent the names of eligible candidates and number of other qualified persons had also sent their applications along with demand draft for the fee prescribed. After calling for applications, the Federation did not proceed with the selection process till October 2020, he added.

He said all of a sudden, in the month of November 2020, the Federation had conducted the written examination but did not publish the result. Instead, it had sent call letters to some of the persons to attend the

interview. Thereafter, 48 persons were declared as selected and appointment orders were also issued to them and now, they were working in the Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries department in various positions, he added.

He said from the beginning itself, there were widespread allegation and rumours that the applicants would be appointed only on payment of huge sum of money to the then Minister Rajendra Balaji as bribe. He understood that the managing director had also played an active role in this crime and violations. As per the government orders, the list of candidates recommended by the employment exchanges was valid only for six months and if the said process was not completed in six months, either new selection had to be commenced or it has to extend the time limit for another six months. In the present case, though the Federation had got the list of the names from the employment exchange in June 2019, it did not proceed further and no steps were taken to conduct the examination and shortlist the candidates till October 2020. Since the list was not at all acted upon, the list of names sent by the

employment exchange lapsed and in case the Federation wanted to proceed further, it should have called for fresh list from employment exchange. But, it did not do so, he added.

He said in the meantime, feelers were sent by the authorities to various persons offering appointments in case they pay the money expected by the then Minister. He understood that only on receipt of sum varying from Rs 20 lakh to 40 lakh, 48 persons were appointed by the Federation ad those who had not paid the demanded money were ignored either by appointing another person, who had paid money or simply leaving the post unfilled. For those persons on the directions of the then Minister, the interview marks were manipulated by the managing director to favour those who had paid money. Therefore, he sent a detailed representation to the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption and the action taken on his representation was not known to him, he alleged.

This petition is likely to come up hearing early and senior counsel A.Sirajudeen will appear on behalf of the petitioner.

'People's Collector' Supriya made forests secy

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 26

Supriya Sahu, a popular collector of Nilgiris two decades ago who is also an anti-plastic crusader known for making Nilgiris plastic-free, has been appointed the state government's principal secretary for environment and forests.

She is famous for environmental conservation in Nilgiris, who took steps to create a man-made forest near Ooty.

Sahu, who successfully handled the tea farmers' unrest in Nilgiris in 2000, went on to become a 'People's Collector' for her affability, sincerity, commitment and administration skills.

A green-minded and competent IAS officer, she then initiated steps to raze the unauthorised buildings that were built in violation of hill stations building rules in Nilgiris. She focused on the men-



Supriya, who successfully handled the tea farmers' unrest in Nilgiris in 2000, went on to become a 'People's Collector' for her affability, sincerity, commitment and administration skills.

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ace of plastic pollution in Nilgiris and became an anti-plastic crusader. Her relentless battle against plastic pollution saw the government banning use of throwaway plastics, making Nilgiris the first plastic-free district in the state in 2002.

In the same year, to com-

memorate the international year of mountains, she took the initiative to plant over 42,000 saplings in a single day at Kuruthukuli near here. This made Nilgiris enter the Guinness book of world records. This place is christened Guinness Park, a manmade forest in

Nilgiris. However, due to negligence in maintenance after she was transferred, the park lost its sheen. But, Sahu, who returned to Nilgiris in 2019 as the managing director of Indoserve at Coonoor and also the monitoring officer of Nilgiris, took steps for replanting in the Guinness Park.

Now appointed the principal secretary in the department of environment and forests, the greens here expect her to find lasting solutions to the problems shrouding the elephant corridor, relocation issues in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, man-animal conflicts and encroachments in Janmam lands in Nilgiris. The environmentalists are hopeful that Sahu would refocus her attention to bring the 'eco-sensitive' tag to Nilgiris to check further defacement of the hills and commercial exploitation of the hill ecology.

Anti-Sterlite protests

Cases against politicians withdrawn
Stalin urges Centre to withdraw agri billsDC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Close on the heels of the withdrawal of cases filed against the people who took part in the anti-Sterlite protest at Thoothukudi in 2018, the government on Wednesday let off the slew of political leaders who were booked on various charges for supporting the agitation.

The decision to withdraw the cases was taken by the DMK government based on the interim report of the Aruna Jagadeesan Commission that was formed to probe

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Even as farmers protesting against the three Agricultural bills passed by Parliament intensified their agitation in Delhi on Wednesday, Chief Minister M K Stalin urged the Centre to withdraw the three controversial Acts.

In a statement he said the State Assembly would

the police firing at the peaceful protestor on May 22, 2018.

Among the leaders who

pass a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the Acts as the DMK had mentioned in its manifesto for the Assembly elections.

Stalin regretted that the Centre had not come forward to take back the bills though the farmers had been protesting against them for six months. No efforts had been made to even strike compromise with the agitating farm-

ers, he said.

The three agricultural bills that had been made into acts are: The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation Act, 2020; The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

got the relief were R Nallakanu of CPI, K Balakrishnan of CPM, T T V Dhinakaran of AMMK,

Premalatha Vijayakanth and L K Sudeesh of DMDK and Anitha R Radhakrishnan of DMK.

Fishing ban: Pondy CM announces relief for fishers

Puducherry May 26:

Chief Minister of Puducherry N Rangasamy announced on Wednesday that each of the 15,983 families of fishermen in the Union Territory would be given Rs 5,500 as cash relief as the fishermen were jobless during the current ban on fishing.

The administration would incur an expenditure of ₹8.79 crore towards disbursement of the relief through the Department of Fisheries and Fishermen Welfare, a press release said here.

The ban on fishing was enforced for 61 days from April 15 to June 14 in Puducherry, Karaikal and Yanam regions while the ban would be in force in Mahe region from June 1 to July 31, official sources said.

The relief is meant to mitigate the sufferings of fishermen during the ban period and also to relieve them of hardships caused by the current pandemic situation in the Union Territory.

— PTI



Vivekanandar Illam, Chennai, conducts Covid camp, which will benefit 300 people in the Ayodhyakuppam area. Relief will be extended to more families of Nadukuppam.

— DC

Bureaucrats reshuffled

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 26

Tamil Nadu government on Wednesday appointed senior IAS Officer Vikram Kapur as Additional Chief Secretary to the planning and development department.

In an order issued by the Chief Secretary of Government, I. Irail Anbu, on Wednesday the following postings have been notified.

Vikram Kapur will be replacing Jayashree Raghunandan, who has been posted as Secretary/ Director or General of Rural Development and Panjayat Raj. IAS officer Mangat Ram Sharma, Principal Secretary to Government, Micro, Small and Medium

Enterprises Department is transferred and posted as Principal Secretary /Project Director, Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water-bodies Restoration and Management (IAMWARM), replacing Vibhu Nayyar. He is transferred and posted as Additional Chief Secretary / Commissioner of Land Administration.

Atulya Misra is the new Chairman & Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Power Finance Corporation and Dr Beela Rajesh has been posted as the Commissioner of Handlooms and Textiles.

Sigy Thomas Vaidhyar, Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Industrial Investment Corporation Ltd. is transferred and posted as

Industries Commissioner and Director of Industries & Commerce.

Hans Raj Verma, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary to Government, Rural Development and Pan-chayat Raj Department was transferred and posted as the Chairman & Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Industrial Investment Corporation Ltd.

Pankaj Kumar Bansal, formerly Managing Director of Tangedco, is placed at the disposal of Tamil Nadu Industrial development corporation limited. Dr S. Swarna has become Principal Secretary / Chairman and Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial services limited.

Rain throws life out of gear in Kanyakumari

DC CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, MAY 26

The torrential rain threw life out of gear in Kanyakumari district as many villages were knee-deep in flood waters.

The coastal district, impacted by heavy rains for the past few days due to the Yaas cyclone, registered a total rainfall of 2,221.80 mm (222.18cm) during 24 hours till 8 am on Wednesday. Myladi recorded the highest rainfall of 240 mm, followed by Eraniel 190 mm, while Boothapandi, Kannimar, Kulithurai, Nagercoil and Surulode recorded 150 mm each.

The continuous rain in the catchment areas of the Western Ghats resulted in heavy inflow to all

the seven reservoirs that have almost reached their maximum storage capacity, according to PWD sources.


The discharge of 11,320 cusecs of water from the Petchiparai dam caused flood in the Pazhalyaru river. The sluice gates of the Mambalathuraiyaru dam that reached its maximum storage capacity were opened to discharge its entire inflow of 149 cusecs, while 7.42 cusecs of water from the Mukkadai dam have been released into the river.

Around 50 villages in the district were submerged in the excess water discharged from the dams and around 1,000 acres of paddy fields and coconut groves face severe damage due to the flood water.

Several coastal villages faced the wrath of the rogue waves that damaged more than 500 country crafts anchored at the shore.

During the single day of rain, 8 huts in the district were damaged, while 61 houses were damaged since May 21 in the district. No human loss or injury has been reported in the district.

The Tenkasi district located at the foothills of the Western Ghats too received good rainfall for the past three days. Almost all the falls in the district were in full spate on Wednesday and the district administration has taken measures to shift people living in the low-lying areas to relief camps.



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IN BRIEF

'NEW NORMS WILL NOT AFFECT FREE-MESSAGING PLATFORM'

From P1

Information technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also stated that the government "is committed to ensure the Right of Privacy to all its citizens, he said the new norms will not impact normal functioning of the popular free-messaging platform.

Separately, the ministry asked social media companies such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp to report their status on compliance with the new rules, which kicked in from Wednesday.

The ministry is understood to have asked the social media companies to immediately provide details and contact information of the chief compliance officer and resident grievance officer. The new rules, announced on February 25, require large social media platforms to follow additional due diligence, including the appointment of chief compliance officer, nodal contact person and resident grievance officer.

Non-compliance with rules would result in these social media companies losing their intermediary status that provides them exemptions and certain immunity from liabilities for any third-party information and data hosted by them.

IMA SERVES DEFAMATION NOTICE ON RAMDEV

Dehradun, May 26: The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has served a defamation notice on Ramdev for alleged disparaging remarks against allopathy and allopathic doctors, demanding an apology from him within 15 days, failing which it said it will demand a compensation of ₹1,000 crore from the yoga guru.

The six-page notice served on behalf of IMA (Uttarakhand) secretary Ajay Khanna by his lawyer Neeraj Pandey describes the remarks by Ramdev as damaging to the reputation and the image of allopathy and around 2,000 practitioners of it who are part of the association. Terming the remarks of the yoga guru a "criminal act" under section of 499 of the Indian Penal Code, the notice demanded a written apology from him within 15 days of its receipt, saying a compensation of ₹1,000 crore will be demanded from him at the rate of Rs 50 lakh per member of the IMA if he failed to do so. The notice has also asked Ramdev to make a video clip contradicting all his allegations and circulate it on the social media platforms where he had uploaded his earlier video levelling them. It further asked the yoga guru to withdraw a "misleading" advertisement from all platforms endorsing "Coronil kit", a product of his firm, as an effective medicine for COVID-19, failing which an FIR and a criminal case will be lodged against him by the IMA.

FARMERS' STIR COMPLETES SIX MONTHS

Chandigarh, May 26: Farmers in Punjab and Haryana put up black flags atop their houses, burnt effigies of the central government and held protests on Wednesday, joining a 'black day' call given by farmer unions to mark six months of their agitation at Delhi borders against the Centre's three contentious farm laws. In Punjab, protesting farmers burnt effigies of the BJP-led central government at many places.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal also raised a black flag at his house in Badal village in Muktsar district and urged the central government to accept the demand of protesting farmers. In Haryana, state Bharatiya Kisan Union chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni said farmers at many places hoisted black flags atop their houses and vehicles to register their protest. Several political parties including the Congress, SAD and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have extended their support to the farmers' call of observing the day as 'black day'.

The Samkyukti Kisan Morcha, an umbrella body of protesting unions, had announced that farmers will observe May 26 as 'black day' to mark the completion of six months of their protest. Farmers carrying black flags while women wearing black *chunnis* held protests in villages.



Police officers distribute food to the needy people during landfall of cyclone Yaas in Kolkata on Wednesday. - PTI



Residents take shelter inside a primary school building in Balasore district of Odisha state as cyclone Yaas barrels towards eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal. - AFP

Yaas leaves a trail of devastation

Thousands of kutcha houses washed, trees uprooted; standing crop lost in Odisha

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BALASORE, MAY 26

The cyclonic storm Yaas on Wednesday morning made its landfall at Bahanaga in Odisha's Balasore district with a wind speed of 130 to 140 kilometre per hour (kmph) and left a trail of devastation in the coastal districts.

Initial reports suggest an elderly person named Purnachandra Naik in Keonjhar died as a tree collapsed on him while he was going to a temple near his house for his morning prayers. Similarly, a youth in Balasore district died as a large branch of a tree fell on him.

Thousands of kutcha houses in coastal villages in Bhadrak, Balasore and Kendrapara districts were washed away in the high tidal surge that accompanied the roaring landfall. Massive tides ranging from 2 to 4 metres high gushed into seaside villages resulting in marooning of innumerable households in Basudebpur and Chandabali areas in Bhadrak district.

In Balasore district, Chandipur, Baliapal, Bahanagar, Talasari and Bhograi areas were severely hit by the disaster. Kutcha houses and houses with asbestos roofs could not withstand the gusty winds and heavy downpour and collapsed. Several areas in Rajanagar area in Kendrapara district also witnessed tidal ingress that led to complete disruption of road communication. Four to five feet high sea water was seen flowing over the roads connecting Kendrapara district with Bhadrak.

Farmers, especially the paddy growers, vegetable and betel-leaf growers, were worst hit as the squally wind and incessant downpours destroyed the standing crops.

"During its landfall, Yaas had turned into a very severe cyclonic storm. It hit the coast at Bahanaga, 20 km south of Balasore town at 10.30 am and the landfall process continued for nearly three hours. With its impact, several coastal Odisha districts including Kendrapara, Bhadrak, Balasore and Jagatsinghpur received heavy rainfall ranging up to 150mm in the last 24



A priest removes an idol of Lord Jagannath from a seafront temple to a safer place in Balasore district in Odisha as cyclone Yaas barrels towards eastern coast in the Bay of Bengal. - AFP

● **FARMERS**, especially the paddy growers, vegetable and betel-leaf growers, were worst hit as the squally wind and incessant rain destroyed the standing crops.

hours. It also precipitated heavy downpours in the adjoining districts of West Bengal."

India Meteorological Department (IMD) director general Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

He added that the cyclone was moving further north and northwestwards and it would enter Jharkhand on Thursday morning after weakening into a deep depression. "From a severe cyclonic storm, Yaas will gradually weaken into a deep depression and enter Jharkhand with a wind speed of 50 to 60 km per hour," the IMD chief said.

Speaking to reporters after the cyclone passed the Odisha coast, state Special Relief Commissioner P.K. Jena efforts were being made to restore the road communication, power supply and drinking water systems.

"Till now, we have not received any reports of any major mishaps except loss of a couple of lives which unfortunately happened as they did not obey the government's order not to venture out during the cyclone. Now, we are focusing on restoration of essential services. We have asked collectors to submit the loss assessment reports as early as possible," said the SRC Mr Jena.

The SRC informed that Mayurbhanj, Balasore's adjoining district in the north had received heavy rainfall and it is likely to cause flash flood in Budhabalanga river which originates from the Simlipal National Park in the district.

Meanwhile, exhibiting their high-skilled rescue expertise and daredevilry, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Odisha police personnel on Tuesday night rescued at least 10 fishermen whose boat capsized near Japa village in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district.

According to reports, after the fishermen sent

distress calls about the imminent danger they faced in the sea, the NDRF jawans immediately reached the spot and evacuated them from the ill-fated vessel to a rescue boat.

Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik praised the efforts of the rescue teams. The jawans also rescued hundreds of domestic animals in Odisha and West Bengal from drowning or getting swept away in tidal waves.

Apart from rescue activity, the NDRF personnel served cooked food to evacuees accommodated in various cyclone shelters.

The NDRF jawans also cleared almost all major roads in Odisha and West Bengal which were blocked by uprooted trees.

"The NDRF focused on saving lives of the people, domestic animals and evacuation of people during the cyclone. Post the landfall of the storm our men have begun the restoration work. We are also taking care of people in shelters," NDRF director general Satyanarayan Pradhan said.

CYCLONE IN FIGURES

15,04,506
No. of people evacuated in West Bengal

5.80 lakh
No. of people in vulnerable areas of Odisha shifted to safe shelters

1 crore
No. of people affected in West Bengal

3 lakh
No. of houses damaged in West Bengal

6 No. of flights cancelled by Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in view of cyclone Yaas

17
No. of columns deployed by the Army to assist the WB administration

969 tonnes
Of liquid medical oxygen moved to six states and a Union Territory through 12 Oxygen Express trains in a span of 24 hours

404
No. of rescue teams been deployed in Odisha

In bleak times, 'villain' actor Sonu Sood redefines heroism

SRIRAM KARRI | DC HYDERABAD, MAY 26

If a scriptwriter had proposed a few years ago a logline for a movie which read - an actor from Punjab, with a six-pack body, who has played a villain on screen for over two decades, finds a calling in the midst of a pandemic.

His real life antics make him the most beloved superstar across the country, the trust in him built rapidly as he works to connect, first with migrant workers and trying to help



them, and as a second wave hits, responding to people from across the country, reaching out to him with a trust they repose in him greater than

in governments. And in cineaste Telugu states, gods of decades slide down the charts, downed by a virus, leaving only one real star.

Such a script would never have found a director accepting it. Even the audiences would have found it beyond plausibility, even for a story. But when life scripts stories and reality screens it, not for two hours but years, anything is possible. Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle* about his inner motivations to emerge from the fringes of

celebritydom to becoming a trusted icon of a ravage nation's people, Sonu Sood, in a soft soothing voice of a healer rather than a preferred negative actor of the movie screen, said, "growing up in Moga, Punjab, I saw my mother, a teacher, give free tuition classes for decades. Outside my father's shop, there would always be a langar, where I too would serve food. It was a lesson ingrained for life that you must always be there to serve in whatever capacity you have."

People living in darkness

Balasore, May 26: Trees and electric poles were uprooted, low-lying areas inundated while kutcha houses were badly damaged as cyclone Yaas left a trail of destruction in Odisha's coastal districts of Balasore and Bhadrak on Wednesday.

Residents of several parts of the two districts, which bore the brunt of the 'very severe cyclonic storm', are staying without power since Tuesday night while many people have been evacuated to safer places by the government.

Officials are yet to assess the damages caused by the storm in the two districts but said that it appears that devastations have

been less than previously feared.

"There has been a lot of damage here. Many trees and electric poles have been uprooted and there was very heavy rainfall," Sritam Mahajan, a resident of Soro town in Balasore district said.

"Now, there is intermittent rainfall, though the winds have subsided," said Mahajan, 27, adding that his area was out of electricity since Tuesday night.

He said he would try to arrange a generator so that he can continue working from home.

Pradyut Mohapatra, a 60-year-old resident of Balasore town, also said that there has been no

electricity in his house and was apprehensive that the power supply might not be restored anytime soon.

Sangram Tripathy, a resident of Chadabali in Bhadrak district, said that the tiled roof of his house got partly blown away in heavy wind and agricultural fields near his house got inundated due to the storm surge.

He said that there had been no electricity in his house since Monday night.

Special Relief Commissioner PK Jena said that the administration is yet to assess the damages in Balasore and Bhadrak district.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

JAPAN BOAT, RUSSIA SHIP COLLIDE, 3 DIE

Tokyo, May 26: A Japanese fishing boat collided with a Russian ship off the northern island of Hokkaido on Wednesday, killing three crew members, Tokyo said.

Japan's coast guard was informed that five crew members from the fishing boat were recovered by a Russian cargo ship, government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told reporters.

"We have been told that three were confirmed dead, while the remaining two suffered non-life threatening injuries," he added.

Japan and Russia are locked in a sovereignty dispute over four islands administered by Moscow, which refers to them as the southern Kurils.

Tokyo claims the islands, which it calls the Northern Territories, and the dispute has prevented the two countries from signing a formal peace treaty since World War II.

Fishing vessels in the area have sometimes been involved in tensions.

U.S. CUTS MEXICO'S AVIATION SAFETY RATING

Washington, May 26: US regulators have downgraded Mexico's aviation safety rating, a move that prevents Mexican airlines from expanding flights to the United States just as travel is recovering from the pandemic.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Tuesday it downgraded Mexico after finding that the country does not meet standards set by a United Nations aviation group.

The downgrade means that US airlines won't be able to sell tickets on flights operated by Mexican airlines, a setback that will mainly hit Delta, which has a partnership with Aeromexico.

The FAA said it will increase scrutiny of Mexican flights to the United States, but the downgrade does not immediately affect current flights.

The FAA decision to lower Mexico from "Category 1" to "Category 2" puts it in a group of countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Thailand.

ZUMA PLEADS NOT GUILTY IN GRAFT TRIAL

Pietermaritzburg, May 26: South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, pleaded not guilty on Wednesday in a much-postponed corruption case dating back more than two decades.

The 79-year-old faces 14 charges of fraud, graft and racketeering relating to a 1999 purchase of fighter jets, patrol boats and military gear from five European arms firms for 30 billion rand, then the equivalent of nearly \$5 billion.

Zuma — who at the time was president Thabo Mbeki's deputy — is accused of accepting bribes totalling four million rand from one of the firms, French defence giant Thales. Impeccably dressed in a dark blue suit and a red tie, wearing an anti-coronavirus mask, he was repeatedly asked by the judge, Piet Koen, to confirm in person the response of his attorney, given "the magnitude of what we're dealing with." "I plead not guilty," Zuma said without hesitating.

Thales also pleaded not guilty to charges of corruption and money laundering.

PAK JOURNALIST ATTACKED FOR CRITICISING ARMY

Islamabad, May 26: A Pakistani journalist, known for his criticism of the armed forces, has been attacked by unknown assailants outside his home in Islamabad, in another series of assaults on media persons.

Asad Ali Toor, who is also a YouTuber, was tied, gagged, severely beaten outside his residence in the upscale F-10 sector late on Tuesday night, according to police. A video showed three men briskly walking away from the apartment building after thrashing Toor who was staggering and trying to recollect himself.

Another video showed Toor moving in a hospital with his shirt soaked in blood at his elbow but apparently out of danger. Talking about the details of the incident in the clip, Toor said the attackers had asked him about the source of his funds. He also revealed in a separate video that he was being threatened and was informed by a "well-wisher" of some attack after Eid. Last year, a case was registered against Toor, a known critic of the armed forces.

EU asks for big penalties against AZ

European Commission begins legal action as pharmaceutical company failed to give vax

Brussels, May 26: The European Union on Wednesday asked a Belgian court to impose penalties running to millions of euros per day on AstraZeneca for Covid-19 vaccine doses it has failed to deliver to the bloc.

The request came as EU countries and their executive, the European Commission, began legal action against the Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical company for "flagrant violation" of its contract with Brussels.

The EU is suing AstraZeneca to force it to deliver 90 million more doses of its coronavirus vaccine before July, arguing that it failed in its contractual duty by handing over only a quarter of the shots it promised for the first three months of 2021.

The deadline for the contract is set for mid-June, according to the Commission, and the EU says the company should face financial penalties if it does not meet this deadline.

Its legal team demanded an upfront fine of 10 million euros (\$12 million) plus "10 euros per dose and per day of delay" in that event.

AstraZeneca delivered only 30 million doses in the first quarter, out of the 120 million it was contracted to supply. For the current quarter which runs until June 30, it plans to deliver only 70 million of the 180 million doses initially promised.

A Commission official close to the case said this month that AstraZeneca was currently delivering doses at a rate of only 10 million per month, well below the planned pace.

The company's defence — articulated ahead of the court case in a series of media interviews by AstraZeneca's French-Australian boss Pascal Soriot — relies on a part of the contract that speaks of "best reasonable efforts" by AstraZeneca and declarations that production was hit by unavoidable delays.

But the lawyer for the EU, Rafael Jeffareli, argued in court that the firm had prioritised supplies to Britain and beyond, while failing to make the best effort to step up production at its EU site in the Netherlands.

PAKISTAN OPENS JABS TO ALL ADULTS

Islamabad, May 26: Pakistan is offering jabs to its entire adult population in hopes of boosting Covid-19 vaccination rates, with only five per cent of the population inoculated so far.

Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar announced on Twitter that the registration of those ages 19 and above will begin from Thursday.

So far, the vaccination was open to those 30 years and above.

Pakistan has reported a steady decline in infections and fatalities from Covid-19 in recent days, but the vaccination response has been sluggish. The only shots given are three Chinese-made vaccines.

Pakistan has registered 908,576 confirmed cases and 20,465 deaths since last year. — AP

BETTER ACCESS

Brussels, May 26: The EU on Wednesday tasked tech giants such as Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking.

The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elec-



A photograph taken on Wednesday shows placards stuck on buses windshields reading "SOS coach operator in danger", "Who's our minister", "Help" and "Silence we are sinking" during a slow-down operation in front of the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in Paris to protest against the lack of help by the French government concerning the professional situation of bus drivers due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

— AFP

UK study finds long-term lung damage after Covid

London, May 26: Researchers in the UK have identified persistent damage to lungs in Covid-19 patients at least three months after they were discharged from hospital, and in some cases the duration is even longer.

The study, conducted by Sheffield and Oxford researchers using a cutting-edge method of imaging, said the damage was not detected by routine CT

scans and clinical tests, and the patients would consequently normally be told their lungs are normal. Early research by the team has shown that patients who have not been hospitalised with Covid-19 but who are experiencing long-term breathlessness may have similar damage in their lungs, and a larger study is needed to confirm this, a release by the Sheffield University said

on Wednesday.

In a paper published in Radiology, the world's leading radiology journal, the researchers from the University of Sheffield and the University of Oxford said that hyperpolarised xenon MRI (XeMRI) scans had found abnormalities in the lungs of some Covid-19 patients more than three months — and in some cases, nine months. — PTI

WHO asked to review Italy report, whistleblower case

Rome, May 26: Whistleblower protection groups urged the World Health Organisation on Wednesday to launch an independent review into the case of an Italian researcher who reported being pressured to falsify data in a now-spiked WHO report into Italy's Coronavirus response.

The groups, including Transparency International, Whistleblowing International Network and some 30 other public health

and anti-corruption groups, sent an open letter to the president of the World Health Assembly.

The assembly, WHO's highest decision-making body, is made up of all WHO member states and is meeting this week.

In the letter, the signatories called for the UN agency to commit to reforming its whistleblowing protection policy. They said the Italian researcher, Dr. Francesco Zambon, had suffered retaliatory

treatment for having reported the incident within WHO's internal ethics system.

Zambon resigned in March, saying he had been isolated and marginalised after he complained internally, and then publicly, about the scandal.

Zambon has said he was pressured by a then-assistant director general, Dr. Ranieri Guerra, to falsify data about Italy's preparedness going into the pandemic. — AP

Taiwan: China curbing vax deal

Taipei, May 26: Taiwan on Wednesday accused China of hindering its efforts to obtain Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines from Germany as it struggles with a sudden spike in Coronavirus cases and a slow inoculation campaign.

For much of the Coronavirus pandemic Taiwan has had one of the world's best responses. But a sudden outbreak and trouble securing enough vaccines has taken the shine off that fight. On Wednesday President Tsai Ing-wen explicitly accused China of being a stumbling block to getting Pfizer shots.

"We had almost completed the contract-signing with the German manufacturer at one point but it

has been delayed till now because China has interfered," Tsai said in a post on her Facebook page.

Back in February Taiwanese officials previously hinted China was causing difficulties, but officials steered clear of explicitly naming Beijing.

Authoritarian China regards democratic and self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and works to keep the island diplomatically isolated.

Taiwan is currently locked out of the World Health Organisation and its annual health summit which is meeting this week. Tsai's administration has not detailed why it believes China has been a stumbling block and Beijing has previously

denied putting up roadblocks. Pfizer-BioNTech's distributor for the Greater China region — which includes Taiwan — is Fosun Pharma based in Shanghai. Taipei has insisted it only wants to deal with the German firm, something which Beijing would likely balk at.

"Only by purchasing (the vaccines) from the original manufacturer can we obtain direct guarantee in quality and safety to avoid legal and political double risks," Tsai said.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian on Wednesday said "Taiwan's access to vaccines from the mainland is smooth," without elaborating further. He also included a swipe at Tsai.

TWO INDIANS OF FIRE-HIT SHIP TEST VIRUS +VE

Colombo, May 26: Two Indian crew members, who were rescued from a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Sri Lanka last week, have tested positive for Covid-19, according to a media report on Wednesday.

All 25 crew members, including five Indians, of the container ship, MV 'X-PRESS PEARL', were rescued on Tuesday after a 'fire alarm' dispatch was sent.

Of the five Indians, two of them sustained injuries during the rescue operation and were hospitalised at the Colombo National Hospital. The two Indians tested positive with Covid-19 after undergoing a rapid antigen test (RAT) at a private hospital, reported newspaper *Daily Mirror* on Wednesday.

The Indians have not yet been identified. According to Johns Hopkins University, the Coronavirus has claimed 1,269 lives in Sri Lanka so far, along with 169,900 confirmed cases. Sri Lanka has received 500,000 doses of Sinopharm Coronavirus vaccine donated by China. — PTI

Ex-top aide: Boris thought Covid 1st wave 'scare story'

London, May 26: Dominic Cummings, the former top aide of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on Wednesday said that the government had fallen "disastrously short" in its response to the Covid-19 pandemic's first wave in early last year as the premier believed it was just a "scare story" at that time. In a series of explosive claims during his evidence before a joint House of Commons hearing of the Science and Technology and Health Committees, Johnson's former Chief Strategy Adviser before an unceremonious exit last year declared that the officials in charge of the crisis were "out of their depth" and apologised to the families of those who died in the early days of the pandemic.

"At that stage, the Prime Minister believed it was a scare story, a new swine flu... I certainly told him it wasn't," Cummings told cross-party MPs during the evidence hearing, in reference to the period before the UK went into a complete "stay at home" lockdown to control the spread of the deadly virus on March 23, 2020.

"We have the Prime Minister chairing Cobra [Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms] meetings and he just tells everyone 'it's swine flu, don't worry about it. I'm going to get Chris Whitty to inject me live on TV with Coronavirus so everyone realises it's nothing to be frightened of. That would not actually help serious planning,'" he said.

Taking on some of the blame himself as one of the senior officials at Downing Street at the time, Cummings defended his stance as he did not feel equipped with all the facts and expertise to pull a so-called "emergency panic button" to push harder for a complete lock-



Boris Johnson

down earlier. "The truth is, senior ministers, officials, advisers like me fell disastrously short of standards required by the public," he said. "When the public needed us the most, the government failed. I want to apologise to all those families who had people that died... In retrospect, it's completely obvious that many institutions failed," he said.

He also made a withering attack on UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock and claimed that he should have been sacked for 15-20 things including "for lying" to people, an allegation for which he was asked by the parliamentary committee chairs to submit further written evidence. During the questioning, Cummings was asked about the government's preparations for a pandemic in general and whether it was the intention of ministers to allow the virus to spread until there was so-called herd immunity.

He told the MPs the original plan had been for limited intervention, with the hope of achieving herd immunity. He told the MPs the original plan had been for limited intervention, with the hope of achieving herd immunity. He told the MPs the original plan had been for limited intervention, with the hope of achieving herd immunity.

UK vax plan to cover over-30s

London, May 26: The UK's health service on Wednesday extended its Covid-19 age-based vaccination programme to the next cohort to cover everyone aged 30 and over.

The National Health Service (NHS) said 1 million more people aged 30 and 31 will be invited by text over the coming days, leaving only adults between 18 and 29 yet to get the nod to come forward for their first doses. It is the latest in a series of expansions this month opening up the vaccinations to people in their thirties, who are to be offered an alternative to the Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs — either Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna — following medical advice related to rare blood clot concerns for lower age groups.

"Our vaccination programme is moving at such a phenomenal pace and I am delighted that less than six months after

Margaret Keenan received the first authorised jab in the world, we are now able to open the offer to everyone in their thirties and over," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"The vaccine is our way out of this pandemic and recent data has shown the life-saving protection a second dose of the jab can give, especially against the new variant (B.1.617.2 variant first discovered in India)," he said.

On the advice of the government and Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), people aged 50 and over and the clinically vulnerable are having their second doses brought forward to counter the spread of the B.1.617.2 variant.

The NHS said it has now delivered almost 32 million first doses of the jab, and well over 19 million of adults have had both doses.

— PTI

Brussels also plans to present by the year end a draft regulation on political advertising

EU wants more from Big Tech against disinformation

tions in the US in 2016.

It was signed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and in June 2020 by TikTok to do more against disinformation and provide much better access to their algorithms as well as beef up fact-checking.

The proposal is the EU's effort to strengthen its existing code of conduct against disinformation, which was launched in 2018 after revelations that platforms had facilitated and amplified false information in the ramp up to the Brexit vote and elec-

slap penalties on Facebook and others when they fail to demonstrate strong action against disinformation. European Commission Vice President Vera Jourova said the stricter and more detailed code of conduct was necessary to better root out "systemic risks" on platforms.

Jourova said that it was time for big tech companies "to stop policing themselves alone and stop allowing to make money on disinformation".

"After the DSA will come into force, this code of

practice will become semi-obligatory," she warned. Among the many proposals, the EU is calling for messaging platforms such as Facebook's WhatsApp to also be included, given the vast disinformation campaigns seen in India and elsewhere.

The Commission is also asking platforms for regular reports with clear benchmarks to assess the measures put in place.

In addition, the EU executive is seeking to create a designated task force composed of the code's signatories, representatives of the EU diplomatic service and media regulators from the member states.

The proposals will be discussed with the signatories, who will have to submit a first version of the revised code late

this year so that it can be operational by the beginning of 2022.

Marisa Jimenez Martin,

Facebook's director of EU Affairs, said that "the reality is that we think the code works". — AFP

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DECCAN Chronicle

27 MAY 2021

Protest in time of Covid needs urgent resolution

Thousands of farmers protesting against the three laws that will govern Indian agriculture henceforth on Wednesday observed a “black day”, marking the completion of six months of their agitation at the gates of the national capital. “We are not going anywhere,” they said and insisted that they have no plans to go home unless the government listened to them, repealed the three laws and offered them legal guarantee for minimum support price for their produce. They also want protection from the impact of the proposed Electricity Bill. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab and several other states also joined the protest, called by the umbrella organisation of farmers unions, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM).

The government has been playing hot and cold on the issue of the repeal of the Farmers’ Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020. It is curious that all the tall figures in the government, from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to agriculture minister Narendra Tomar to defence minister Rajnath Singh who tried to mediate with the farmers, have all declared their intention to alleviate the fears of the farming community but they have remained on the streets for the last six months despite 11 rounds of talks!

The farmers have been apprehensive of the intentions of the government when it legally and effectively opens up the Indian farm sector and leaves it for the market forces to control. They cannot be faulted given that the government’s track record of planning and executing its ideas on the ground has been dismal. If its bungling on demonetisation and the introduction of Goods and Services Tax is not enough, then the government’s vanishing act while the nation fell prey to the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 would add to the fear in the minds of the farming community.

The Opposition parties have also lent their support to the farmers’ demands. The government must stop being obdurate and immediately resume talks with the SKM, they have stated in a letter to the Prime Minister this week, reminding the government that it will help “protect lakhs of our annadatas becoming victims of the pandemic so that they can continue to produce food to feed the Indian people”.

While the government has been saying it had the welfare of the farming community at its heart, anti-social elements have been working overtime to malign the agitation. They almost succeeded in their mission with the drama played out on the Republic Day but for the dexterous move by the Bharat Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. A similar attempt was made when a section of the media accused the protesters of stopping oxygen carriers to Delhi. That, too, was exposed in no time.

The government must realise that no agitation can be drawn this long unless there is a genuine cause. The government must resume talks at the earliest and convince the farmers about its earnestness or be convinced by their fears. Letting the annadatas go on an unending agitation does not behave a democratic government.

CJI plays a judicious hand

The fresh approach used in the selection of senior IPS officer S.K. Jaiswal, the current head of the CISF, as the new director of the CBI, commends itself.

In the selection meeting last Monday, the Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana, who is on the three-member panel to choose the CBI chief, besides the PM and the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, proposed that a Supreme Court judgment of March 2019 — that an officer should have at least six months’ service remaining in order to be considered for the position of DGP — be extended to the post of CBI director as well. The panel accepted the view.

It is to be hoped that the criterion will henceforth be adopted in selecting the chief of the IB and the R&AW as well. In the case of the appointment of the CBI Director, the government could well have taken shelter behind the CVC Act if it wished to torpedo the CJI’s well-considered suggestion.

But the notion is *ipso facto* sound. In too many cases, officers are selected for top slots with only days, weeks, or a couple of months remaining before their superannuation. This reinforces the impression of favouritism, the absence of neutrality at the highest levels of governance, and gives rise to the undue play of political factors. The ideals of transparency and fair play are undermined. In the event, the country is frequently deprived of the services of the most meritorious amongst those available.

The CBI chief has an assured two-year tenure. This is to reinforce the idea of autonomy and independence in decision-making in so sensitive a position. It is bad enough that the CBI has widely come to be seen as “a caged parrot” — the colourful description once supplied by the Supreme Court. It is now up to its new leader to disabuse us of this impression.

When the high-level panel accepted the CJI’s suggestion, two high-profile officers, who had less than six months’ service left but were deemed close to the powers-that-be, were taken out of contention. For reasons of good governance, this is just as well.

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Subhani



Asymmetry of power & politics of revenge



Shikha Mukerjee

The asymmetry of power, resources and responsibilities between the Centre and the states in India’s federal structure has been so overwhelmingly tilted that it was but natural for the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assume that it was unchangeable and universally so, allowing him to try to scare and repress a puny *[sic!]* regional player, namely Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress party, after her splendid third-time victory. He and his party should have known better.

There is the power of the State, expressed through hundreds of articles in the Constitution of India, and then there is the power of the ultimate sovereign, the ordinary woman and man, who votes and delivers a verdict. In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as “revenge politics,” adding, for good measure, that the “BJP should remember that the people of Bengal rejected their ideology in the Assembly elections”.

That the CBI’s sudden swoop and arrest on May 17 of three Trinamul Congress leaders, two of whom are ministers with responsibilities vital to bringing the Covid-19 surge and the six-week election administrative disarray under control, is vendetta politics is not any doubt in the minds of West Bengal’s voters. The CBI’s raid that netted three TMC leaders and one politician with no party affiliation in a case of bribery and corruption, aka the 2014 Narada sting operation, brought into sharper focus the “washing machine” politics of the BJP. Left out of the list of those arrested

were Mukul Roy and Union home minister Amit Shah’s prize recruit Suwendu Adhikari, prompting the public through the social media to question the exception.

The outcome is a further boost to the Trinamul Congress’ standing with the people and a further erosion of the BJP’s already tarnished credibility. The courtroom drama has further incensed the man/woman on the street, regardless of what the Centre’s lawyers may have argued, backed by the entirely irrelevant social media commentary by governor J.P. Dhankhar.

There is no difference of opinion on what these antics are all about — first the tweets by the governor about the near breakdown of the state’s constitutional machinery that were meant to signal that President’s Rule could be imposed at any moment, overthrowing the just elected government, followed by the raids have been identified by the Congress, CPI(M) and privately by some sane BJP leaders as well. In repeating behaviour similar to cattle raiders to hit back at the Opposition parties, the Narendra Modi government used exactly the same tactics of using or perhaps misusing the power to awe and smear vested in the Centre that had failed; governments led by Arvind Kejriwal in Delhi, Pinarayi Vijayan

In a statement that was unusually long and politically sagacious, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Surya Kanta Mishra delivered a summary of the attempt to induce turmoil and destabilise the Mamata Banerjee government as ‘revenge politics’...

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee...

in Kerala, Hemant Soren in Jharkhand, Uddhav Thackeray in Maharashtra and Ashok Gehlot in Rajasthan were all raided and pushed back and Narendra Modi and his party were the losers.

In the preceding decades the capacity to push back, a complex mix of regional political culture and history that shaped the popular perception, was weaker than it is now. In West Bengal, the capacity to fault the Centre and wrinkle out vendetta politics against the legitimately elected and popular government has been honed over decades, when the Congress used Article 356 to impose President’s Rule against the rickety coalitions of the United Front in the 1960s. Over years of experience of the politics of discrimination and the consequences of the asymmetry of power between the Centre and the state, the average man in the street and especially in the rural areas, is politically well educated.

If these were diversionary tactics as has been argued in some quarters, it was politically foolish. The frantic family members of all those who died because the Modi government had not taken steps to ensure adequate supplies of oxygen to meet the surge that every expert said was coming are not diverted or deceived. The scandalous incompetence of the ruling establishment to handle the crisis is evident in the number of deaths across the country — three lakhs and counting.

If these were tactics to assert the power of the Centre over the state, it was so badly timed that it has been described by BJP insiders as politically suicidal. Neither West

Bengal’s electorate nor voters across the country are impressed by the display of power when the lives of loved ones have been sacrificed to feed the Modi government’s hubris. There is so much traffic on the social media on this that there can be no room to challenge how the people have interpreted these shenanigans.

What is worse is that the judiciary has now been embroiled in what for the BJP is nothing more than a game that has gone wrong. A split decision on granting bail to the arrested leaders says it all. The simple conclusion, regardless of the complex interpretations by the Centre’s lawyers, is that the decision to arrest by the CBI is doubtful in law. No matter how long these hearings last, it is not possible to repair the political damage that the BJP has inflicted on itself in the people’s court.

The BJP’s wizards have created a bigger problem for themselves out of the West Bengal defeat. The queue of defectors pleading to rejoin the Trinamul Congress is the best indicator. As is the letter from a defeated BJP candidate, Locket Chatterjee, who is still an MP, to Amit Shah asking for the Central security detail to be removed, because she cannot be a protected entity while the party’s workers are unsafe.

Violence to settle political scores, before, during and after an election, is always condemnable; but that unfortunately is West Bengal’s culture. Having flaunted its arsenal of Central security forces to enforce peace before and during the elections, by constructing a narrative of locally uncontrollable violence, the BJP overplayed its hand. The post-election sending out of Central probe teams, frantic tweets by the governor or meddling by the Prime Minister are pointless gestures and understood by the public to be so. The verdict is out, and the BJP cannot overturn it, that West Bengal is not impressed by its leaders and categorically rejects its communal and divisive politics.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

GIFTS WITH VACCINE

While the Tamil Nadu government is making all efforts to create more awareness about the urgent need for administering vaccines to all eligible persons, it would perhaps be a good idea if the authorities possibly consider offering some incentives also to people get themselves vaccinated, for example, attractive gift bags containing fruits, toys, mask packs, free petrol tokens, sanitiser etc., considering the present challenging health situation being faced from the deadly virus. Such offering of gifts with vaccination could potentially help in boosting our present fight against the deadly virus by vaccinating more people and accelerating immunity in the population and most important, thereby preventing any further deaths occurring from Covid infection.

A. Mohan, Chennai

NEED INVESTIGATION

The American daily, The Wall Street Journal, recently citing a U.S. intelligence report that three researchers at China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology fell ill and sought hospital care in November 2019, a month before China reported the first Covid-19 case, fuels further debate on the exact origin of the novel Coronavirus. The information is likely to increase pressure for more investigations even as China has repeatedly denied that the virus escaped from one of its labs. Though the virus is said to have originated from the seafood market in Wuhan city, the possibility that it was the result of an accidental leak from WIV, where research on Coronavirus was being conducted on bats, cannot be ruled out. Long characterised by sceptics as a conspiracy theory, the postulation that the pandemic could have begun with a lab accident in China offers a new twist to the whole episode.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

SEX SCANDAL

It is unfortunate that a teacher in PSBB, KK Nagar has been arrested for sexually harassing the students physically and also appearing during online classes clad only in a towel. It is more shocking to learn that despite complaints of sexual harassment lodged by the affected girls against him with the school management, no action was initiated by the school which emboldened the accused to continue with his misconduct for more than five years. It is also shocking that Y.G. Mahendran, one of the trustees of the school, has tried to extricate himself from any responsibility in the sordid episode and his daughter Maduvanthi, another stake holder has tried to give a communal and religious colour to the issue by saying that the issue is blown so much because they are Brahmins and Hindus! Hope law will take its right course and punish all concerned.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Did PM pep talk with DMs, others breach protocol?

Protocol, anyone? Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s pep talk to district magistrates on the Covid-19 issue in an online meeting has got some raising the issue of whether it was right for Mr Modi to interact directly with district magistrates and other officials while bypassing their respective ministers. Moreover, the event was telecast live when, just a few weeks ago, the Centre had objected sharply to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal for a live feed during Mr Modi’s meeting with chief ministers.

While seemingly there is nothing wrong with the Prime Minister addressing government officials whenever he chooses to, the question is about propriety and federalism. District officials work under elected state governments and chief ministers and report to them as well. Bypassing the state governments indicates thumbing one’s

nose at the federal structure, which is problematic, it is being said.

Interestingly, Mr Modi’s interaction follows a similar meeting organised by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal who spoke directly with state education secretaries, overlooking the state education ministers. This was one reason why the Tamil Nadu government boycotted the meeting.

‘DOCS’ IN SERVICE DEPUTED TO ASSIST MEDICAL TEAMS

Taking a cue from Gujarat which took this step during the first wave of Covid last year, the Haryana government is using IAS and IPS officers who have a medical degree in the state’s fight against the pandemic.

Sources say that five Haryana cadre IAS officers and three IPS officers who have MBBS degrees have been pulled off their administrative duties and directed to

assist medical teams running Covid hospitals in the state. They have been deputed to additional chief secretary for health Rajeev Arora for the creation and administration of 500-bed hospitals in Panipat and Hisar and other related duties.

The IAS officers are Dr Chander Shekhar Khare, Dr R.S. Dhillon, Dr Sangeeta Tatarwal, Dr Manoj Kumar and Dr Vaishali Sharma. The IPS officers are Dr Dheeraj Kumar, Dr Anshu Singla and Dr Arpit Jain. The state government has also deputed 22 senior IAS officers to oversee Covid preparedness in different districts.

No doubt, this is a temporary arrangement to combat the second wave of the pandemic. However, it also coincides with the growing demand by some medical experts and organisations that the government create a special all-India cadre of medical officers along the

lines of the IAS and IPS, etc. If this stopgap measure is successful, it might prod the Centre to seriously consider the demand for a specialised medical service.

TWO SENIOR COPS LOCK HORNS IN HARYANA

An intra-service battle has erupted in Haryana Police. IGP Y. Purn Kumar, a 2001-batch IPS officer, has filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana high court against the state police chief Manoj Yadava for alleged “discriminatory behaviour” towards Mr Kumar.

Sources say that Mr Kumar has accused DGP Yadava of “partial attitude, discriminatory treatment and violation of service rules”. He has sought directions from the court to direct the additional chief secretary for home to take immediate decision on his complaints submitted against Mr Yadava.

The spat does not seem to be new.

Mr Kumar has accused Mr Yadava of targeting him since July 2020 “in a vindictive manner” ever since Mr Kumar was posted to Ambala instead of another officer favoured by the DGP. Mr Kumar has also sought directions from the court to restrain Mr Yadava from writing his annual performance appraisal report until the petition is decided.

The feud at the top in the state’s police service has happened at a time when the state is struggling with the Covid epidemic and also dealing with the farmers’ agitation against Central laws, and which shows no sign of disappearing. And when two senior cops take on each other instead of the issues facing Haryana, it can’t bode well for law and order in the state.

Share a babu experience! Follow diltiphecherian@Twitter.com. Let’s multiply the effect.

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Sensex	51,017.52	0.75
Nifty 50	15,301.50	0.61
S&P 500*	4,201.23	0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	0.00
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,589.527	1.08
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.59	-0.09
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.559	-0.005

* As of 8:30 PM IST

PharmEasy completes Medlife acquisition



Online pharmacy PharmEasy said it has completed the acquisition of Medlife to become India's largest healthcare delivery platform. All the users of Medlife would be migrated to PharmEasy. "This acquisition significantly strengthens our position in the healthcare industry, and further helps us in providing quality healthcare to a greater number of households," PharmEasy co-founder Dharmil Sheth said.

MGM's 4,000-title film library to strengthen streaming Amazon to buy MGM Studios for \$8.45 bn

KELLY GILBLOM & SPENCER SOPER
MAY 26

Amazon.com Inc agreed to buy the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie company for \$8.45 billion, a bet that a nearly century-old Hollywood icon can feed an insatiable demand for streaming content.

The proliferation of streaming services, including newer arrivals such as HBO Max and Disney+, has put pressure on Amazon to acquire more programming. Chief executive officer Jeff Bezos has made no secret of his desire for movie moguldom, and MGM's vast backlog provides an abundance of streaming material, not to mention an opportunity to mine the iconic James Bond and Rocky franchises for new films and television shows.

Moreover, with retail rivals like Walmart Inc rolling out more sophisticated online stores, Amazon must work even harder to keep its 200 million Prime subscribers loyal.

"This jumpstarts them by 50 years," said Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Securities. "That's really what it comes down to. They weren't going to be able to produce enough content to ever get close to Netflix."

Pachter said that Amazon's studios produce a few hundred hours worth of television shows and movies a year. MGM adds a back catalogue of 25,000 hours that Amazon could



divvy up between its Prime Video offering, or its free-to-stream, ad-supported IMDb TV.

The takeover is Amazon's biggest acquisition since it agreed to buy Whole Foods in 2017 for \$13.7 billion but follows investments of about \$11 billion on content for its streaming video and music services last year alone. Mike Hopkins, senior vice president of Prime Video and Amazon Studios, in a statement pointed to MGM's "deep catalogue" as justification for the purchase.

MGM has been seen as a takeover target for years, but was never able to close a sale before. The company made a fresh push last year, when it reportedly hired advisers to seek offers.

For MGM, the studio that brought James Bond and Scarlett O'Hara to the big screen, the deal provides a finale to a bumpy era of hedge-fund ownership that began with a bankruptcy over a decade ago. MGM's lead shareholder is the Anchorage Capital Group LLC, which became an owner with three other investors as part of a 2010 bankruptcy agreement

that erased about \$4 billion in debt.

MGM's Ebitda rose 48 per cent to about \$307 million last year, lifted by profit from its 4,000-title film library. But with a lack of new releases, sales declined 3 per cent to \$1.5 billion.

Under Anchorage Capital the studio aspired to its old glory—a legacy that includes "Gone With the Wind," the top film of all time in ticket sales, and the biblical classic "Ben-Hur," which shares the record for most Academy Awards at 11.

The new owners hired a moviemaker CEO in Gary Barber, a Hollywood heavyweight known for films such as "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective." He oversaw a new James Bond movie, "Skyfall," that generated more than \$1 billion in ticket sales—the studio's biggest-grossing film ever—and partnered with Warner Bros on the blockbuster "Hobbit" films.

MGM also branched out into television. The studio took control of the premi-

um cable network Epix, and acquired the TV production company owned by famed producer Mark Burnett, known for creating "Survivor" and "The Apprentice." The studio also created the critically acclaimed series "The Handmaid's Tale" and " Fargo," adding to a lucrative library.

Hedge funds rarely hang on to such investments for more than a few years, and observers long thought that Barber was prepping the studio for sale. In 2017, reports suggested that MGM was in discussions with a Chinese company, though no deal materialised.

MGM traces its roots back to the 1920s merger of Marcus Loew's Metro films with a film company run by Hollywood legend Louis B. Mayer. The studio, while making great pictures like "Dr. Zhivago" and "2001: A Space Odyssey," drifted in and out of financial distress in the second half of the 20th century. Over the decades it was owned by Time Inc, CNN founder Ted Turner and more than once by the late billionaire Kirk Kerkorian.

Turner kept much of MGM's library, which is now owned by AT&T Inc's WarnerMedia, soon to be part of Discovery Inc.

"I am very proud that MGM's Lion, which has long evoked the Golden Age of Hollywood, will continue its storied history," said Anchorage CEO Kevin Ulrich, who is chairman of the board of MGM.

—Bloomberg

GST: Centre has to borrow ₹1.58L cr more to pay states

VRISHTI BENIWAL & SUBHADIP SIRCAR
MAY 26

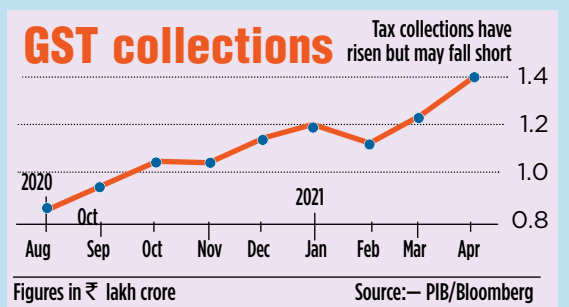
India may need to borrow more for a second straight year to compensate its states for their revenue loss due to a shortfall in a nationwide consumption tax collection, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The additional borrowing requirement is estimated at Rs 1.58 lakh crore (\$21.7 billion) in the fiscal year started April 1, said the people, who asked not to be identified citing rules. A panel on goods and services tax will meet on Friday to discuss compensation to states, among other issues.

While the amount to be paid to states works out to Rs 2.7 lakh crore, the government is expected to muster only Rs 1.1 lakh crore, the people said.

Calls made to a finance ministry spokesperson weren't immediately answered.

The amount is part of a compensation that the central government agreed to pay states for any revenue loss on account of introduction of a nationwide GST. But the economic downturn caused by the world's worst coronavirus outbreak risks hurting tax collection, possibly forcing the administration to consider additional borrow-



ings. Should the borrowing materialise, it will be in addition to the over Rs 12 lakh crore budgeted this year to bridge the fiscal deficit gap. The RBI, has so far, been able to keep yields under check through its various moves such as 'Operation Twist' and the announcement of a Rs 1-lakh crore bond purchase acquisition programme for the current quarter. The benchmark 10-year yield is down 20 basis points to 5.97 per cent this fiscal year.

Any additional borrowing will replicate an arrangement followed last financial year, where New Delhi borrowed Rs 1.1 lakh crore on behalf of the states and passed them on as back-to-back loans, the people said. The decision on the extra borrowing, the amount and the timing would be made after consulting with the Reserve Bank of India and states, the people said.

While the payment to

states was initially supposed to be for five years starting 2017, the central government last year extended its scope beyond 2022 to meet the revenue gap caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Government spending is key to sustaining the recovery of Asia's third-largest economy from a rare recession last year.

Although GST receipts have come in at more than Rs 1 lakh crore each month for seven successive months as of April, there are worries that it will slow amid regional lockdowns implemented by most states to curb the deadly second wave of the pandemic. The economic costs of the recent surge in cases are rising rapidly with economic losses estimated at \$74 billion, all of it contained in the second quarter, Barclays Plc said in a report to clients on Tuesday. The bank lowered its economic growth forecast by 80 basis points to 9.2% for the fiscal year.

—Bloomberg

COFFEE-BREAK

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

Aries: Don't get depressed if you hear something bad about your partner. Find out the truth for yourself, it might not be as bad as it sounds. Work on creative projects.

Taurus: Monetary gains are certain. You may face health problems. You may have to work hard but there may not be any immediate benefit of the same.

Gemini: Joyful situations will bring a new life in your home. Friends may need your help. Official matters will start improving. A job transfer is likely.

Cancer: Children will make you proud. Tense situations may rise at work place. Siblings will be of great help to you and vice versa. Unexpected income would be there.

Leo: You are likely to get a promotion and an increment. You will feel a fresh enthusiasm towards your work. You need to spend quiet time with yourself.

Virgo: You will have a magnetic appeal that will attract the right conditions and people towards you. Remember that knowledge is power. Therefore, gather as much knowledge as possible.

You share your b'day with

Ravishankar Jayadritha Shastri is an Indian cricket coach, former commentator, cricketer and current head coach of the India's national cricket team.



Libra: Your mate will help you with your work today. This period is good for activities that will secure your future and help you in improving your lifestyle.

Scorpio: Look into a project that will help you earn some extra money. This is overall a very positive day for you with wonderful developments taking place.

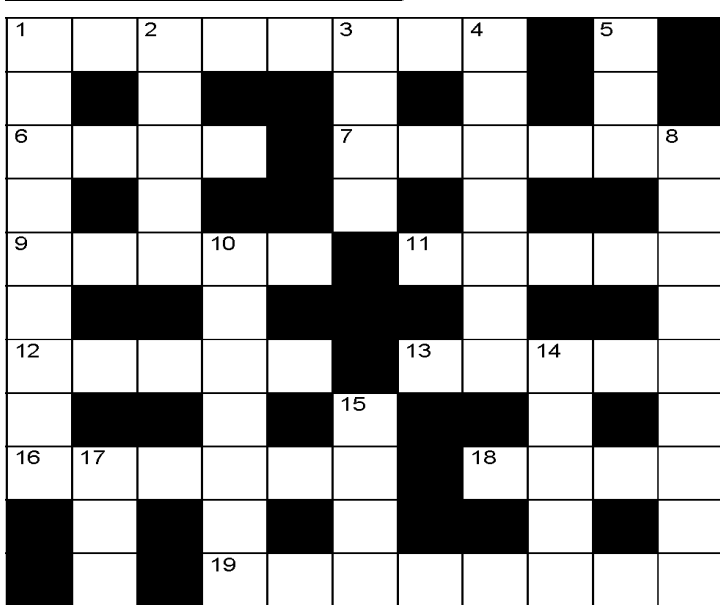
Sagittarius: Overseas professional opportunities are expected. New deals and clients need to be handled carefully. Think twice before making commitments.

Capricorn: The day indicates favorable luck and opportunities. A breakthrough at work shall lift up your spirits. Control on nerves and better behavior at work place can lead to good rewards.

Aquarius: Property matters and debts can disturb your mental peace. Sudden expenses due to health problems may bother few of you. Your determination and hard work will pay off in the coming days.

Pisces: Your communication skills and ability are likely to be tested at your workplace. Avoid getting into arguments with family elders. Financial matters need careful handling.

QUICK CROSSWORD



Across

1. Old coin (8)
6. Gemstone (4)
7. Interior coating (6)
9. Soothing ointment (5)
11. About (5)
12. Hot meat dressing (5)
13. Lukewarm (5)
16. Rudder bar (6)
18. Greek spirit (4)
19. Not suitable (8)

Down

1. Anticipation, planning (9)
2. Insurgent (5)
3. Not in action (4)
4. Shots (7)
5. Pale (3)
8. Organised (anag) (9)
10. Italian composer (7)
14. Vertically (5)
15. Impulse (4)
17. Cold (3)

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

- Across:** 6. Incinerate, 8. Clogs, 10. Asset, 13. Intentional, 14. Agent, 17. Debt, 19. Ergonomics.
- Downs:** 1. Undo, 2. Ribs, 3. Feta, 4. Saps, 5. Ventilate, 7. Activated, 9. Green, 11. Scope, 12. Ate, 15. Edgy, 16. Tend, 17. Dump, 18. Bach.

Word Mine

R
M
E
A
G
G
O
T
E

TODAY'S RATINGS: 30 AVERAGE: 35
GOOD: 40 OUTSTANDING

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

ed it
beled
one
oron:
ts by
that
s by
any
less
neot.
dout.
majors!
ut the

North
♦ A 10 5 2
♥ Q 10 8 4 3
♦ 10 6 5
7

West
♦ Q 6 4
♥ A 7
♦ 9 2 2
♠ 6 5 4 2

East
♥ 9 7 3
♦ 8 4
♠ A K Q J
♣ K 9 8 3

South
♥ K J 8
♦ A 9 5 2
♥ 8 4
♠ A J 10

Dealer: East
Vulnerable: Neither

South West North East
1 ♥ INT 3 ♥ Pass Pass Pass
4 ♥

Opening lead: 4 2

jumble

GACOR
WLRH
CRNETH
IKIBIN

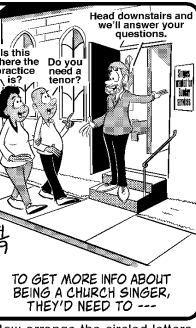
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Yesterday's Jumbles: GROSS HALVE TOPPLE RITUAL
Answer: When they completed the jigsaw puzzle, they were — ALL TOGETHER

West leads the diamond two, low from a tripleton in partner's unsupported suit. East takes two tricks, then shifts to a low club. What now?

South could have tried to guess who held the spade queen, but it was much easier to let the opponents do his dirty work for him.

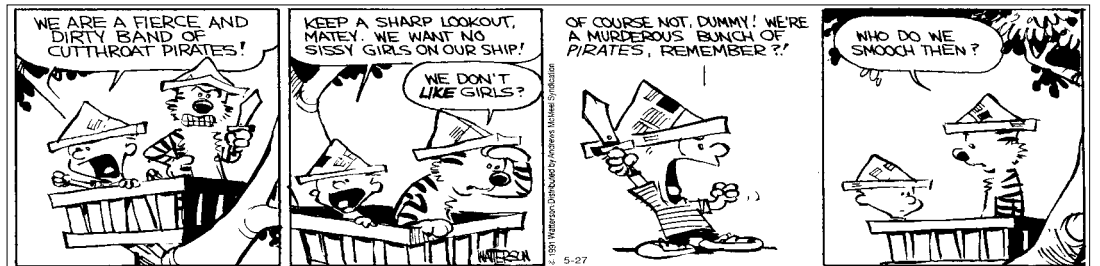
Declarer won with the club ace and cashed the heart ace, being disappointed that the king did not drop, but relieved to see that both opponents fol-



TO GET MORE INFO ABOUT BEING A CHURCH SINGER, THEY'D NEED TO ---

(Answers tomorrow)

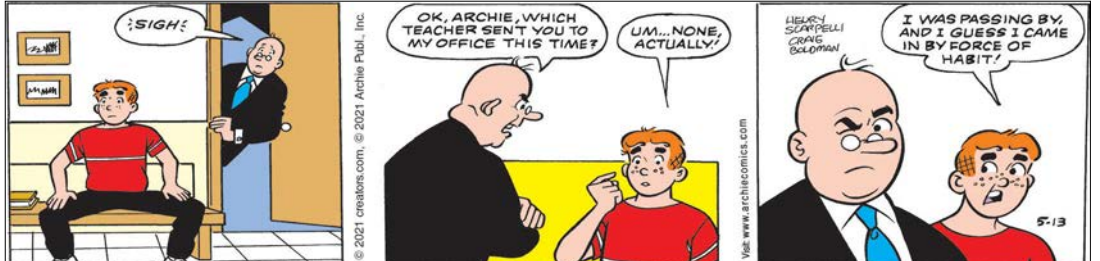
CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



bridge
PHILLIP
ALDER

A SECOND OVERBID IN THE PLAY DIFFICULTY

Virginia Woolf wrote the following at the age of 17, but it wasn't published until 1990, 49 years after her death: "Methinks the human method of expression by sound of tongue is very elementary and ought to be substituted for some ingenious invention which should be able to give vent to at least six coherent sentences at once."

There's nothing like youthful naivete. Yesterday, I gave a deal that was labeled as inter-

mediate, but I considered it advanced. This one was labeled ambiguously with what one could argue is an oxymoron: elementary elimination.

The problem-setter said that the contract was four hearts by North, but I couldn't find any way to achieve that unless South made an unwise takeout double over one diamond. Show those five-card majors! This auction wouldn't meet with universal approval, but the play's the thing.

		North			
		♠ A 10 5 2			
		♥ Q 10 8 4 3			
		♦ 10 6 5			
		♣ 7			
West				East	
♠ Q 6 4				♥ 9 7 3	
♥ K 7				♦ 6	
♦ 9 3 2				♣ A K Q J	
♣ Q 6 5 4 2				♠ K 9 8 3	
		South			
		♠ K J 8			
		♥ A J 9 5 2			
		♦ E 4			
		♣ A J 10			
Dealer: East					
Vulnerable: Neither					
South	West	North	East		
1♥	1NT	3♥	1♦		
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass		
Opening lead: ♠ 2					

West leads the diamond two, low from a tripleton in partner's unsupported suit. East takes two tricks, then shifts to a low club. What now?

South could have tried to guess who held the spade queen, but it was much easier to let the opponents do his dirty work for him.

Declarer won with the club ace and cashed the heart ace, being disappointed that the king did not drop, but relieved to see that both opponents fol-

lowed. Next, he eliminated the minors by ruffing two clubs in the dummy and one diamond in hand. Then he exited with a trump to West's king.

Now West had either to lead a spade, finding the queen for South, or to return a club, which declarer would have ruffed on the board while sluffing a spade from hand.

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(Asia Features)

SHORT TAKES

Milkha is stable, wife catches Covid

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh “continues to be stable on oxygen support” and he was on Wednesday shifted out of the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital where he is being treated for Covid pneumonia, indicating signs of improvement in his condition. However, his 82-year-old wife Nirmal Kaur, a former India volleyball captain, was on Wednesday admitted to the same hospital in Mohali after testing positive for Covid pneumonia.

“Mr Milkha Singh continues to be stable on oxygen support. However, he is weak and we are trying to persuade him to increase his food intake,” Fortis hospital in Mohali said in an update. “Today, we have stepped him down from the ICU to a room which he is sharing with his wife who was admitted earlier in the day with Covid pneumonia,” he added. — PTI

Former cricketer Ranjita no more

Mumbai: Former Mumbai player and scorer Ranjita Rane died here on Wednesday after battling cancer.

She was in her mid 40s. “Deeply saddened to inform that ex-Mumbai cricketer and scorer Ranjita Rane has passed away,” a senior Mumbai Cricket Association official said.

A well-known MCA scorer, who knew Rane, said she was admitted to a city hospital for the past fortnight. Rane, an all-rounder, who bowled medium pace, played 44 first class matches for Mumbai from 1995 to 2003. Another cricketer Prabhuhai Parmar, who had represented Saurashtra in domestic cricket, died due to Covid-19 on Tuesday. The 76-year-old had played four Ranji Trophy matches for Saurashtra in 1968-69. — PTI

Ankita out of French Open race

Paris: Ankita Raina's yet another attempt to qualify for the singles main draw of a Grand Slam failed as she bowed out of the French Open Qualifiers with a second-round defeat, here on Wednesday. Ankita, up against higher-ranked German Greet Minnen, could win only two games in the entire match that lasted one hour and 21 minutes.

The 125th ranked Indian could convert only one of the three break points and eventually lost 2-6, 0-6. It was Ankita's seventh attempt to crack the singles main draw of a major. She had reached the final round of the Australian Open qualifying event early this year, falling at the final stage. Ramkumar Ramanathan and Sumit Nagal will take court for their respective men's singles second round matches. — PTI

Eriksen, Kasper to lead Denmark

Copenhagen: Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand named his squad featuring Inter Milan midfielder Christian Eriksen and Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel for Euro 2020 on Tuesday. The 1992 European champions face Finland, Belgium and Russia in Copenhagen in the opening phase of the delayed competition. “The first objective is to qualify from the group stage in the best shape possible to continue our mission,” said Hjulmand. “Playing in front of our fans will enable us to tackle the knockout stage well armed and from then on anything can happen. — AFP

Davis, James pair too hot for Sun

Los Angeles: Anthony Davis and LeBron James delivered down the stretch on Tuesday as the NBA champion Los Angeles Lakers bounced back to beat the Phoenix Suns 109-102 and knot their playoff series at one game apiece. Davis had said he blamed himself after scoring just 13 points in the Lakers' 99-90 defeat in game one of the best-of-7 Western Conference first-round series. He wasn't about to let it happen again. Davis scored 34 points while LeBron James added 23 points as the Lakers gained the split of two games in Phoenix. — AFP

Regd. No. TNENG/2010/35692

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TWEAKING TWINS

Kiwis wary of spinners Ashwin and Jadeja ahead of WTC final

New Delhi, May 26: India's pace attack is on par with New Zealand's world class swing operators but the Black Caps batsman Henry Nicholls is more wary of the threat spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja may pose during the upcoming World Test Championship final. India and New Zealand will fight it out for the inaugural title at Southampton's Ageas Bowl, one of those rare English tracks known to aid the slow bowlers for a considerable period in Test matches.

“India have a very good seam attack and also have the experienced spinners like Ashwin and Jadeja. They have been consistent in all parts of the world (of late) and bring quality (to attack),” Nicholls said.

If there are no injury concerns, the Indian pace troika that is expected to be in the playing XI for the clash starting June 18 would be Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

“Mohammed Shami along with Jasprit Bumrah and Ishant Sharma have proven their quality over the years which is similar to our seamers (Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Neil Wagner) on whom we really pride ourselves on.

“So if you are facing that kind of a line-up, it's an exciting challenge and as a group we are expecting it to be tough but also looking forward to the challenge,” he added.

His teammate Devon Conway's strategy of pouring dry kitty litter on the track in order to create rough was backed by Nicholls as they are playing at a “neutral venue” which is known to assist the spinners. — PTI



Indian all-rounders Ravichandran Ashwin (left) and Ravindra Jadeja in this file photo.

Kohli, Rohit static in ODI chart

Dubai, May 26: India skipper Virat Kohli and his deputy Rohit Sharma held on to their second and third positions respectively in the batting chart, while pacer Jasprit Bumrah remained static at number five in the bowling list of the latest ICC ODI player rankings issued on Wednesday.

Kohli and Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.

In bowling, Bumrah was at the 5th position with 690 points, while New Zealand's Trent Boult was

● **Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma were sitting pretty with 857 and 825 points respectively in the batting list headed by Pakistan's Babar Azam with 865 points.**

atop with 737 points, followed by Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan (725), Afghanistan's Mujeeb Ur Rahman (708) and Kiwi pacer Matt Henry (691).

Bangladesh off-spinner Hasan became only the third bowler from his



Virat Kohli

country to be ranked among the top two after a fine showing in the first two matches of their ongoing World Cup Super League series against Sri Lanka.

Hasan has advanced three places to reach the

second position after returning figures of four for 30 and three for 28 bowling with the new ball.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had grabbed the number one position in 2009 for the first time, while left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is the other Bangladesh bowler to have been in the top two, reaching the second position in 2010.

Left-arm fast bowler Mustafizur Rehman is another one from Bangladesh to move up the list, his hauls of three for 34 and three for 16 lifting him eight places to ninth position. — PTI

MUSHFIQUR TON HELPS BANGLA CLAIM SERIES

Dhaka, May 26: Mushfiqur Rahim hit a gritty 125 to set up Bangladesh's maiden series victory over Sri Lanka across all formats with an emphatic 103-run win in the rain-hit second one-day international on Tuesday.

The wicketkeeper-batsman lifted Bangladesh from a precarious 74-4 to 246 all out after they elected to bat first at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

Sri Lanka managed just 141-9 in the tourists' revised chase of 245 in 40 overs as Bangladesh took an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Mustafizur Rahman claimed three wickets each while Shakib Al Hasan took two key scalps. Mushfiqur remained the hero as he recorded his eighth ODI century and put on a crucial 87-run fifth-wicket stand with Mahmudullah Riyad, who made 41.

Brief scores: Bangladesh 246 in 48.1 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 125, Mahmudullah 41; D. Chameera 3/44 bt Sri Lanka 141/9 in 40 overs (M. Rahman 3/16).

Umar pays hefty fine, to take part in ACU's rehab

Karachi, May 26: Controversial Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal has paid a hefty fine of 45 lakh (Pakistan) rupees to PCB, which now entitles him to join Anti-Corruption rehabilitation program of the board.

A source in the PCB confirmed that Akmal had deposited the fine imposed on him by the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) in February while disposing off cases filed by the batsman and the PCB.

“Umar has deposited the

full amount of 45 lacs rupees (Pakistan) with the board which means he is now eligible to start the rehab program of the Anti-Corruption code of the board,” the source said.

“But practically it will take some time before Akmal can resume his cricket career as his rehab program will take some time since the anti-corruption unit of the PCB is presently busy with the Pakistan Super League matches to be held in Abu Dhabi next month,” the

source said. Earlier the board had rejected Akmal's request that he be allowed to pay a 45 lacs (Pakistan) rupees fine in installments to pave the way for him to return to cricket after serving a ban since February 2020 for breaching clauses of the Anti-Corruption code.

Umar Akmal, who will turn 31 this month, has not played for Pakistan since November, 2019 when he last appeared in a T20 series at Lahore against Sri Lanka. — PTI

18,000 FANS ALLOWED FOR ENGLAND-N. ZEALAND TEST

London, May 26: Around 18,000 cricket fans will be allowed to attend each day of next month's second Test between England and New Zealand at Edgbaston, which will be the first of the government's next wave of pilot events.

Under current guidelines, smaller outdoor venues are only permitted to be at 25 per cent capacity, but the stadium will be 70 per cent full for the second Test against the Black Caps, which takes place between June 10 and 14.

To gain entry to the ground in Birmingham, each ticket holder will need to present a negative

lateral flow test, taken within the preceding 24 hours. The first Test at Lord's, which starts on June 2, will be played in line with existing regulations, meaning a capacity of around 25 per cent, or around 7,000 people.

“Having crowds back into cricket grounds is so important for the game and for our fans too. The last 15 months have shown just how big a role cricket plays in many people's lives, and we cannot wait to welcome a growing number of fans back to our stadia over the coming months said ECB chief executive Tom Harrison. — AFP

England speedster Archer undergoes elbow surgery

London, May 26: England fast bowler Jofra Archer has undergone surgery on his right elbow to address a long-standing injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Wednesday, without specifying any time-frame on his return to action.

Archer had undergone a hand surgery in March and returned to first-class cricket earlier this month when his right elbow injury flared up.

“England and Sussex seam bowler Jofra Archer had surgery to address his long-standing elbow



Jofra Archer

issues on Friday,” the ECB said in a statement.

“Archer will now commence an intensive rehabilitation period working with the ECB and Sussex medical teams. His progress will be reviewed by his consultant in

approximately four weeks at which point further guidance will be provided as to when he can return to bowling,” it added.

England will hope that Archer is able to make a full and swift recovery to play a key role in both the T20 World Cup and the Ashes series in Australia later this year.

The elbow issue had been a recurring one for Archer, who has been trying to manage it over a year. It had led to him missing a number of matches on tours to South Africa in 2020 and India earlier this year. — PTI

ATHLETIC TRAINER | UNDER SCANNER

Coach accused of sexual abuse

NEHA SURANA | DC CHENNAI, MAY 26

P. Nagarajan, the head coach of St. Joseph's Prime Sports Academy, has been accused of sexually abusing female athletes for many years. Police have started enquiry after a slew of allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct against the coach circulated on social media and soon went viral.

The accusations included actions such as “compelling athletes to stay back after training, exhibiting his power to behave inappropriately with the athletes and taking advantage of the underprivileged athletes.”

A letter from a father of an athlete, dated February 3, 2021 and addressed to the secretary of the Tamil Nadu Athletic Association (TNAA), demanded action against the coach for his “inappropriate behaviour”.

The TNAA secretary C. Latha acknowledged receiving the letter in February, but said it was not an “official complaint” against Nagarajan.

“We, however, called Nagarajan for enquiry and he denied the accusations,” said Latha.

Now that more athletes have shared their traumatic experience with the coach, Latha said the asso-

ciation would start a detailed enquiry.

Some of the anonymous testimonies of Nagarajan's former trainees suggest that the coach took advantage of athletes' poor background. An athlete said she had tried to fight against him but was forced to quit the academy due to a lack of support.

“A 15-year-old girl complained to me about Nagarajan's harassment and when I decided to fight for her, 10 girls from the same academy approached me and reported that they were facing similar harassment by the coach.”

“The coach has taken the students' poverty as an advantage for all his misdeeds. There are a bunch of people who blindly support him. We couldn't inform our family members about this as it would have put a stop to our sporting careers. So, we left the academy to show our protest,” read a message.

A few athletes alleged that the coach preyed on young girls from humble backgrounds, who couldn't raise voice against him.

“I know girls who were forced by Nagarajan for sex, and they were molested for months. One girl was compelled to stay back after the training session at the ground and do whatever he asks for,” read another message.

Djokovic wins in Belgrade opener

Belgrade, May 26: Novak Djokovic edged to a straight-sets win over German lucky loser Mats Moraing on Tuesday in his opener in Belgrade where the World No.1 is warming up for the French Open.

The clay-court Grand Slam starts in Paris on Sunday, and Djokovic opted for extra match practice on home soil this week.

The 34-year-old was made to fight by the world number 253, winning 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) in an hour and 40 minutes.

It was Djokovic's first match since losing the Italian Open final to Rafael Nadal nine days ago.

Spaniard Nadal will be the favourite to win a 14th French Open crown next month, although Djokovic will be chasing a 19th Grand Slam title to move within one of Nadal and Federer on the all-time men's list.

The Serbian star was in strong form in the opening set on Tuesday, but was broken twice by Moraing in the second before clinching the win in a tie-break.

“I was twice a break up in the second set so I maybe could have finished out the job earlier, but credit to



him for fighting, for playing really well, for playing very courageous, very bold tennis,” Djokovic said.

“I felt pretty nervous from the start,” said Djokovic.

“I had an opponent that doesn't have much experience, but he played like he spent 10 years playing at top level,” he added.

He will next face Argentinian Federico Coria, the younger brother of former Roland Garros runner-up Guillermo Coria, in the quarter-finals. — AFP



India's Amit Panghal (left) lands a punch on Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh at the Asian Boxing Championships in Dubai on Wednesday.

INDIAN PUGILISTS POISED FOR A RICH MEDAL HAUL

Dubai, May 26: Defending champion Amit Panghal (52kg) and the redoubtable Vikas Krishan (69kg) were among three Indian boxers who advanced to the semi-finals on Wednesday as the country assured itself of an unparalleled medal haul of 15 in the Asian Boxing Championships here.

Debutant Varinder Singh (60kg) was the other Indian to make the last four.

Panghal secured a second successive medal after overcoming a stiff challenge from Mongolia's Kharkhuu Enkhmandakh in the last-eight stage, while Varinder defeated Filipino Jere Samuel Dela Cruz 5-0.

India's previous best medal haul was 13 that was achieved in 2019.

The World Championship silver-winning Panghal won 3-2 in a high-octane contest in which he overcame a sluggish start and used his combination punches to telling effect in the last two rounds.

— PTI