

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | MONDAY | 10 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.0°C
Min: 24.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp. 38/24 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Chaturdasi
till 9.56 pm
Star: Ashwini till 8.25 pm
Varjyam: 3.56 pm to 5.44 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm; 3.11 pm to 4.02 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HJRI CALENDAR

Ramzan 27, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5:35 am
Zohar: 1:30 pm
Asar: 5:15 pm
Maghrib: 6:25 pm
Isha: 8:15 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5:38 AM

SUNSET TODAY 6:29 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 4:41 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 6:12 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6:34 PM (TODAY)
SEHR: 4:15 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT



You are here for a bed in the hospital? But our MLA has gone for a berth in the Cabinet!

SHORT TAKES

China probed weaponising CV

London/Melbourne: Chinese military scientists investigated weaponising Coronaviruses five years before the Covid-19 and may have predicted a World War III fought with biological weapons, according to reports referring to documents obtained by US State Department. The documents show the PLA commanders making the sinister prediction.

Saudi calls for Indo-Pak talks

Islamabad: Saudi Arabia has emphasised the importance of dialogue between Pakistan and India to resolve their outstanding matters, including the Kashmir issue. Pakistan Foreign Office on Saturday night released a joint statement agreed between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia after Prime Minister Imran Khan held high-level talks with Crown Prince

Aussie borders to shut indefinitely

Melbourne: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Sunday announced that the country's borders will remain closed indefinitely for the rest of the world to protect Australians from the deadly outbreaks of COVID-19 strains. Australia's borders were slammed shut in March last year as the coronavirus spread across the world. Only citizens and

Nirav plea: UK judge to decide

London: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, whose extradition to India was ordered last month by UK Home Secretary Priti Patel in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, has filed an application for permission to appeal against the order in the High Court in London. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) confirmed an

WORLD | 5

Scotland renews independence call



SPORTS | 8

Hamilton wins Spanish GP



TABLOID

Film hosp. set given to Covid facility



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Probe on to find culprits in Kadapa mine explosion

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 9

In the wake of a shocking mishap which claimed 10 lives and left many injured, public debate has turned to those responsible for the explosion of gelatin sticks at the white barytes quarry at Mamillapalle in Kasinayana mandal in Kadapa district on Saturday.

Police, revenue, mines and geology and pollution control departments are generally responsible for overseeing blasting operations in quarries and mines. The mines department officials were reportedly well aware that illegal mining was brazenly taking place at the quarry. Also, the police and the revenue departments turn blind eye to those running explosives businesses without any permits or licences. The pollution control board officials do not seem to know which quarries are operating without environmental permits.

First of all, prime responsibility rests with the department of mines. It is a common practice that those in possession of licence mineral extraction licences sell them away to the highest bidder illegally. Officials are said to be in cahoots with the illegal miners and look the other way even as ore worth crores of rupees is illegally extracted and sold. They also do not check if those mines have proper environmental permits.

While Mangampet is famous for gray barytes in Kadapa district, white

Collector's probe faults YSRC leader

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 9

A ruling YSR Congress leader, C. Nageshwar Reddy, the general power of attorney (GPA) holder of the white baryte mine in the district where 10 workers were killed in an explosives mishap on Saturday, is said to be enjoying official patronage despite gross violations in mining operations over the last few years.

Nageshwar Reddy is a follower of Mydukur MLA Raghurami Reddy and is a brother of Veera Narayana Reddy, who contested Brahmamgari Matham elections.

A report submitted by District Collector Ch. Harikiran, a copy of which is available with *Deccan Chronicle*, is self-explanatory. It mentions that the GPA holder was a habitual offender, flouted all norms of mining, used

explosives without permission and transported ore in violation of mining rules. Inquiries revealed that the local mining officials visited the site at least twice in 2019 and last year again and recommended termination of the lease after finding the lives of workers at high risk.

But, senior officials at the Directorate of Mines and Geology, for reasons best known to them, slept over the recommendations, which contributed to the ghastly incident, though indirectly.

The officials noticed that the lives of workers were in grave danger as there were no separate inlet and outlet for entry and exit of workmen who were forced to use crane buckets to go into the mine and come out, "which is a highly dangerous condition."

■ Page 2: Lease operations to remain suspended

barytes are available in small quantities in areas including Vemula and Vempalle. This ore is usually mined underground.

The mines in Vemula and Vempalle areas have not been operational for few years due to water seepage in underground mines adjoining the Pulivendula branch canal. It is alleged that some miners are illegally extracting the ore and

using permits issued in the name of non-operative mines to sell it in market.

In the case of those selling explosives, dealers must have specialised vehicles to transport safely. Those engaged in illegal sale of explosives reportedly brought the gelatin in a normal vehicle unfit for the purpose.

■ Page 2: Cops, revenue staff failed to keep check

E-passes for emergency travel in AP from today

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

AP DGP Gautam Sawang on Sunday said that a pass is mandatory even for emergency travel and informed that they would start issuing e-passes for emergency purposes from Monday. He stated that those needing the passes can apply through the Police Seva app on their mobiles.

Sawang said that the curbs on inter-state movements would continue until the government took a call on the matter. On Sunday, he made a surprise visit to Vijayawada and inspected the enforcement of partial curfew in the state. Pointing to the surge in Coronavirus cases in the state, he told the police not to brook any violations and let their guard down.

The DGP asked the people to follow Covid-19 safety measures without fail. Everyone should wear two masks and keep a



Task Force police checking the vehicles after lockdown violators on Eluru Road in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

sanitiser handy. He advised people to come out of houses only in cases of any emergency. Those suffering from Covid-19 symptoms as well as those in home isolation should avail of the services of '104' and '108' and access the government, he said.

Sawang said any member of the public can complain against violators of Coronavirus protocol and

lockdown norms by calling up '100' and '112' toll-free numbers. They can also make use of the Police Seva app on their mobiles. On the Section 144 CrPC restrictions brought in place, Sawang said they would remain in force until further orders from the state government.

■ Page 2: Need prior permission for events: DGP

VIRUS | DEFENCE

**PATHRI
RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, MAY 9**

The Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) anti-Covid drug will be made available next week to those who are in need, bringing major relief to thousands of people who are struggling for breath in Covid hospitals and undergoing treatment in home isolation.

Dr G. Sateesh Reddy, secretary, department of defence research and development, and chair-

man, DRDO, said that 10,000 sachets of the new anti-Covid drug — 2 DG 2-deoxy-D-glucose — that was developed by a defence lab will be released either on May 11 or 12.

The Drugs Controller General of India had approved the anti-Covid drug developed by DRDO's Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS) in collaboration with Dr Reddy's Laboratories (DRL), Hyderabad, for emergency use. Against this backdrop, Dr Sateesh Reddy told this newspaper that the 2 DG



will be available in sizable numbers after three weeks while pointing to large-scale production in the offing.

Responding to a question on the effectiveness of 2-DG on the new Covid strains that emerged in the second wave as the trials were conducted in the first

Himanta is Assam CM, Central job for Sonowal

Sarma stakes claim, to take oath today; BJP backs choice

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 9

Senior BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was unanimously elected as the leader of the BJP legislature party here on Sunday, is all set to take the oath of office as Assam's next chief minister on Monday.

Union agriculture minister and BJP central observer Narendra Singh Tomar made this announcement in Guwahati on Sunday, after earlier asking his party's legislators to propose any other name if they wished.

"Mr J.P. Nadda has sent me and Arun Singh to felicitate and conduct this meeting to choose the next chief minister for Assam. Mr Sarbananda Sonowal and other leaders proposed a single name — Himanata Biswa Sarma. Mr Sarma will be the next chief minister of Assam," Mr Tomar said at the BJP legislature party meeting. Mr Sarma will take the



BJP's Chief Minister-designate Himanta Biswa Sarma (left) being greeted by former Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal after being elected the party's Legislature Party leader in Guwahati on Monday.

— PTI

oath on Monday as the 15th chief minister of Assam.

Earlier, Mr Sarma's

name was proposed by chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal and seconded by BJP state party chief

Gov. allows CBI charges on four Trinamul ex-ministers

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MAY 9

West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has given his "sanction for prosecution" to the Central Bureau of Investigation to chargesheet four former Trinamul Congress Cabinet ministers — Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee — in the high-profile Narada sting operation case.

Interestingly, except for Mr Chatterjee, the other heavyweights contested and won the Assembly election this time, becoming MLAs again. Among them, Mr Hakim and Mr Mukherjee are also due to take the oath from Mr Dhankhar as Cabinet ministers, among a list of 43 for the swearing-in ceremony at Raj Bhavan on Monday morning.

It is pertinent to note that the rules require the investigating agencies to seek the permission of both the governor and the Assembly Speaker for the prosecution of state ministers and MLAs respectively.

In this case, the CBI had not sought permission from the outgoing Speaker, who holds the

post till a new Speaker is elected, or even the pro-tem Speaker.

This means the CBI's action and the governor's sanction for prosecution might be open to a legal challenge.

The list of 43 ministers to be sworn in on Monday includes former state finance minister Amit Mitra, who is likely to return to that post and become finance minister for the third time despite the fact that had not contested the Assembly polls this time.

There will also be 16 new faces in the TMC Cabinet.

2 first-time BJP MPs skip swearing in as WB MLAs

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 9

Two first-time BJP MPs, who also contested and won the Assembly election in West Bengal, have not taken their oath as MLAs apparently in fear of losing their berths in the Lok Sabha. They are Nishith Pramanik and Jagannath Sarkar.

Their unexpected move, that has raised eyebrows within the BJP, came at a time chief minister

Mamata Banerjee's protégé-turned-adversary Suwendu Adhikari has emerged as a strong contender for the post of the Leader of the Opposition, racing ahead of another frontrunner, Mukul Roy, the national vice-president of the party.

While Mr Pramanik is an MP of Cooch Behar in North Bengal, Mr Sarkar is an MP of Ranaghat in Nadia. Fielded along with three other MPs — Babul Supriyo, a Union minis-

ter, Locket Chatterjee and Swapan Dasgupta — by their party in the Assembly polls, Mr Pramanik won from Dinhatata in the district and Mr Sarkar was elected at Ranaghat while the other three lost.

They were, however, conspicuous by their absence at the oath-taking ceremony for MLAs in the Assembly on May 7.

This immediately fuelled speculation about their intentions.

Ranjeet Kumar Dass and newly elected Haflong MLA Nandita Garlosa. The AGP legislature party, which held a meeting Sunday, also announced that it would support the leader elected by the BJP legislature party.

On Sunday evening, Mr Sarma met Assam governor Jagdish Mukhi and formally staked claim to forming the new government. Earlier Sunday, outgoing chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal tendered his resignation to the governor, who as per tradition asked him to continue in office till the formation of the next government. While there is nothing known officially yet on what Mr Sonowal will be doing next, there is considerable speculation here that he may be elected to the Rajya Sabha soon, and sources say that he is tipped for a berth in the Union Cabinet. The state administration has started preparations for the oath taking ceremony at Sankardev Kalakshetra.

7 DIE DUE TO LACK OF OXYGEN AT KING KOTI HOSP IN HYDERABAD

SANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL I DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 9

At least seven Covid-19 patients at the King Koti Hospital, a dedicated Covid facility of the state government, were feared to have lost their lives from lack of adequate oxygen supply on Sunday.

The oxygen tank at the hospital began showing low pressure starting 3 pm on Sunday. An oxygen tanker truck that was to arrive by then to refill the hospital tank was delayed as the driver reportedly lost his way near Jaddc-herla.

As panic spread over the non-arrival of the tanker, the Narayanguda police got into the act, traced the truck and guided the driver to the hospital. By then, the drop in the pressure in the oxygen lines at the hospital led to seven patients losing their lives. Narayanguda inspector G. Bhupathi said the tanker reached the hospital around 3.30 pm.

According to some hospital staff, four Covid-19 patients died in the ICU A ward, two in ICU B, while the seventh patient who was in the male isolation ward also succumbed as the pressure in the oxygen line dropped. The dead included four patients who were aged between 35 and 45 years, it was learnt. A policeman on duty at the hospital also said that seven people were believed to have lost their lives on account of poor oxygen supply. The parents of one such deceased patient, who managed to procure an oxygen cylinder, desperately implored the hospital staff to use the cylinder to provide oxygen to the patient, despite the hospital staff saying the person had passed away.

Attendants of patients rushed to get oxygen cylinders to save the lives of their loved ones being treated at the hospital. But the search for cylinders in the last minute meant that some of them managed to reach the hospital with one only late in the night.

IN BRIEF

POLICE FAIL TO CHECK ILLEGAL DEALERS

FROM PAGE 1

The failure of police and revenue officials to check the activities of such illegal dealers was a main reason for unfortunate incidents such as the one on Saturday. Political interference and corruption is cited for the officials turning wilful partners in the crime.

As for the alleged complicity of pollution control board officials, proper inspections of mining sites could have unearthed any illegal and unsafe activities. Though the regulations issued by the government in 2016 say the mines department should not issue any permits unless there are environmental permits, it is learnt hundreds of mines are operating in the district without any such permits.

NEED PRIOR PERMISSION FOR EVENTS: DGP

FROM PAGE 1

Meetings and conferences of any political party would also not be permitted as long as the partial curfew was in force, he informed.

The DGP said that obtaining prior permission pertaining to any functions or celebrations from local authorities specified by the government was mandatory. He warned action would be taken against spreading false and unconfirmed news on social media. He urged the people to cooperate with the police in containing the Coronavirus spread in the state.

LEASE OPERATIONS TO REMAIN SUSPENDED

FROM PAGE 1

It was also found during the inspection that the ventilation system was not provided by the lessee as specified in the Approved Scheme of Mining.

According to the Collector's report, the Assistant Director, Mines, Kadapa, submitted a report after visiting the mine on October 16 and 18, stating that the lessee had been conducting underground mining without trained personnel. He excavated excess quantities beyond the annual approved quantity from 2013-14 onwards and even violated the crucial Environmental Protection Act-1986 by carrying out mining without environmental clearance and consent for establishment.

Ruling YSRC MLC C. Ramachandraiah, whose wife is the original lease holder of the mines, told this correspondent that the GPA holder executed an agreement on a ₹100 non-judicial stamp paper, indemnifying the original lease holder in case of accidents. When contacted, Ramachandraiah said his family had already applied to the mines department for transfer of lease to the GPA holder.

Meanwhile, Director of Mines Venkata Reddy told *Deccan Chronicle* that the lease operations would be suspended and a criminal case would be booked against the persons involved in transporting the blasting material. Kadapa district mines assistant director Ravi Prasad said the families of the 10 workers killed in Saturday's blasts would be compensated at the rate of ₹10 lakh each.

YSRC AGENDA TO ELIMINATE TD LEADERS: NAIDU

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday criticised the Jagan Mohan Reddy government for working with an "ulterior agenda to eliminate" the TD activists for questioning the unchecked corruption under the current regime. He strongly condemned the cold-blooded murder of a TD activist Srinivasulu at Nidjuru in the Kurnool district.

In a statement here, the TD chief deplored that in the past two years of the Jagan Reddy rule, many false cases were filed against the party leaders for questioning the illegal activities and large-scale corruption by the ruling party leaders. He alleged, police were making false arrests of the TD activists.



People waiting in a queue for vaccination at Christurajapuram Urban Health Centre in Vijayawada on Sunday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Suspension of first dose a worry in AP

Priority now to vaccinate second dose beneficiaries

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

The suspension of the first dose Corona vaccination, due to shortage of the vials and the pressing need to first attend to the needs of those who already got the first jab, is a matter of worry among people amid the swift surge in Covid-19 infections.

The government made it clear that it will give priority to completion of the second dose to those who have already got the first dose. Some 53,58,712 people in the state got the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and they were getting the second jab when the shortage for vaccines arose and the government stopped fresh vaccinations.

Those mainly above age

45 are fearful of a swift spread of Coronavirus infection due to the absence of vaccination and are seeking a government review of the decision.

According to reports, only 17,96,000 persons got the second dose vaccination against a total of 53,58,712 who earlier got their first dose of the vaccine. The rest are waiting for their turn.

Initially, people were hesitant to take the vaccine jab due to fear of side-effects, small or big. Now, in the second wave, they are rushing to vaccine centres to get the jabs. This increased the demand for both Covaxin and Covishield.

According to reports, some 78,22,769 people in the age-group of 45-60 in

13 districts of AP were in the line for vaccination, of which only 53,58,712 got the first dose and 24,64,057 have to get their first dose. The decision to vaccinate only those requiring the second dose has put some 24.50 lakh people to the risk of contracting the virus in the absence of vaccination.

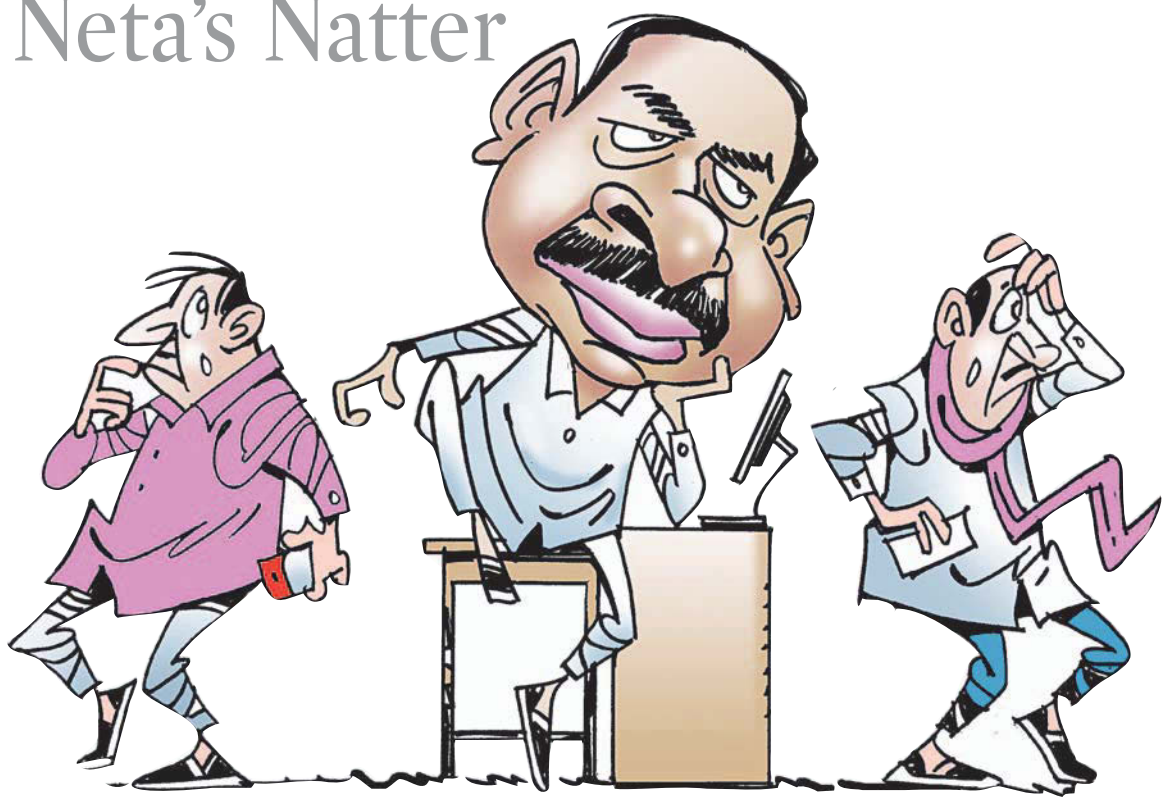
Earlier the government had announced vaccination to people above 45 years and recently extended the vaccination to those between 18-45 years from May 1. This created hope among the youngsters and the middle-aged that they would get protection from the pandemic spread. But the state government made it clear that the vaccination will be provided to only second dose beneficiaries across the state on

a priority basis in the immediate term.

Quinquagenarians or those in the 50-59 age-group Md. Shafi and J Rakesh, said health experts are alerting about the possibility of a third wave that would be more severe than the second wave. "A majority of the people in the 45-60 age group would be suffering from comorbidities. Getting the vaccination done would increase their immunity level.

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said the priority now would be for the second dose beneficiaries. Else, their first dose jabs will go in vain. "People need not worry as the government will vaccinate all in due course of time.

Neta's Natter



It was Goud then, it's Etala now

There are a lot of commonalities between former minister Etala Rajendar, who was ousted from the K. Chandrashekar Rao-led Telangana state government, and T. Devender Goud, the once strong Telugu Desam leader and former home minister of combined Andhra Pradesh.

Both are intelligent, articulate, super-rich and even have an almost similar physique which reflects fitness and discipline. Both hail from the

politically strong Backward Classes community.

Devender Goud was considered a powerful and crucial leader in the N. Chandrababu Naidu Cabinet and had enormous influence on his boss. He faced difficult times while in the Opposition. There was an aura around him that he would be a formidable force in the region and could cause irreparable damage to the Telugu Desam the day he decided to quit the party. Finally,

● **ETALA MAY** even consider floating a new party which has its inherent risks, the political circles are curious to know if he would join the Bharatiya Janata Party.

when the moment came, he was along when he walked out of the TD. After a brief brush with a political outfit of his own that joined the bogey of separate Telangana forces, he merged the party with Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam. Finally, after the misadventure, he

went back to the TD fold and "managed" to become a Rajya Sabha member. He later went into political oblivion and his health did not permit him to play an active role in politics. Now the time has come for Etala to take the most calculated move post his ouster from the Cabinet. Amidst rumours that he may even consider floating a new party which has its inherent risks, the political circles are curious to know if he would join the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Jagan lands in troll tsunami

It might be out of conviction or compulsion, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy landed himself in the troll tsunami with his tweet in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It all started with the Prime Minister calling CMs of a few States where the second wave is severe to review the preparedness of these States. Immediately after one such telephonic conversation Jarkhand Chief

Minister Hemant Soren took a dig at the Prime Minister for not listening to the Chief Ministers and understanding the ground realities but turning the event into a "mann ki baat", the PM's favourite talk show on All India Radio.

He tweeted at 9 pm on May 6 to which Jagan reacted at around 3 pm on May 7 and gave sermons to "his brother" Hemant Soren to not indulge in "such type of politics" as it would weaken the coun-

try. Jagan also called for unconditional support to the PM.

Hell broke loose and the twitter was flooded with trolls against Jagan and all those targeted him are not Telugu Desam brigade. Given the anger being shown at the PM on social media these days, there was no surprise that CM got brickbats from the general public too.

Finally came the retort from Jarkhand Mukti Morcha of Soren which tweeted that the entire

country knew of Jagan's compulsions and that they too pray for his well being. The JMM attached a newspaper clipping of CBI court adjourning the petition filed seeking cancellation of Jagan's bail.



STORIES OF HOPE

Techie spends ₹85L for medical help to people

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 9

Much concerned over the perils of the raging Coronavirus in the district, a software engineer A.G. Anil Kumar Reddy has embarked on the 'Heal Anantapur' mission.

He is spending his own funds towards creating a widespread awareness in the public to take preventive measures to stave off the deadly virus. He has so far spent ₹85 lakh to carry out his mission, as part of which is donating quality medical kits to doctors, medical staff and others involved in duties at Covid-19 hospitals in Anantapur.

Further, Reddy started a 'one lakh meal' supply programme to provide food to the relatives of patients, workers and orphanage homes. "We've started meal distribution, considering the

plight of various sections of people unable to get food. Especially, attendants of patients and inmates of orphanages are in a pitiable condition," he said.

Earlier, the socially conscious engineer took up restoration and upkeep of heritage structures as part of 'paying back to the society.' He supported renovation of a five-centuries-old well at a temple on the outskirts of Anantapur. He has been carrying out his activities under the aegis of AGS organisation for the past one year. His Facebook page 'Discover Anantapur' is boosting efforts to highlight how Anantapur is facing in all walks of life.

Referring to the 'Heal Anantapur' campaign, Reddy told *Deccan Chronicle* that around ₹85 lakh was spent on sourcing medical kits

from South Korea. A campaign was launched a week ago to better the conditions at the government general hospital, cancer hospital and super specialty hospitals which are thronged by huge crowds of Covid-19 patients and their attendants.

"Around one 1 lakh N-95 masks and surgical masks, one lakh surgical caps and one lakh hand gloves are being supplied to the medical staff, patients and police, Reddy informed. He said he was happy to be doing his bit to the society in such a serious situation as a denizen of Anantapur.

As part of the campaign, a big mask covers the historic 'Clock Tower' in the city.

His innovative awareness campaign on Covid safety has caught the attention of people who are praising his selfless services.

Man killed in group rivalry in Kurnool

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 9

A 42-year-old man was killed by his political rivals at Nidjuru village in Kurnool mandal on Saturday night. The deceased was identified as Kuruva Sreenivasulu, an active worker of Telugu Desam. His sister-in-law was also seriously injured in the clashes that occurred between YSRC and TDP workers over the recent MPTC election disputes.

Tension prevailed in the village after the murder-clash. It was learnt that at least 10 families of the accused locked their houses and left the village on Sunday.

The relatives of the deceased protested in front of the houses and demanded immediate arrest of all the accused.

It is learnt that the sister-in-law of the deceased contested as an MPTC candidate in Nidjuru. Counting of votes is yet to be taken up. Meanwhile,

disputes arose between her family and rivals belonging to YSRC.

On Saturday night heated arguments ensued between the two groups, which led to the killing of Sreenivasulu.

The YSRC men allegedly attacked their rivals with chilli powder and sticks.

Kurnool taluka police station sub-inspector Lakshmi Narayana said a case was registered against 18 persons for taking part in the attack and killing the TD worker.

Rajendar made to eat humble pie

Municipal and IT Minister K.T. Rama Rao had the last laugh in the infamous ouster of Health Minister and senior TRS leader Etala Rajendar from KCR-led Telangana cabinet.

First it gave clear signals that the leaders, how big and powerful they might be, will not be spared if they covertly or overtly oppose the eventual appointment of KTR, if not today tomorrow. Etala, who is known for his proximity to another Minister and CM's nephew T. Harish Rao, has been ill at ease ever since the KTR camp stepped up the : "KTR

CM" campaign and made his discomfort known to public with controversial statements.

However, pushed to the wall, Etala came out openly in support of dynastic politics in regional parties. Referring to experiences of regional parties across the country, Etala said son or daughter of the regional party founder would be a natural heir and in case of TRS also he never objected to KTR taking over as CM. The theory was so convincing among the rank and file of the TRS that those murmur under their breath about KTR's rise will fall in line.

Cricket pitches AP babu into trouble

The new-found love of Praveen Prakash, principal secretary to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, for the 'status' feature in WhatsApp landed him in an embarrassing situation the other day. Praveen of late has been sharing his photos with comments on WhatsApp. On Sunday last week, he put two pictures of him watching the Indian Premier League match between Mumbai and Chennai the previous day. He commented that it was a memorable moment because there were just 150 people at the Arun Jaitley stadium at Feroze Shah Kotla, Delhi, the original seating capacity of which is 30,000. It was also meant to establish how privileged Praveen was to be

among the limited number of VVIPs. Within no time, people started sharing his photo in various groups including the ones operated by government employees. There were comments that the top official has been enjoying a cricket match when the state is reeling under the worst-ever pandemic. Some even pointed out that the government has been treating his weekend stay in Delhi as "on duty" and paying him travel expenses to the national capital.

Apparently coming to know of the criticism, the senior babu changed his status.



O2 PLANT YET TO BEGIN OPS AT KURNOOL HOSP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 9

Even as the state government is going ahead with setting up oxygen plants at various medical facilities in the state by sanctioning ₹230 crore on Saturday, the situation at Kurnool Government General Hospital is quite different.

Though a pressure swing adsorption (PSA) oxygen generation plant was readied a fortnight ago, it is yet to be made operational. An engineer said they had laid a pipeline to supply oxygen to the surgical ward which has 200 beds.

Yet, oxygen cannot be supplied due to the fact that there are patients undergoing treatment. Fixing of oxygen pipes to beds may cause disruption of treatment to the patients, which may cost lives and, hence, the delay, he explained.

Kurnool Government General Hospital Superintendent Dr G. Narendranath Reddy said the hospital has a sufficient supply of oxygen. "We have two tanks with a capacity of 21,500 litres capacity. As such, we don't have any constraint of O2. The new plant which is ready will be put to use if patient numbers swell at the hospital," he said.

The PSA plant was sanctioned under the PM Cares project. It is one of the five plants sanctioned to Andhra Pradesh. The senior Viskahapattam, Kakinada, Guntur, Tirupati and Kurnool have been granted such plants under the PM Cares scheme. The Andhra Pradesh Medical Infrastructure Development Corporation (APMIDC) is the implementing agency in the state.

Kurnool PSA plant has a capacity to generate 1,000 litres of gas per minute. It picks up natural air from the atmosphere, separates carbon dioxide and nitrogen and captures O2 which will be directly pumped into the supply channel to reach the oxygenated beds in the hospital.

SHORT TAKES

NOD TO OPEN SHOPS FROM 5 PM TO 7 PM SOUGHT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

The Muslim United Front and Muslim JAC sought the government to extend permission to shop from 5 pm to 7 pm during the present curfew situation in AP. MUF and MJAC president Md Kaleem on Sunday said that the AP government gave permission to urea, pesticides and agriculture equipment shops to run from 7 am to 6 pm to help the farming community and associated sectors. He said that currently the Muslim community observing Roza (fasting) in the Ramadan month. He said that those who are fasting have to purchase essentials for Iftar purposes but the closure of shops troubling the Muslim community.

Mr Kaleem stated that the West Bengal government is allowing shops to run from 7 am to 10 am and from 5 pm to 7 pm during lockdown to help people mainly Muslim community in this Ramadan month. He and other leaders of MUF and MJAC sought Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to give relaxation to shop to run from 5 pm to 7 pm in AP to help people, mainly the Muslim community.

FREE CREMATION OF COVID DEAD BODIES SOUGHT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

The Indian Union Muslim League AP objected to the collection huge money to perform last rites to Covid-19 dead bodies in the graveyards from people from economically weak backgrounds and sought the government to provide free cremation for the dead bodies. IUMILAP president Basheer Ahmed in Guntur on Sunday said that the Guntur Municipal Corporation is collecting ₹2,200 for cremation of normal dead bodies and ₹5,100 for cremation of Covid dead bodies. He deplored that the majority of people would be financially devastated by the pandemic due to huge expenses towards the treatment.

Mr Basheer Ahmed said that the families would not be in a financially stable position whenever a death occurs and these families are facing of difficulties to pay ₹5,100 for funeral due to Covid-19 induced financial crises. He appealed to GMC officials and the government to stop collecting huge money for the cremation of Covid-19 dead bodies and sought to offer last rites for free of cost to help the Covid-19 hit families.

MPDO SUSPENDED FOR ALLOWING 1ST DOSE OF VAX

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 9

The East Godavari district administration has cracked the whip on private hospitals for overcharging patients in the name of Covid-19 treatment and violating the norms laid down by the government.

District collector D. Muralidhar Reddy denotified 30 private hospitals which failed to implement Covid-19 treatment protocols. He also suspended P. Gannavaram mandal parishad development officer Nageswar Rao on charges of giving vaccination tokens in violation of the norms.

The collector made it clear to all district officials to give vaccines only for administering the second dose. However, officials found out that in P. Gannavaram mandal, the MPDO issued tokens for first dose holders as well.

AMARA RAJA RESUMES OPERATIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 9

Amara Raja Batteries Limited has resumed operations at its plants in Nunegundlapalli and Karkambadi at Chittoor District with effect from May 8 after the High Court of Andhra Pradesh granted an interim suspension of the orders passed by Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB).

In a press release on Sunday, ARBL said that they would continue their focus on the best environmental, safety and health practices by working closely with APPCB to resolve any potential issues.



People flock Poorna Market in the morning in view of curfew restrictions from noon, in Visakhapatnam on Sunday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

22,164 Covid-19 infections, 92 deaths registered in AP

Single day highest number of 2,844 +ve cases was registered in EG

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

The surge in Coronavirus cases continues in AP. Official bulletin says 22,164 new Covid-19 infections and 92 new deaths were registered in the past 24 hours.

Meanwhile, the state created a new record by testing 1,05,494 samples, which is the highest till date. The cumulative total of Corona cases reached 12,87,603, of which 1,90,632 are active cases and 10,88,264 are recoveries. The recovery rate in AP is 84.52%. Total death toll due to Covid-19 touched 8,707.

The single day highest number of 2,844 positive cases was registered in East Godavari district, followed by 2,206 in Visakhapatnam, 2,169 in Chittoor, 2,099 in Guntur, 2,039 in Anantapur. West Godavari reported 1,748 cases, Nellore 1,574, Kurnool 1,568, Srikakulam 1,432, Kadapa 1,267, Krishna 1,240, Vizianagaram 998 and Prakasam 990 infections.

The number of recoveries reached 10,88,264 as 18,832 patients recovered

DC IMPACT: Vax centres moved to spacious locations

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 9

A report in *Deccan Chronicle* on the chaotic conditions prevalent at vaccination centres in Kurnool has awakened the district administration, which has now decided to conduct vaccination programmes only at spacious buildings like function halls and college premises.

Consequently, Primary and Urban Health Centres will not dispense

Covid vaccination to the public, said district collector G. Veera Pandian.

Stating that the changes were being brought about from Monday following the May 9 report in *Deccan Chronicle*, DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah said in a statement that there shall be no vaccination on Monday. It would be resumed on Tuesday and continue till May 31. He also asserted that only the second dose will be administered and no registrations for the first

dose would be accepted till then. All scheduled slots for the first dose have been cancelled, he said.

Dr Giddaiah said the vaccination centre at Kurnool Government General Hospital has been closed based on complaints of huge queues.

He further said that only 20 people will be allowed inside the vaccine centre at a time and an orderly token system is to be followed to avoid the rush and jostling.

CALL CENTRE OPENED FOR ASYMPTOMATIC

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 9

District administration has opened a call centre exclusively for Asymptomatic Covid positive patients in home isolation in Nellore. The centre will function round the clock and 24 employees have been deputed to man the centre in three shifts.

According to the SPSR Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu, the staff should elicit information on the condition of patients in home isolation in periodical intervals and shift them to hospitals in case of any complications after consulting medical officers and phone numbers 104 and 1077. The call centre contacted 26,325 patients so far. Those in home isolation can call the numbers 7207337780, 81, 82, 7036747605, 608 for any guidance.

Vaccination for all in due course

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

Medical oxygen allocation to AP has been increased from 330 mt to 560 mt by the Centre on request from the state government. This would help meet the present shortage.

Medical and health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said the state is taking steps to vaccinate all. The state has written to the Centre seeking permission to vaccinate those above 45 years of age in the state as a matter of first priority. This was accepted.

He said the state has received 3.5 lakh vaccine doses of Covishield from the Serum Institute and 1.42 lakh doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech. These will be distributed to various vaccination centres.

The medical oxygen allocation to the state was increased from 330 mt initially to 560 mt by the Centre on a request from the state. In the last 24 hours, the state received 590 mt of liquid oxygen from the Centre. The state has

provided 561 tonnes of liquid oxygen to the public and to private hospitals in the state, which was 90 mt more than that of Saturday.

The official said the 104 call centre has received 2.08 lakh phone calls from April 16 till now and as many as 15,926 phone calls were received in the past 24 hours. He explained that some 6,965 of those calls were for various information, 2,904 for admissions, 3,652 for Covid tests and 1,914 for test results.

A GO was issued by the state government pertaining to weightage of 15 marks out of 100 in recruiting para-medical staff on a temporary basis.

The health secretary said everyone in the state would be vaccinated. The government has issued guidelines to district collectors to prevent the rush at vaccination centers. Currently, the second dose would only be administered. Arrangement has been made through ward and village volunteers to announce via loudspeakers that the first dose is not being given now.

Call centre for people in home isolation

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

Krishna district collector A.Md. Imtiaz said that the triage centre in Vijayawada would be expanded and made available on the premises of Siddhartha Medical College in two days. He reviewed the works at the medical college on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, the collector said they were operating a triage centre on the campus of NTR Dental College and were expanding the triage centre on the campus of Siddhartha Medical College for the convenience of public. He said that through this centre, the doctors would give appropriate instructions to the Covid-19 patients. Anyone suffering from Corona symptoms can seek appropriate guidance through this centre.

Imtiaz said that the doctors at the triage centre on receiving a call would assess the patient's health condition, make suitable suggestions and decide if the patient needs treatment at a hospital or at home or at any Covid care centre. He explained the centre has 30 beds to provide immediate medical care and recommend better treatment. He stressed on facing up to the Corona virus without losing mental stability.

The collector noted that all

- It is coming up on the premises of Siddhartha Medical College
- Doctors will render appropriate advice to Covid-19 patients
- Anyone suffering from Corona symptoms can seek guidance
- Another triage centre already operational at NTR Dental College
- Nutritious food, medicines and timely care would be provided free at these centres

the Covid patients were anxious and urging treatment at hospitals. He assured that enough care and attention was being paid by the doctors at Covid care centres. He said a total of 3,036 beds were made available at Gudavalli, JNNURM and ADM centres in the district. The beds would be provided to those who have Covid symptoms and do not have access to home isolation. Nutritious food, medicines and timely care would be provided free at these centres.

Joint collector L. Shivashankar, Sub-Collector H.M. Dhyanchandra, GGH supervisor Dr K. Sivasankar and other officials were present.

AP govt vindictive, filing false cases: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

Former minister and Telugu Desam politburo member Yanamala Ramakrishnuudu on Sunday slammed the YSR Congress government for filing "false cases" against TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu with the ulterior motive of diverting public attention from its failure to control the Covid-19 second wave. He strongly objected to filing the case as the TD chief was only alerting the government on the origin of the dreaded N440K virus in Kurnool district.

Ramakrishnuudu demanded that the AP government explain whether it was ready to slap cases on national media organisations and scientists for sounding alert on N440K. He demanded that the CM wake from his deep slumber and start instilling hope in the Covid-hit people.

The TD leader stated that instead of taking remedial measures based on these remarks, the YSRC government played its usual politics of vengeance by filing a false case once again against the former CM. He flayed that the mistakes made by the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime had become a curse for the AP people amid the devastating spread of infections.

- The TD leader states that instead of taking remedial measures based on remarks by Naidu, media, scientists, YSRC govt is playing its politics of vengeance. He asks the CM to wake up from 'deep slumber' and attend to Covid crisis
- He recalled how the Telangana High Court alerted their state govt

He deplored that the people were paying a heavy price because of the CM's inefficiency and negligent attitude.

He pointed out that the medical experts had been sounding alarms on the intensity of the second wave, but Reddy turned a deaf ear to all such cautionary advice.

Ramakrishnuudu said that the filing of a criminal case against Naidu would only expose the faction mindset of Reddy. He claimed that Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology conducted studies on the new virus strain and over 50 medical organisations published reports on the N440K variant. He recalled how the Telangana High Court alerted their state government to take advance measures as the new virus strain was striking terror in Andhra Pradesh.

Vizianagaram reported 11 deaths, Visakhapatnam 10, East Godavari 9, Anantapur 8, West Godavari 8, Nellore 7, Prakasam 6, Kurnool 6, Chittoor 5, Srikakulam 5 and Krishna 5 deaths. There were no deaths reported in Kadapa district.

East Godavari is at the top in total number of

Coronavirus infections. It accounts for 1,63,193 cases. Chittoor district has 1,39,937 cases, Guntur 1,20,522, West Godavari 1,10,388, Anantapur 98,777, Visakhapatnam 97,819, Nellore 92,897, Kurnool 92,698, Srikakulam 85,356, Prakasam 82,968, Kadapa 71,914, Krishna 69,958 and Vizianagaram 58,281.

TD will pay back in full for false cases: Lokesh

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 9

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Sunday asserted that their party would pay back in full for all the "false cases" that the YSR Congress and its men were filing to harass the leaders and activists of Telugu Desam. He even warned that the policemen who were supporting the YSRC vengeance politics would have to eventually go to jail along with Chief

Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy sooner or later. He said the YSRC leaders cannot escape from paying for all their omissions and commissions.

In a statement here, Lokesh said that some policemen were behaving like YSRC uniformed activists and were filing illegal cases to serve the political interests of the ruling party. He asked how such false cases could be filed against former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and against him-



Nara Lokesh

self. He said any government would give first priority to saving the lives of people by providing hospital beds, oxygen supply, ventilators and life-saving medicines like remdesivir

- TD leader deplores that Coronavirus is doing a death dance at hospitals which are filled with heaps of dead bodies.

and so on, but the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime was pursuing politics of victimisation as its single point agenda.

Lokesh deplored that the Coronavirus was doing a death dance at hospitals which were filled with heaps of dead bodies. He said the government was

offering the people as a sacrifice to the Coronavirus by not taking up vaccination on a war footing.

He asked the police officials why they were not booking cases against minister Seedirri Appala Raju who also made remarks similar to those made by Naidu with regard to the N440K variant. He warned the TD would not sit silent if the misguided officials continued to harass their party only to harass their political bosses.

Vedic Ispat meets O2 needs in AP, K'taka

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 9

Vedik Ispat Private Limited in Hindupur is meeting the needs of Covid patients for oxygen by producing oxygen and supplying it to hospitals in Anantapur and Chittoor districts, and also in parts of Karnataka.

In view of oxygen scarcity at Hindupur Area Hospital in the district, the district administration has requested the company for oxygen supplies.

Penukonda Sub-Collector Nishanthi, who is deputed as the nodal officer of the hos-

pital, is overseeing oxygen production and securing its supplies from Vedik Ispat steel plant which is located at Gollapuram Industrial Area in Hindupur rural mandal.

Oxygen is being transported to Hindupur hospital and other hospitals in Anantapur and Chittoor districts and at Gowribidanur in Karnataka.

The Sub-Collector informed that the oxygen production commenced on May 1 at the steel plant from where oxygen-filled cylinders are being sent to hospitals in AP and Karnataka.

She is also monitoring surveillance and control measures against Covid-19 in the revenue division.

As the division is located on the Karnataka border, a large number of migrant labour is returning home. Official teams are conducting awareness programmes in all gram panchayats in coordination with tahsildars and their staff to maintain the appropriate Covid protocol behaviour.

A separate control room is also set up at Penukonda to monitor the situation round-the-clock, the official informed.

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SHORT TAKES

U.P.: 67 NEW VENTILATORS LYING UNUSED

Firozabad (UP), May 9: A total of 67 new ventilators are lying unused at the 100-bedded Covid-19 isolation ward set up at a medical college here, a senior doctor has said.

When contacted, Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Alok Kumar Sharma said that last year, the medical college had got 96 ventilators under the PM-CARES Fund, and in all there are 114 ventilators available at the medical college. Of these, 25-30 ventilators are being used to provide treatment to patients.

He added that of the 67 ventilators, which are kept in a store room of the hospital, around 60-62 are in working condition.

Kumar, however, did not elaborate on the rest of the ventilators.

Principal of the medical college, Dr Sangeeta Aneja said, that the state medical department has been informed that 67 ventilators are there in the hospital.

In a letter to the state health department, it was also requested that if there is a need of a ventilator in any nearby district, then it could be sent there.

"Currently, we have ventilators, and they will be used when required. For operation of ventilators, technicians are needed, which we do not have in adequate numbers," she said.

KOTA COPS GET 75 WEDDINGS PUT OFF IN A DAY

Kota, May 9: Over 75 weddings were postponed in a day in Kota Rural district after police reached out to families as part of a campaign to comply with the lockdown which has been enforced in the state to contain rising Covid cases.

During a field visit of DIG Ravidutt Gaur, two beat constables of Kota Rural Police, Asharam of Digod police station and Navneet of Kaithun police station, informed him that they had persuaded three families to call off weddings scheduled for this month, DSP and CO (Itawa) Vijayshankar Sharma said.

The beat constables were given a reward of Rs 1,100 each, he said.

The DIG then directed officials to conduct meetings at gram panchayat level in presence of influential locals and public representatives to persuade families to cancel upcoming weddings, Sharma said.

Under the supervision of Kota Rural SP Sharad Choudhary, the campaign was launched at gram panchayat level on Saturday morning with beat constables and SHOs interacting with families, resulting in postponement of more than 75 weddings in a single day, the DSP said.

"My sister Manisha was supposed to get married on Friday but a beat constable came early morning and convinced us to call off the wedding. It has now been postponed to after the coronavirus pandemic," said Rinkesh Kumar.

TEN STATES ACCOUNT FOR OVER 71% OF CASES

New Delhi: Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi are among 10 states that account for 71.75 per cent of the 4,03,738 new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday.

The other states in the list of 10 are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Haryana.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 56,578. It is followed by Karnataka with 47,563 while Kerala reported 41,971 new cases.

A total of more than 30.22 crore tests have been conducted so far across the country while the daily Covid-19 positivity rate stands at 21.64 per cent, the ministry said.

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Haryana, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh cumulatively account for 82.94 per cent of India's total active cases, the ministry stated. "The National Mortality Rate has been falling and currently stands at 1.09 per cent," the ministry said.

Besides, 4,092 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for 74.93 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (864). Karnataka follows with 482 daily deaths.

Delhi extends lockdown by another week, tightens curbs

Kejriwal says extension is to ensure that Capital does not let guard down

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 9

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has extended the lockdown in the national capital by another week, making the restrictions stricter. Even Delhi Metro services have been suspended this time. The lockdown will be on till 5 am on Monday, May 17. Mr Kejriwal said the extension was meant to ensure that the city does not let its guard down even though the Covid-19 numbers have dropped marginally. "The positivity rate has gone down but still we can't afford leniency. We need to extend to lockdown," the CM said.

There will be a total prohibition of wedding ceremonies at public places. Marriages can be held at homes or in the courts with not more than 20 people, under an order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). "There will be a complete prohibition on marriage ceremonies at public places, banquet halls, hotels and similar places during this period," it said.

The service providers or owners of hotels, banquets, marriage halls, sound systems, DJs, and catering services will have to return the advance payments for marriages during the lockdown or have to mutually agree on a later date for the ceremonies, the order said.

Mr Kejriwal had also written to the Union health minister, urging him to direct the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to increase their monthly supplies to Delhi to 60 lakh doses from May to July.

While the positivity rate, which stood at 35 per cent in mid-April, has dropped to 23 per cent, doctors say even this is very high and there is a need to completely break the chain of transmission.

Delhi's cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage exceeded 38 lakh doses, the Delhi government said on Sunday.

The Delhi health department says it has vaccinated 2,75,540 people of the 18-44 age group so far and has a stock of 2,74,460 vaccine doses for this age group. Deputy CM Manish Sisodia has, meanwhile, ordered an inquiry into reports that 23 Covid-19 patients had gone missing from Hindu Rao Hospital, and has instructed the health department to submit its report by Monday.

AAP MLA Atishi said, meanwhile, that Delhi has so far received 5.5 lakh doses for 18-44 category, over 43 lakh for the 45-plus, and healthcare and frontline workers. "We have now 4.65 lakh doses available for 45-plus people, and healthcare and frontline workers; and 2.74 lakh doses for the 18-44 group," she said. The total number of cases in Delhi has reached 13,10,231 — of which 87,907 are active cases. The total number of fatalities is 19,071. The city recorded a positivity rate of 23.34 per cent and a case fatality rate of 1.46 per cent. This will be the fourth week of the lockdown imposed as the Covid-19 numbers in the national capital skyrocketed.

PM speaks to CMs of 4 states on Covid

New Delhi, May 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday spoke to the chief ministers of Punjab, Karnataka, Bihar and Uttarakhand on the Covid-19 situation in their states, official sources said.

Modi has been speaking to state chief ministers and lieutenant governors of union territories for the last few days to assess the pandemic situation there and offer suggestions.

Chief ministers have also briefed him on the measures being taken by them to deal with the raging second wave of the pandemic.



Patients on oxygen support wait outside the Covid-19 facility of the Chest Disease Hospital in Jammu, on Sunday. — PTI



Relatives mourns after the death of family member due to Covid-19, as Coronavirus cases surge in the national capital, at LNJP Hospital in New Delhi. — PTI



Family members along with medical workers shift a COVID19 patient to Level-3 ward of Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital in Prayagraj, on Sunday. — PTI

India gets 6.7K O2 concentrators, 16 generation plants as aid from abroad

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 9

The Union Government on Sunday said a whopping 6,738 Oxygen Concentrators, 3,856 Oxygen Cylinders, 16 Oxygen Generation Plants, 4,668 ventilators and about three lakh vials of anti-Covid drug Remdesivir have been delivered to the country so far from abroad, adding that it was promptly allocating and distributing the supplies. This comes even as foreign aid continued to pour in from Britain, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Kuwait, China and other nations.

Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong tweeted on Sunday evening, "The first batch of 100 Oxygen concentrators, 40 ventilators, and other anti-epidemic supplies donated by the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) arrived in India today by a Chinese cargo flight from Chengdu. RCSC also decided to provide US\$ one million in cash assistance to the Indian Red Cross Society through the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help India fight against Covid-19."

Meanwhile, SpiceXpress, the air cargo arm of airline SpiceJet, said it had airlifted 9,600 oxygen concentrators from Beijing, Wuhan, Nanjing and Hong Kong to Kolkata and Delhi on Sunday. The airline said it has airlifted more than 27,000 oxygen concentrators from the USA, Hong Kong, Singapore and China so far.

On British support, MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted, "Taking forward our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Consignment of 3 O2 generators & 1,000 ventilators arrives from UK. Each generator can produce 500 litres of oxygen per minute, enough to treat 50 people at a time."



A consignment of three oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators arrives from the UK. Each generator can produce 500 litres of oxygen per minute, enough to treat 50 people at a time. — PTI

Earlier on Saturday, 100 oxygen concentrators were sent by Japan as a part of the first batch of the emergency assistance to India. Japan is providing India with 300 oxygen concentrators and 300 ventilators and announced it will continue to extend further support.

Canada also announced that it is sending up to 25,000 vials of the antiviral drug remdesivir (brand name Veklury) and up to 350 ventilators from its National Emergency Strategic Stockpile to help respond to the critical situation across India. Canada is also providing support through UNICEF's response to the pandemic in India with the urgent provision of 1,450 oxygen concentrators. This support is in "addition to Canada's \$10-million support to the Canadian Red Cross Society, which is supporting the Indian Red Cross Society's procurement of essential supplies and medicines". The Canadian Armed Forces are airlifting these supplies to India.

On South Korean support, the MEA tweeted, "A valued partner in our extended neighbourhood. First consignment of 30 oxygen concentrators & 200 oxygen cylinders with regulators arrives from the Republic of Korea. Welcome this support from our Special Strategic Partner."

A total of 282 Oxygen cylinders and 60 Oxygen concentrators also reached India from Kuwait and another 60 MT of liquid oxygen, 800 oxygen cylinders and two concentrators is also on its way from the Gulf nation.

Centre advises on fungal infection management

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 9

India recorded 3,66,317 fresh cases on Sunday. The numbers have declined marginally over the past three days after hitting a peak of 4,14,554 on Thursday. Deaths continued to surge with 3,747 fatalities reported on Sunday. However there were early signs in the data that the second wave in the country could be reaching its peak. Several states too imposed lockdown or strict curbs as Coronavirus catastrophe continues.

Maharashtra reported 56,578 cases while Karnataka had 47,563. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh were the other top contributors.

Rajasthan recorded 159 deaths and 17,921 coronavirus cases on Sunday, taking the death toll to 5,665 and the infection tally to 7,56,707.

Haryana reported 13,548 new coronavirus cases, taking the case tally to 6,15,897 while 12,639 recoveries brought the active number of cases in the state to 1,16,867. Haryana recorded 151 Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the health bulletin.

In Uttar Pradesh the number of new cases of Covid-19 continued to decline while recoveries went up in the state on Saturday, health officials said. At least 26,847 fresh cases were reported while 34,721 people were declared free of coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours. During

this period, total 2,23,656 Covid tests were conducted in the state.

In a first of its kind data released by the government, on Covid patients requiring critical care, shows that nearly 50,000 people are currently in ICUs while over 14,000 on ventilator support.

Meanwhile, Centre issues advisory on management of Mucormycosis fungal infection in Covid-19 patients

Mucormycosis, a fungal infection being found in Covid-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes and prolonged intensive care unit (ICU) stay, may turn fatal if uncared.

Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana extended their ongoing lockdowns till May 17 to curb the unprecedented surge of Covid-19 cases and deaths.

Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Puducherry will also have a two-week shutdown starting Monday, while in Karnataka's stringent lockdown will come into effect on Monday till May 24. On Saturday, Kerala came under a nine-day complete lockdown. This means that from Monday, a majority of the country will be under either a strict lockdown or lockdown-like curbs.

M a h a r a s h t r a, Karnataka and Delhi are among 10 states that account for 71.75 per cent of new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the Union health ministry said in its Sunday morning update.

Major share for BPL in C'garh's new vax policy

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, MAY 9

The revised adult vaccination policy set to be announced by Chhattisgarh government very soon has proposed to give a major share to members of below poverty line (BPL) families in the third phase of inoculation launched in the state on May one, sources said on Sunday.

The proposed policy has divided people in the age group of 18-44 to be inoculated in the third phase of vaccination into four categories and quotas for each category of these people have been fixed, a senior officer in the Chhattisgarh health department told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted since he was not authorised to speak to media.

The four categories of people created in the proposed revised vaccination policy are BPL, above poverty line (APL), Antyodaya and frontline workforce, sources said.

Sources revealed BPL has been given a share of 52 per cent in the vaccination drive, while APL,

Antyodaya and frontline workforce have been given quotas of 12 per cent, 16 per cent and 20 per cent respectively.

Chhattisgarh is the first state to fix quotas for people in the third phase of vaccination in the state.

In a related development, Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday announced to include journalists and lawyers in the frontline workforce.

"Journalists, lawyers and their families will also get priority in vaccination like frontline workers", Mr Baghel announced.

People with comorbidities, food providers, vegetable vendors, anganwadi workers, mitanis (health workers), panchayat secretaries, "Kotwar-Patel" and public distribution system managers and vendors have also been included in the list of frontline workers.

The Chhattisgarh high court has earlier directed the state government to come out with a fresh adult vaccination policy after setting aside the existing policy which gave priority to Antyodaya card holders in the vaccination drive.

COVID | BLUES

Experts say only Covid-appropriate behaviour can fight disease

Vaccination a shield against virus

New Delhi, May 9: With the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the country and concerns being raised about a possible third wave, experts caution that the next wave could be less severe if people keep following Covid-appropriate behaviour and a large portion of the population is vaccinated.

According to the Union Health Ministry data released on Sunday morning, India recorded 4,03,738 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the country's cumulative tally to 2,22,96,414, while the death toll climbed to 2,42,362 with 4,092 daily deaths.

There has been a sharp surge in infections over the past couple of months, making the second wave much worse than the first one that began in early 2020 and peaked in the last quarter of that year before the tally hit a trough in the first quarter of 2021.

Several experts believe that a casual approach that followed the trough of the first wave could be a possible reason for the pandemic raising its head again, though others are also putting the blame on the new mutants and variants of the virus being more virulent.

K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser,

had said on Wednesday last week that the third wave was inevitable and it was necessary to be prepared for new waves, but clarified two days later that the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if prescribed guidelines about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing are followed.

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

in a few months when the immunity people have developed naturally or with the help of vaccination fades, the virus strikes again and the only thing that can stop the virus from bouncing back is how people are guarding themselves.

"Early this year, as the new cases receded, people started interacting as if there was no virus. The immunity had already started declining. They organised mass gatherings, they stopped wearing masks, giving the opportunity to the virus to strike again," said Dr Anurag Agarwal, director, Institute of Genomics and Int-

egral Biology, New Delhi.

"While we anticipate a third wave, we cannot say when exactly it will come or how severe it will be. But if people keep following Covid-appropriate behaviour in coming months and we are able to vaccinate a large number of people, the third wave could be less severe," Dr Agarwal added.

While the sudden surge in the number of cases during the second wave has led to panic among people, what is adding to their fear is the constant threat of new mutants of the virus and how these mutants could potentially harm them. — PTI

IN BRIEF

SLAIN JUDGE GETS CLOSER TO SAINTHOOD

Rome, May 9: An Italian judge murdered by the mafia in Sicily takes a step towards sainthood Sunday, almost three decades after being declared a martyr by pope John Paul II. The beatification of Rosario Livatino will take place in the cathedral in Agrigento, the Sicilian town near where he was gunned down aged 38 on September 21, 1990.

In a preface to a new book about the judge, Pope Francis hailed him as a “righteous man who knew he did not deserve that unjust death”.

Livatino, who prayed in church every day before going to court, had been involved in a mass trial against mafioso and was about to launch a new case when he died.

He was found in a ditch by the roadside a few miles from his home. He had refused armed protection.

Many of his notes were later found to be marked STD, for “sub tutela Dei”, a Latin invocation meaning “under the protection of God” which judges of the Middle Ages used before taking official decisions. The notes also showed he asked God’s forgiveness for the risks his work exposed his parents to, once he learned that the bosses of the Cosa Nostra had him in their sights. When John Paul II visited Livatino’s parents in 1993, he said the judge was “a martyr for justice and indirectly for the faith”.

PAK POLICEMAN KILLED IN KP MILITANT ATTACK

Peshawar: A Pakistani police official was killed when some unidentified terrorists opened fire on a patrol vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday.

The terrorists attacked the police mobile van while it was doing a routine patrolling on Indus highway in Lakki Marwat district, Station House Officer of local police station Naveed Nawaz said.

While Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Muhammad Shah was killed in the attack, two terrorists were gunned down in the retaliatory firing, he said. In another incident, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) police arrested three wanted terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bannu district. The members of the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan outfit were wanted in several cases, including suicide attacks on police stations, extortions and target killings, police said.

Attacks on Pakistan government installations by militia in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are quite common. In January, a police man was killed in Karak district for escorting a team of health care workers, who were supposed to administer polio vaccine to children in the highly-conservative and Pashtun-dominated area which borders Afghanistan. — Agencies

FIRE AT SYRIAN OIL REFINERY EXTINGUISHED

Damascus, May 9: Firefighters extinguished a blaze Sunday in a distillation unit at one of Syria’s two oil refineries, Syrian state TV reported.

No one was hurt, but the fire caused some damage to the facility, a refinery official said. The TV named the cause of the fire as crude oil leakage from one of the pumping stations at the Homs Oil Refinery in the central province of Homs. The fire came amid a series of mysterious attacks on vessels and oil facilities in Syria over the past months. The war-torn country has been suffering from fuel shortage in recent months.

Head of Homs Oil Refinery Suleiman Mohammed told state TV that the distillation unit that caught fire is one of four at the refinery.

In addition to the refinery in Homs, Syria has another one near the coastal town of Banias. Both are government-run and operating.

Syria’s oil resources are mostly outside of government controlled areas. Syria controls some small oil and gas fields but most of the large fields in the east are controlled by US-backed Kurdish-led fighters. This has made Damascus reliant on Iran for fuel.

The US sanctions have targeted a network that spanned Syria, Iran and Russia responsible for shipping oil to the Syrian government. — AP

Death toll soars to 50 in Kabul school bombing

Kabul, May 9: The death toll in a horrific bombing at a girls’ school in the Afghan capital has soared to 50, many of them pupils between 11 and 15 years old, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

The number of wounded in Saturday’s attack has also climbed to more than 100, said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day, he said. The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The first explosion came from a vehicle packed with explosives, followed by two others, said Arian, adding that the casualty figures could still rise.

In the capital rattled by relentless bombings, Saturday’s attack was among the worst. Criticism has mounted over lack of security and growing fears of even more violence as the US and Nato complete their final military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The attack targeted Afghanistan’s ethnic Hazaras who dominate the western Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood, where the bombings occurred. Most Hazaras are Shiite Muslims.

The area has been hit by violence against minority Shiites and most often claimed by the Islamic State affiliate operating in the country. No one has yet claimed Saturday’s bombings.

3 hurt in Times Square shooting

New York, May 9: A shooting in New York’s bustling Times Square on Saturday injured a four-year-old girl and two women, in the latest incident of gun violence in the city, police said.

The shooting took place just before 5 pm local time (9 pm GMT), at the intersection of 7th Avenue and 44th Street, a NYPD spokesperson told AFP.

The three victims were a four-year-old child in a stroller, who was hit in the leg while her family was buying toys, a 46-year-old woman hit in the foot, and a 23-year-old

Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day on Saturday.

The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The radical Sunni Muslim group has declared war on Afghanistan’s Shiites. Washington blamed IS for a vicious attack last year in a maternity hospital in the same area that killed pregnant women and newborn babies.

Soon after the bombing, angry crowds attacked ambulances and even beat health workers as they tried to evacuate the wounded, health ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastigar Nazari said.

He had implored residents to cooperate and allow ambulances free access to the site.

Bloody backpacks and school books lay strewn outside the Syed Al-Shahda school. In the morning, boys attend classes in the sprawling school compound and in the afternoon, it’s girls’ turn. Residents in the area said the explosion was deafening.

Naser Rahimi said he heard three separate explosions, and immediately thought that the sheer power of the blasts meant the death toll would almost certainly climb. — AP

tourist from Rhode Island hit in the leg.

They were hospitalized in Manhattan, and their lives were not in danger, said New York police commissioner Dermot Shea, at a press briefing.

Shea said the three bystanders — who did not appear to know each other — stumbled into an argument between two to four men, at least one of whom fired a gun. No arrests had been made by early evening. Police issued an appeal for witnesses and released surveillance camera footage of a wanted man. — AFP

Variant fuelling Covid explosion: WHO

Geneva, May 9: A Covid-19 variant spreading in India is more contagious and may be dodging vaccine protections, contributing to the country’s explosive outbreak, the World Health Organisation’s chief scientist said Saturday.

In an interview, Soumya Swaminathan warned that “the epidemiological features that we see in India today do indicate that it’s an extremely rapidly spreading variant”.

India on Saturday for the

first time registered more than 4,000 Covid-19 deaths in just 24 hours, and more than 4,00,000 new infections.

New Delhi has struggled to contain the outbreak, which has overwhelmed its healthcare system, and many experts suspect the official death and case numbers are a gross underestimate.

Swaminathan, an Indian paediatrician and clinical scientist, said the B.1.617 variant of Covid-19, which was first detected in India

Scotland renews bid to part ways with England yet again

Scottish National Party wins polls, pushes for 2nd plebiscite for independence

London, May 9: The Scottish National Party won its fourth straight parliamentary election on Saturday and insisted it will push on with another referendum on Scotland’s independence from the United Kingdom even though it failed by one seat to secure a majority.

Final results of Thursday’s election showed the SNP winning 64 of the 129 seats in the Edinburgh-based Scottish Parliament. The result extends the party’s dominance of Scottish politics since it first won power in 2007.

Other results from Super Thursday’s array of elections across Britain emerged Saturday, including the Labour Party’s victory in the Welsh parliamentary election.

The election with the biggest implications was the Scottish election, as it could pave the way to the



break-up of the United Kingdom.

SNP leader and Scotland’s first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said her immediate priority would be steering Scotland through the coronavirus pandemic and that the legitimacy of an independence referendum

BACK STORY

England and Scotland became one kingdom after Scottish Parliament ratified the Treaty of Union in 1706 to merge both the kingdoms, which were ruled by one king for 100 years.

Scottish King James VI became the English monarch in 1603 as England’s Queen Elizabeth I died without any children.

The East India Company, which colonised India, also played a role in the integration of Britain and Scotland by harming the interests of Scottish traders, who were opposing the Union.

remains, SNP majority or not.

This is now a matter of fundamental democratic principle, Sturgeon said. It is the will of the country.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the leader of the Conservative Party, would have the ultimate authority whether or not to per-

mit another referendum on Scotland gaining inde-

pendence. Johnson appears intent on resisting another vote, setting up the possibility of renewed tensions between his government and Sturgeon’s devolved administration.

Johnson wrote in the Daily Telegraph newspa-

Sadiq wins London Mayor post again

London, May 9: Sadiq Khan has been re-elected as Mayor of London for a second term after beating his closest rival with a vote share of 55.2 per cent versus 44.8 per cent in an election that was closer than expected.

Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

The Pakistani-origin former Labour member of Parliament was the first Muslim mayor of a European capital city when he was first elected in 2016. The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

“I am deeply humbled by the trust Londoners have placed in me to continue leading the greatest city on earth,” said Khan.

“I promise to strain every sinew, help build a better and brighter future for London, after the dark days of the pandemic and to create a greener, fairer and safer city for all Londoners, to get the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. I am proud to have won an overwhelming mandate today,” he said, speaking at his City Hall office.

Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

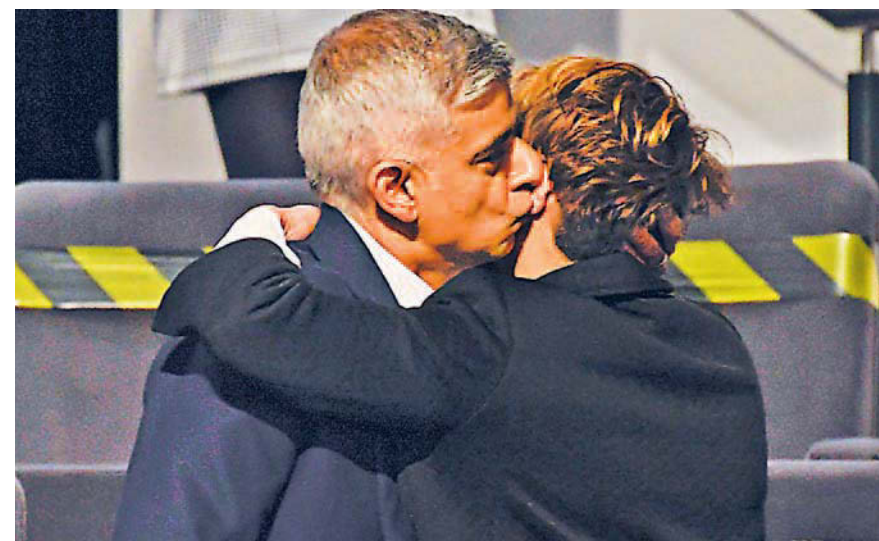
The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Khan reiterated his previous pledge to be a mayor for all Londoners and work to improve the lives of every single person in this city.

Rival Bailey said he had been “written off” by pollsters, journalists and other politicians but Londoners didn’t write me off”.

His victory is one of the few positives for the Labour Party as the party held on to its dominance in the London Assembly as well.

However, overall the local election performance has been largely dismal for the Opposition party as it lost many of its strongholds. The Conservatives have gained control of around 12 councils. — PTI



Re-elected Mayor of London Sadiq Khan hugs his wife Saadiya after the result declaration at City Hall, in London, on Saturday.

Nirav Modi’s appeal against extradition stuck in UK HC

London, May 9: Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, whose extradition to India was ordered last month by UK Home Secretary Priti Patel in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, has filed an application for permission to appeal against the order in the High Court in London.

The Crown Prosecution

Service (CPS) confirmed an appeal has been lodged but a High Court judge who will make a decision on the matter is yet to be assigned.

The matter has not been sent to a judge for consideration on the papers, the Administrative Division of the Royal Courts of Justice in London said this week.

In the first instance, a

High Court judge will make a decision on the papers submitted for the appeal and determine if there are any grounds for an appeal against the Home Secretary’s decision or the Westminster Magistrates’ Court February ruling in favour of Modi’s extradition to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering. — PTI

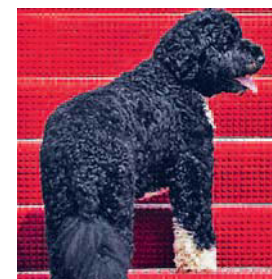
Putin sees Nazi ideas in Europe

Moscow, May 9: Russian President Vladimir Putin marked the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe with a speech warning that Nazi beliefs remain strong.

Speaking to the annual military parade here, Putin on Sunday decried attempts to rewrite history, to justify traitors and criminals, on whose hands lies the blood of

people. “Unfortunately, many of the ideologies of the Nazis, those who were obsessed with the delusional theory of their exclusiveness, are again trying to be put into service,” he said.

The anniversary of Nazi Germany’s defeat, which Russia calls Victory Day, is the country’s most significant secular holiday. — AP



A file photo shows former US president Barack Obama’s pet Bo climbing the stairs of Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base, Md. for a flight to Chicago. — AP

OBAMA DOG BO, ONCE WH STAR, DIES OF CANCER

Washington, May 9: Former US President Barack Obama’s dog Bo died Saturday after a battle with cancer, the Obamas said on social media.

Bo, a Portuguese water dog, was a gift to the Obamas from the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., a key supporter of Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign who became close to the family. Bo helped Obama keep a promise to daughters Malia and Sasha that they could get a dog after the election. A companion dog, Sunny, joined the family in August 2013. Both were constant presences around the White House and popular among visitors, often joining the Obamas for public events. — AP

SPACE | ALERT

Remnants of rocket burned up as they reentered atmosphere near the Maldives

China’s rocket debris falls into Indian Ocean

Beijing, May 9: The remnants of an out of control and China’s biggest rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere with most of its parts burned up and disintegrated over the Indian Ocean near the Maldives, the country’s space agency said on Sunday, ending days of fevered speculation over where the debris would hit.

The remnants of China’s Long March 5B rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere at 10.24 am Beijing time and fell into an open sea area at 72.47 degrees east longitude and 2.65 degrees north latitude, China’s Manned Space Engineering Office said. The coordinates put the

splash down in the Indian Ocean, close to the Maldives, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported, adding that most of the remnants burned up during the re-entry.

US and European tracking sites had been monitoring the uncontrolled fall of the rocket.

Monitoring service Space-Track, which uses US military data, also confirmed the re-entry. “Everyone else following the LongMarch5B re-entry can relax. The rocket is down,” it said.

“@18SPCS confirms that CZ-5B (LongMarch5B) (48275 / 2021-035B) reentered atmosphere 9 May at 0214Z and fell into the

NASA DENOUNCES CHINA OVER ‘IRRESPONSIBLE STANDARDS’

Washington, May 9: US space agency Nasa on Sunday slammed China for failing to meet “responsible standards” regarding its space debris, hours after remnants of the country’s largest and an out of control rocket disintegrated over the Indian Ocean near the Maldives.

Reacting to China’s space programme, Nasa

administrator Bill Nelson said: “It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris. “Space-faring nations must minimize the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximize transparency regarding those operations,” he said in a statement. — AP

this re-entry; thanks for the wild ride,” it said. The US Space command

confirmed the re-entry into the atmosphere of the rocket over the Arabian peninsula, but said it was unknown if the debris had hit land or water.

“The exact location of the impact and the span of debris, both of which are unknown at this time, will not be released by US Space Command,” it said.

Harvard astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell, who tracked the tumbling rocket part, wrote on Twitter, “An ocean reentry was always statistically the most likely. It appears China won its gamble. But it was still reckless. The rocket, carrying the core module for China’s Tiangong Space Station, blasted

off from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the southern island province of Hainan on April 29.

The large rocket stage that deorbited was more than 33 metres (108 feet) tall and weighed more than 20 tonnes, making it the sixth largest object to re-enter the Earth’s atmosphere, according to the Aerospace Corporation, a federally funded research organisation based in California. Very little of the rocket stage’s mass survived re-entry, however, with the majority having burned up as it entered the Earth’s dense atmosphere at a speed of about 8 km per second, the Post report said. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

10 MAY 2021

No more bickering, enable new anti-Covid task force

The Supreme Court order constituting a National Task Force (NTF) for, among others, making an assessment and recommendations on the availability and distribution of medical oxygen and essential drugs and medicines for the entire country gives the Union government an opportunity to make quick amends to the lapses it committed in preparing the nation for the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19.

The cabinet secretary is the convenor of the NTF which has 12 members drawn from the bureaucracy, academics and the healthcare industry. The court would want the NTF to commence its work immediately and determine the modalities for oxygen supply within a week, reflecting the desperation of thousands of people suffering from the lack of healthcare facilities felt across the country. The court has also tasked them with anticipating the requirements of the nation to face a third wave of the pandemic, which the principal scientific adviser to the government has already warned is on its way. The Union and state governments and their agencies have been told to provide

The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned...

complete and real time data for facilitating the NTF's work while all private hospitals and other healthcare institutions have been asked to co-operate with it.

While repeatedly assuring all stakeholders that it has no plans to enter into the executive domain of the government, the apex court has said the constitution of the NTF will facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based on scientific and specialised domain knowledge and "enable the decision makers to have inputs which go beyond finding ad-hoc solutions to the present problems".

The ball is now in the government's court, contrary to a section of the cheerleaders of the NDA dispensation screaming themselves hoarse, saying the court's directive goes against the constitutional scheme of things. True, the court has stepped in to fill a vacuum people have felt but it has made it clear that it is for the government to take "appropriate decisions" on the task force's recommendations though it said the body shall submit its recommendations to the court also. True also that the Constitution vests all the executive power with the Union council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister, who also heads the National Disaster Management Authority, constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The court must, however, have been disappointed with the response of the government when it asked for a plan to address the pressing issues people face during the pandemic, and hence the decision. That several high courts were also forced to intervene to ensure supply of oxygen and life-saving drugs may have also prompted the Supreme Court into taking a pro-active position.

The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned so that it comes up with readily actionable plan which will help address the mess the nation finds itself in now. Quibbling over constitutional niceties can wait till the pandemic is over.

Israel mars own peace gains

In a series of severe policing moves, Israel did not endear itself to its new allies in the region like the UAE and Bahrain, both signatories to normalisation agreements with Israel last year, besides old enemy Hamas, which rules in the Gaza Strip. Israeli police appeared to block the right to worship for Muslims in the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, their religion's third holiest site. The Israel police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at stone-throwing Palestinian youth on Friday injuring about 205 Palestinians and 18 policemen and also clashed with protesters outside Jerusalem's Old City on Saturday which, as the "Night of Destiny", is also the holiest night in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Weeks of unrest followed by two days of high tension from police action described as "security moves" by the police chief may be traced back not only to competing historic claims to east Jerusalem, which houses holy shrines of Judaism, Islam and Christianity but also to rising anger over the possible eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarra as their land is being claimed by Jewish settlers. This relates to an old phenomenon in Israel's planned demographic change of territories occupied since the 1967 war. Israel's supreme court is to hold a hearing on the case pertaining to East Jerusalem on Monday.

There were also claims of a rocket from Hamas falling in an open area on Sunday and a retaliatory aerial Israeli strike at a Hamas military post. The incidents does no credit to Israel even as Benjamin Netanyahu's government is still in place though Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid party has been asked to explore forming a new coalition government. The US, Europe and UN are calling for calm even as Israel's Arab allies are condemning the latest moves which, naturally enough, are seen as obstructing Muslims when they are going for Ramadan prayers. In oppressive policing action, Israel may be blithely blowing away the gains made in its peace moves that helped alleviate old enmities in the region.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Kishwar Desai London Diary



Indian summer on UK's red list; royal duchesses in duel of creativity

April may be a cruel month but May heralds the beginning of the holiday season. For some reason, the English prefer to go abroad at the only time the weather is tolerable — in the summer months. It was in the late nineteenth century that Parliament decided to have a summer break. The issue was the pollution of Thames. It stank. Members wanted the windows open due to the heat but that brought in the stink. So they decided to abandon the Westminster Palace for the summer. That brought summer holidays all around.

And now the traffic lights are back again — to guide you whether you can travel to a particular country or not. Australia and New Zealand have made it to the "green" traffic lights, including others like Iceland, along with very few other countries. Which means that the Brits can travel there without having to quarantine for 10 days at a hotel chosen by the government when they return. But countries like India — and some of its neighbours like Nepal and Pakistan fall into the "red" list. Thus while we

know that right now there is a travel ban between the two countries — if any British citizen wants to travel to India they need to quarantine for ten days in a hotel upon their return, plus all the tests they have to undergo. Some people are deeply unhappy that these restrictions are still in place, despite the vaccine. But that is our "Brave New World" — perfect only for armchair travellers!

So we still have rules of how many others you can meet and how closely they must be related. For instance, six members of two families can meet, etc. But it is only around the third week of June that many of these restrictions are going to be removed — we hope that we can last that long! But of course getting back to "normal" will come with fresh caution as undoubtedly a life free of Covid and its many mutations is still far away. So while the "traffic lights" may turn green, many of us will still hang on to our masks.

Even so, it is not all pleasure and no work. May is also the month when local elections take place. Plus this year, vote to the Scottish Parliament. Municipal

elections in England were cancelled last year due to our first (of many but we did not know it then) lockdowns.

Mind you, despite all the difficulties the country has been through, the Prime Minister is still riding high. Perhaps it is the optimism that he exudes — with the tousled hair and Houdini-like escape mechanisms. Throughout his career, he has got away with much, much more than any one else, and he carries no guilt for any wrong or fault he has committed. He apologises and carries on, a formula that has worked wonderfully.

Normally, the government party does not do well in the four yearly local elections as they are out of sync with general elections. But "lucky" Boris is emerging triumphant all over the English regions. The Labour Party under its leader Sir Keir Starmer (a rare Knighted MP) was hoping to reverse their losses in the North where they were supposed to have a "Red Wall". It had crumbled in the last general election. Alas, it cannot be rebuilt by Sir Keir, and Boris has once again managed to convince voters that he is

their best good news guy.

In London though things are different, the mayor of London has a four-year term. Boris was twice the mayor of London. But in 2016, Sadiq Khan, the Labour candidate, captured London. He has already had a bonus extra year due to the postponement of the election. Now he has won, and extended his stay for three more years. Thus he becomes not only the first minority ethnic candidate to continue to head one of the biggest cities in the world but now will establish the enviable distinction of having been mayor for a eight years. So come 2025 - prepare for Sadiq to turn his mind to leadership of the Labour Party and take a gamble on becoming the first minority ethnic Prime Minister of UK. Of course he may be running against Rishi Sunak or Priti Patel as the Conservatives' prime ministerial candidate. Who could have thought even 10 years ago, such a thing could happen?

And meanwhile a quick note on the publicity outreach of the two duchesses. Both Kate and

Meghan are doing their best to stay in the limelight. Who would have thought the ever productive Meghan Markle even had a book in her, and this time it seems to be a cute little children's book. She has come up with one called *The Bench*, dedicated to her husband Harry — but written for her son. Undoubtedly a money spinner — good or bad — it means that now we all know what gift to buy a toddler.

One person who may not buy it will be the Duchess of Cambridge for reasons which are far too well known, especially after Oprah. But the competition is heating up — as William and Kate have their own "YouTube" channel now. While the two duchesses continue their duel at dawn, from safely across the pond... one wonders, what next?

Kishwar Desai's latest book, The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar

Subhani

NAMES OF THE PEOPLE WHO DIED DUE TO COVID

India, world in middle of a 'Third World War'



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

It's now a "Third World War". In the nineteenth century, Prussia's Maj. Gen. Carl von Clausewitz had said: "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means". That is what the People's Republic of China is now engaged in — waging war in order to dominate the world.

We have now entered the third year of this epic campaign, which began in 2019 on a low key. The Chinese strategy was simple — to subdue without shooting — and to bring India to its knees. This has now turned into a conflagration. New Delhi was totally unprepared and last year, as the threat of the pandemic rose, it got caught up in health issues and couldn't put adequate infrastructure in place. This monumental misjudgment led to vast numbers of Indians shivering down their spine, failing as usual to read Chinese malice.

It's not just India. The world is in the midst of a long-drawn, protracted "Third World War", the first salvo of which was fired by Beijing's dictator-for-life Xi Jinping from Wuhan in 2019, to fulfil the Communist Party of China's twenty-first century ambition of becoming the planet's numero uno power.

The seeds were sown at Wuhan, President Xi's favourite venue to showcase his country's new global ambitions. Remember the "Wuhan spirit" of 2018 — when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Chinese strongman in the aftermath of the Doklam standoff earlier that year? The prime target was, of the West, and specifically the United States; but Beijing then changed course towards the secondary target, India; decimating Delhi's health and resources through a second-wave warhead that pene-

trated through the fragile firewall of Lutyens' Delhi's diplomatic gullibility, political vulnerability and strategic inability to retaliate against the CPC's malice. This not only brought Delhi down, forcing it to kowtow to the world for aid and help, but now threatens the very existence of India's demography.

As fatalities rise across the land and corpses pile up, the killer epicentre of the war has ferociously revived across the whole of India, wreaking havoc of the kind not seen by Indians before. Without a bullet fire or a bomb dropped, the flames of war are about to send India's economy and its health systems into the ICU. India's defence and diplomacy are on a psychological ventilator, with the polity embarrassed and bruised for going into an avoidable and premature celebration to declare victory over the China-origin virus pandemic.

New Delhi's enormous misjudgment in assessing the incendiary punch of the conflagration has sunk a nation of 1.3 billion into an unprecedented state of pessimism and panic, dejection and depression. India also miscalculated the swift course change of the "Third World War", because unlike all belligerents in previous conflicts in human history, its mass killing spree without military mobilisation doesn't have any visible or definite contours.

The deathly blow of the Chinese-origin virus (Covid-19) is far worse than the physical devastation and destruction that India faced in either the First or the Second World War. The outreach of this virus has been more devastating than the poison gas in the First World War (used by Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary in the trenches adjacent to the Franco-

German border and beyond) and the subsequent reduced use by combatants in the Second World War following the public revulsion caused after the 1914-1918 war.

In the twenty-first century, however, the Chinese-origin virus has already affected around 320 million people globally and is now on an uncontrollable overdrive. Having afflicted 20 million-plus Indians and killing over 200,000 of them, this silent chemical-biological killer is infecting around 400,000 people in India every single day, with around 3,500-4,000 succumbing every day. The funeral pyres are everywhere, not just in crematoria: ambulances, alleys, parks, car parks, riversides are seeing corpses lit before the last rites.

Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first "world war" in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds. Make no mistake. Even at the height of the bloodshed between the belligerents, the First World War was a European war, leading to 30 million deaths. It happened mostly on the European heartland, Russia, Turkey, Mesopotamia and East Asia, in which a maximum of 40 nations were directly involved or affected.

The 1939-1945 Second World War, however, killed 60 million people, double that of the First World War, with the devastation centred mostly in Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific islands. Mainland India survived a direct assault, along with most

Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first 'world war' in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds

of the African continent, Australia, plus North and South America.

Compare these with the Chinese-virus killer of the Third World War! It has spared no one, except perhaps the country of its origin, as is being claimed by the CPC in its centenary year. Hence, of the 223 countries (sovereign, semi-independent, autonomous, dependents) in the world, all are under attack except one! Isn't it a World War of one (among 223) against 222?

In the midst of this calamity comes the "offer" of proposed assistance to India from Mr Xi, who is also the CPC's general secretary! Should India accept it? As far as Beijing is concerned, we can emulate what then PM Manmohan Singh had done in 2004, in the aftermath of the tsunami, to politely refuse any assistance, at least from the CPC. India can seek or accept aid or help from any of the remaining 222, but not from the one that is actively trying to turn this country into a vassal state at a time of its distress. China has already proved that it is an existential threat to a large number of countries. Now the "Third World War" looms large, with the threat of the airborne "Made in China" germ/virus hovering over the planet.

You don't have to look very far for evidence of the Hans' mischievous thought and intent. On Weibo, see the image of a Chinese rocket launch positioned next to a photo of Covid-19 victims being cremated in India. The text read: "Lighting a fire in China versus lighting a fire in India". This nasty, nefarious image was published by an account of the official Chinese law enforcement agency — CPC Central Political, Legal Affairs Commission — that has millions of Weibo followers. It shows the Chinese rejoicing at the sight of funeral pyres of Indian victims of the "Third World War". Will nemesis catch up one day?

The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.

LETTERS

DRDO DRUG

It is great to hear DRDO's progress (DRDO's Covid drug gets DGCI nod, DC, May 9). It is a significant development. All the scientists involved in this endeavour must be congratulated for developing this drug indigenously after elaborate trials started as early as March 2020. Clinical trials found that patients condition improved significantly and became free from supplemental oxygen dependence. With the green signal from DGCI, it is hoped 2-DG will be available in hospitals soon and save lives of Covid-19 patients.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

HOSPITAL ADMISSION

The decision by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that the requirement of a positive test for Coronavirus is not mandatory for admission to a Covid health facility is welcome and a big relief to patients and their kith and kin (*No need for +ve test for hosp. admission, DC, May 9*). Further, authorities concerned are required to keep tabs on the extortion and fleecing of medication and other paraphernalia.

Dr C. Ghanashyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Value of rare coins

HYDERABAD, MAY 9.

The City Crime Branch officials investigating the discovery of rare gold coins, dug out earth in the house of the waddar in Mubarakpur village, in Vikarabad, and found the vessel in which the remaining gold coins were preserved. On examining the gold coins, the officials realised the value and importance of their recovery.

The officials informed the State and Centre Archaeological departments about their findings. Mr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, Assistant Director, Archaeology and Museums, A.P. examined the coins and determined the period at 14th centre A.D. The coins in the denominations of 'pagodas' and 'half pagodas' bore the images Shiva-Parvathi, Gandabherunda (a bird with two necks) and some floral designs on one side and inscriptions in Devanagari script on the other.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,232.60	0.74
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185▲474	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

* As of Friday/Saturday

Hero MotoCorp extends plants' shutdown to 16th

Hero MotoCorp said it is extending the shutdown of its plants across India by another week till May 16 in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation. The shutdown also includes the Global Parts Center in Neemrana and R&D facility the Centre of Innovation and Technology in Jaipur, Hero MotoCorp said. Last month, the company had announced temporary stopping of operations at all its six manufacturing units in India.

Over 2,100 PSB branches closed or merged in FY21



As many as 2,118 branches of 10 public sector banks have either been closed or merged with other banks in the last fiscal, according to an RTI reply. The highest number of 1,283 branches of Bank of Baroda were either closed or merged, according to information provided to an RTI query filed by Neemuch-based activist Chandrashekhra Gaud. No branch of Bank of India and Uco Bank was closed last fiscal.

Amara Raja resumes ops at Andhra plants

Amara Raja Batteries Ltd said it has resumed operations at its plants at Nunegundlapalli and Karkambadi in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday. The resumption of production was done after the Andhra Pradesh High Court suspended the orders passed by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board. The firm said the recent temporary disruption will not have any material impact on its operations or order book.

FPIs pull out over ₹5,900 crore from equities last week

Foreign portfolio investors have pulled out Rs 5,936 crore from equities in the first week of May amid worries over the Covid second wave and its fall-out on the economy. FPIs had pulled out Rs 9,659 crore in April after infusing money in the preceding six months. If fears of Covid-19 persist among investors, then further redemptions cannot be ruled out, Himanshu Srivastava of Morningstar India, stated.



NCLT starts proceedings on creditor plea

Ahluwalia Contracts in insolvency soup

New Delhi, May 9: The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has initiated insolvency proceedings against construction firm Ahluwalia Contracts India Ltd for defaulting on payments to an operational creditor.

The New Delhi-based NCLT bench allowed the insolvency plea filed by A2 Interiors Products Pvt Ltd against Ahluwalia Contracts, claiming default of Rs 14.10 crore, and appointed an interim resolution professional.

Ahluwalia Contracts had engaged A2 Interiors Products for interior, furnishing and allied civil and electrical works at various project sites. It had supplied materials to Ahluwalia Contracts as part of various work orders issued for six projects at different locations in the country, according to the NCLT order.

It had raised invoices against each work order, which were duly received by Ahluwalia Contracts, however, it failed to release the full payment.

Later, in May 2019, A2 Interiors had issued a notice to Ahluwalia Contracts under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) demanding Rs 12.54 crore along with interest, which was rejected by Ahluwalia Contracts in its reply and raised disputes.

Following this, A2 Interiors approached the NCLT under section 9 of IBC, which allows operational creditors to file an insolvency plea, claiming



a total outstanding debt of Rs 14.10 crore against Ahluwalia Contracts.

This was opposed by Ahluwalia Contracts, contending it as not maintainable, on the grounds that it is arising out of different work orders, which cannot be claimed under one single application and of different service in nature and each contract gives rise to separate alleged debt.

It also alleged that the applicant has concealed certain facts and documents and not disclosed all work orders executed between the parties.

However, the operational creditor said that though it was for work order for six different projects but the corporate debtor is a Principal Contractor. It also submitted that no notice of dispute was raised by Ahluwalia Contracts prior to the notice of demand issued by it.

An NCLT bench comprising members

Sumitpurkayastha and Deepti Mukesh said: "Considering the documents on records and submissions made, it is observed that there exists an operational debt which is due and payable by the corporate debtor."

It further observed that once the work is complete and the final bill is raised, the retention money becomes due and payable.

Though the corporate debtor has raised dispute prior to the issue of the demand notice with regards to non-completion of work on time, defective work and invoices raised but has itself admitted that retention money is payable.

While admitting A2 Interiors' plea, the NCLT observed that the corporate debtor had admitted to the debt and the said has become due as per their own statement in their email, leaving no scope for any further adjudication.

— PTI

GOVT RELEASES ₹8,900 CR FOR PANCHAYATS

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, MAY 9

Amid the rampant spread of Covid19, the finance ministry, on Sunday, released over Rs 8,900 crore as grants a month in advance for panchayats. Though the payment was scheduled for June, the ministry decided to release it in May in view of the prevailing Covid19 situation. The amount s will be distributed among 25 states, in which the highest share of over Rs 1,441 crore has been granted to Uttar Pradesh, followed by over Rs 861 crore to Maharashtra.

"The Department of Expenditure in finance ministry released an amount of Rs 8,923.8 crore to 25 states for providing grants to the Rural Local Bodies. The grants of Rs 8,923.8 crore are meant for all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions - village, block and district," a finance ministry statement said.

Cadila eyes nod for Covid vaccine by June

RAHUL SATIJA MAY 9

Cadila Healthcare Ltd plans to submit trial data for its Covid-19 vaccine by end of May and is looking for an approval in June, a newspaper reported citing Sharvil Patel, managing director of Cadila.

The Phase-III clinical trials of the ZyCoV-D vaccine will be representative of its efficacy against

Jewellers get HC reprieve on hallmarking

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 9

The Bombay High Court has directed the government not to take any coercive action against jewellers till June 14, 2021 for storing or selling non-hallmarked gold jewellery. The government had made hallmarking mandatory from June 1.

The Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court was hearing the appeal filed by the All-India Gems and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) and others. The court stayed "coercive action" till it further heard the matter on June 14.

The GJC had contended that the new regulation with effect from June 1 is likely to result in great hardships to around 5 lakh jewellers in India. There are at least 488 districts which do not have hallmarking centres and the Covid restrictions prevent a person from travelling from one dis-



trict to another for hall-marking purposes.

Further, there are 6,000 crore jewellery pieces which need to be hallmarked. Within the time available it is not possible to get all these pieces hallmarked. Any breach of the regulation is punishable with maximum imprisonment of one year.

"The court has in the meanwhile, directed that no coercive action shall be taken against the jewellers under Section 29(2) of the BIS Act, 2016, till the next date of hearing on 14th June 2021. This is

a big relief to the jewellers who shall now be fully protected from any actions from BIS even though they may wish to still go ahead with mandatory hallmarking," said Saiyam Mehra, vice-chairman, GJC.

According to Ashish Pethe, chairman, GJC, court has seen the hardship of jewellers and has taken note of the contention that in proportion to the large number of jewellers in India, the percentage of hallmarking centres available in India is just about 34 per cent.



many known variants, as different ones have surfaced in this wave, Patel told the Financial Express. It is by far the largest trial being done in

the country right now and the company has recruited more than 28,000 volunteers, he said.

Cadila is also working toward getting approval to administer the vaccine to children above the age of 12 years, the report said, citing one person it didn't identify. The Ahmedabad-based firm has tested the ZyCoV-D vaccine on more than 1,500 children as part of its ongoing Phase-III

trials. No other vaccine has been tested for children, according to the report.

Once the company gets approval, Cadila plans to make up to 240 million doses per annum at its facilities at Ahmedabad and Vadodara, the report said. Initially, it plans to supply vaccines to India, and eventually, export them to other countries.

— Bloomberg

ByteDance aims to challenge Alibaba

COCO LIU & ZHEPING HUANG MAY 9

Zhang Yiming built ByteDance Ltd into the world's most valuable private company via a string of blockbuster apps like TikTok that challenged Facebook and other incumbents on their own turf. His latest target: Alibaba.

The 38-year-old AI coding genius, searching for ByteDance's next big act, has set his sights on China's \$1.7 trillion e-commerce arena. The co-founder has hired thousands of staff and roped in big-name sponsors like Xiaomi Corp impresario Lei Jun to drive what he calls his next "major breakthrough" into global business-selling stuff to consumers via its addictive short videos and livestreams. That endeavor will test not just Zhang's magic touch with app creation and ByteDance's AI wizardry, but also investor reception ahead of one of the tech world's most hotly anticipated IPOs.

His startup is already starting to make waves in an industry long controlled by Jack Ma's



Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and JD.com Inc. It sold about \$26 billion worth of make-up, clothing and other merchandise in 2020, achieving in its maiden year what Alibaba's Taobao took six years to accomplish. It's shooting for more than \$185 billion by 2022. Douyin, TikTok's Chinese twin, is expected to contribute more than half of the firm's \$40 billion domestic ad sales this year, driven in part by e-commerce.

"Short video platforms have so much traffic that they can basically do any business," said Shawn Yang, managing director of Blue Lotus Capital Advisors. "Douyin is not only in ads, but also live-streaming, e-commerce, local life services and

search. This has a lot of room for imagination."

A burgeoning e-commerce business could help the firm surpass its \$250 billion valuation when it goes public, countering concerns around Beijing's crackdown on the country's internet behemoths. Preparations are said to be underway for a listing that would be one of the world's most anticipated debuts. While ByteDance won't handle sales or merchandise itself, it hopes to sell more ads to merchants, boost traffic and take a cut of business.

The internet giant is a late entrant to China's social commerce scene, where influencers tout products to fans like a Gen-Z version of the Home Shopping Network.

The format, pioneered by Alibaba as a marketing tool in 2016, developed a life of its own last year when Covid-19 spurred demand for at-home entertainment. Last year, Alibaba's Taobao Live generated over 400 billion yuan (\$62 billion) of gross merchandise value.

ByteDance is counting on its artificial intelligence-driven, interest-based recommendations to help its e-commerce business catch up.

ByteDance's ambitions aren't limited to Alibaba. The firm has also started to let users book hotels and restaurants through Douyin, offering lifestyle services similar to superapps like Meituan and Tencent's WeChat.

Douyin's e-commerce foray in China may offer a road map for TikTok, which has begun testing the waters in online shopping through tie-ups with Walmart Inc and Canadian e-commerce firm Shopify Inc. In December, Zhang told global employees that e-commerce, when combined with live-streaming and short videos, offers an even bigger opportunity outside China. — Bloomberg

Copper just smashed past a record. Here's what you need to know

MARK BURTON MAY 9

Copper soared last week to an all-time high, continuing a sizzling rally that's seen prices double in the past year.

The previous copper record was set in 2011, around the peak of the commodities supercycle sparked by China's rise. This time, investors are betting that copper's vital role in the world's shift to green energy will mean surging demand and even higher prices. Copper futures rose as high as \$10,440 a tonne in London on Friday.

What's the big deal about copper?

Through human history, copper has played a critical role in many of civilization's greatest advances:

from early monetary systems to municipal plumbing, from the rise of trains, planes and cars to the devices and networks that underpin the information age.

The reddish brown metal is mostly unrivalled as an electrical and thermal conductor, while also being durable and easy to work with. Today, a vast array of uses in all corners of heavy industry, construction and manufacturing mean it's a famously reliable indicator for trends in the global economy.

The copper market was one of the first to react as the Covid-19 coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, with prices slumping by more than a quarter between January and March last year. Then as China's unprecedented steps to control the domestic

spread of the virus started to yield results, copper rapidly rebounded—and it hasn't looked back since.

But it's not just China driving the rally. While the country accounts for half of the world's copper consumption and has played an integral part in copper's surge, demand there has actually softened this year. Yet prices continue to drive higher.

Why is copper surging?

It's partly due to evidence of recoveries in other major industrial economies, with manufacturing output surging in places like the US, Germany and Japan.

But investors have also been piling into copper on a bet that global efforts to cut carbon emissions are going to mean the world needs a lot more of the



Explainer

metal, putting a strain on supply. New mine production may be slow to arrive, as mines are hard to find and expensive to develop.

Electric vehicles contain about four times as much copper as a conventional car, and vast amounts of copper wiring will be needed

in roadside chargers to keep them running. Bringing electricity from offshore wind farms to national power grids is also a copper-intensive exercise.

What does it mean for the economy?

There are mounting concerns that the broad rally in everything from lumber to steel will force central bankers to step in to stop inflation in raw-materials markets spiralling out of control.

In turn, the stellar economic rebound that's driving the commodities rally may start to stall as businesses are hit by higher interest rates, compressed margins, and waning demand from consumers.

Could the rally fizzle out?

In the case of copper, there are some signs that spot demand is starting to cool, particularly in China, and some analysts and traders say the record prices aren't justified by today's fundamentals.

The view among policymakers is that the rise in commodities prices will prove short-lived, as consumers will focus their spending on services and experiences as economies open up, easing the strain on demand for commodities-intensive items such as second homes, electronics and appliances seen during lockdown.

For copper though, it's not just about strong demand today. In fact, a lot of expected spending on renewables and electric-vehicle infrastructure is yet to really materialise. When it does, it could

transform the outlook for copper usage in developed countries.

How high could copper go?

Trafigura Group, the world's top copper trader, and Goldman Sachs Group both say prices could hit \$15,000 a tonne in the coming years, on the back of a global surge in demand due to the shift to green energy. Bank of America says \$20,000 could even be possible if drastic issues arise on the supply side.

The copper market itself may also be facing a big shift. Trafigura predicts that demand growth in China will be eclipsed by rising consumption in the rest of the world over the coming decade, in a dramatic reversal of the recent trend. That could help underpin a new

SHORT TAKES

Pakistan on verge of second victory

Harare: Pakistan were on the brink of a second successive innings win against Zimbabwe despite a fighting performance by Regis Chakabva on the third day of the of the second and final on Sunday.

Bad light ended play with Zimbabwe on 220/9 in their follow-on innings, 158 runs short of making Pakistan bat again.

Chakabva made 80 as Zimbabwe made their highest total of a series in which they have been outclassed.

Chakabva followed up his top score of 33 in the first innings by making his team's only half-century in the two matches. Pakistan fast bowler Hasan Ali took a career-best 5/27 as the host nation were bowled out for 132 in the first innings.

Brief scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. vs Zimbabwe 132 (Chakabva 33, Hasan Ali 5/27) & **220/9** (Chakabva 80, Shaheen 4-45, Nauman 5-86).

Sakariya loses father to Covid

Rajkot: Young Saurashtra pacer Chetan Sakariya's father Kanjibhai Sakariya died due to Covid-19 at a hospital in Bhavnagar on Sunday. He was 42 and was battling the infection for the past few days.

The Saurashtra Cricket Association condoled the demise, saying "Everyone at Saurashtra Cricket Association is deeply saddened on the sad demise of cricketer Chetan Sakariya's father."

"...Saurashtra Cricket Association conveys heartfelt condolences to Chetan and prays to the Almighty to give enough strength to everyone in his family to bear the loss and grant eternal peace to the departed noble soul," the cricket body said in a statement. The 22-year-old Chetan played for the Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL. — PTI

Maiden pro bout win for Manpreet

New Delhi: Commonwealth Games silver medal-winning Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra made a positive start in the professional circuit, beating Argentina's Luciano Ramos in his debut bout in Florida, USA. Jangra travelled to USA two months back for training. The boxer won his first professional bout against Ramos in a four round unanimous decision in the super welterweight category on Saturday. Jangra has signed up with Florida-based Pro Box Promotions.

The 27-year-old, who is also a silver medalist from the 2013 Asian Championships, was supposed to fight on March 19 but that bout was put off. "I'm so excited for a great run in the pro ranks and hopefully win a world championship with my team," said the boxer, who is training with American coaches Asa Beard and Marc Farrait. — PTI

Sabalenka wins Madrid Open title

Madrid: Aryna Sabalenka is glad she changed her mind about playing at the Madrid Open. Two weeks after nearly withdrawing from the tournament because of a muscle injury, Sabalenka was standing on center court with the winner's trophy in her hands on Saturday. Sabalenka defeated top-ranked Ash Barty 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 for her 10th WTA title and first on clay. In the men's final, 2018 champion Alexander Zverev will face eighth-seeded Matteo Berrettini.

Sabalenka's victory, coming two weeks after she was hurt in a loss to Barty in the Stuttgart final. "To be honest, after the final in Stuttgart I was injured, I couldn't even move, I really wanted to withdraw from here," she said. — AP

Westbrook does it for Wizards

Los Angeles: Another historic night from Russell Westbrook helped the Washington Wizards to a 133-132 overtime victory over the Indiana Pacers on Saturday.

Westbrook notched the 181st triple-double of his career on Saturday, tying Oscar Robertson for the most in NBA history.

He finished with 33 points, 19 rebounds and 15 assists, draining the go-ahead free-throws with one second left in overtime then blocking a potential game-winning shot from Indiana's Caris LeVert as time expired.

"That's Russell, he's an incredible player and person," said Wizards coach Scott Brooks. — AFP

Maldives mayhem

Bengaluru FC told to leave Male for violating Covid protocols

Male/New Delhi, May 9: It was a chaotic Sunday for Indian football as Bengaluru FC's AFC Cup play-off against Eagles FC was postponed and the team asked to leave Male for violating Covid-19 protocols, while all Group D fixtures in the same event were also put off after ATK Mohun Bagan reported two positive cases.

The Asian Football Confederation did not give any reason for postponing the matches but it is understood that the deadly resurgence of Covid-19 in many Asian countries is behind the decision.

It all started with Bengaluru FC's play-off match against Eagles FC, scheduled here on May 11, being left in doubt after the host country's sports minister asked the ISL side to leave citing breach of Covid-19 protocols.

"Bengaluru FC's 2021 AFC Cup playoff stage clash against Eagles FC has been postponed until further notice, as confirmed by the Asian Football Confederation on Sunday. The club is making all arrangements to get all its players and staff home at the earliest," BFC said in a statement.

"Bengaluru FC would like to place on record an unconditional apology for a health and safety breach, involving one member of staff and two players, in the Maldives, on Saturday," it added.

The exact nature of the violation by BFC, which is captained by India skipper Sunil Chhetri, was not specified but



Bengaluru FC's Sunil Chhetri during a training session in Male. BFC are in the Maldives for the AFC Cup.

— BFC

sports minister Ahmed Mahloof termed it as "unacceptable".

The sentiment was echoed by BFC owner Parth Jindal, who apologised and promised strict action against the errant players and support staff.

"Unacceptable behavior from @bengaluruFC breaching the strict guidelines from HPA (Health Protection Agency) & @theafcdotcom. The club should leave Flag of Maldives immediately as we can't entertain this act,"

Mahloof tweeted from his official handle.

"We have informed FAM that we cannot hold the match, and asked them to make arrangements for @bengaluruFC's departure. We will be in further correspondence with AFC through @MaldivesFA to postpone the group stage."

The minister's tweets came after reports emerged that some players of the side were seen roaming Male's streets in violation of the quarantine protocol.

Also, two ATK Mohun Bagan players — Prabir Das and SK Sahil — tested positive for Covid-19, hours before their group matches in Maldives were postponed by the continental football governing body.

"Participating clubs who have travelled to Maldives will be required to arrange for their return home while adhering to the Covid-19 health and travel protocols put in place by the country," the AFC said in a statement. — PTI

Red Devils delay City's title party

London, May 9: Manchester City's Premier League title celebrations were put on hold again as Manchester United fought back to win 3-1 at Aston Villa on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side missed a chance to seal the title when they lost 2-1 to Chelsea on Saturday.

City could have started the party if second-placed United lost at Villa Park, but their arch-rivals kept the leaders' champagne on ice with a second-half escape act.

Trailing to Bertrand Traore's first half rocket, United equalised through Bruno Fernandes' penalty before Mason Greenwood and Edinson Cavani netted to leave City frustrated.

City, with three matches to play, are now 10 points clear of United, who have four games left.

United host Leicester on Tuesday and Liverpool on Thursday, with a defeat in either of those matches guaranteeing the title for City, who are next in action at Newcastle on Friday.

The Europa League finalists would love to keep City waiting as long as possible as they bid to



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani celebrates after scoring against Aston Villa in an EPL match at Villa Park in Birmingham on Sunday.

— AFP

earn a runners-up finish, which would be their highest end-of-season position since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took charge in December 2018.

But treble-chasing City's blistering form has turned the title race into

a procession since the new year and it is only a matter of time before their coronation is confirmed.

They will have to wait another 48 hours at least due to the latest display of United's fortitude.

Mercedes masterstroke helps Hami deny Max

Barcelona, May 9: Lewis Hamilton claimed his fifth successive Spanish Grand Prix on Sunday ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen after a Mercedes pit-stop masterstroke.

Hamilton moved on to 98 career wins after a surprise second change of tyres hoodwinked Red Bull to lift him 14 points clear of Verstappen in the drivers' standings.

Valtteri Bottas took third with Charles Leclerc's Ferrari in fourth.

Hamilton had set off from pole for the 100th time but was beaten to the first corner by Verstappen, with Leclerc dishing out the same treatment on Bottas on turn two.

On lap eight Yuki



Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the Spanish GP on Sunday.

— AP

Tsunoda's Sunday drive in Catalonia came to a premature end when his Alpha Tauri came to a grinding halt.

Verstappen held off

Villa took the lead in the 24th minute through Traore, who turned sharply in the penalty area and shrugged off Victor Lindelof before smashing a superb strike into the top corner from an acute angle.

But Solskjaer's team have been experts at second-half comebacks this season and Paul Pogba won a 52nd minute penalty when Douglas Luiz needlessly bundled over the United midfielder.

City's Sergio Aguerro had missed a penalty against Chelsea with a risky 'Panenka' chipped effort, but Fernandes was far more clinical as he sent Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez the wrong way from the spot.

Greenwood put United ahead four minutes later as he swivelled past Tyrone Mings on the edge of the area and drove a low finish past Martinez's weak attempted save.

United suffered a blow when their captain Harry Maguire limped off after colliding with Anwar El Ghazi.

But Cavani wrapped up the points with a glancing header from Marcus Rashford's cross in the 87th minute. — AFP

WARNER AND SLATER DENY BAR BRAWL

Male (Maldives), May 9: Star opener David Warner and cricketer-turned-commentator Michael Slater have denied reports of their involvement in a drunken bar brawl in Male, where Australian cricketers competing in the now-suspended IPL are waiting to board a flight home in a few days' time.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, Warner and Slater got into a late night physical altercation after a heated argument at the Taj Coral Resort where they are in quarantine.

But Warner, who captained Sunrisers Hyderabad before being replaced by Kane Williamson just before the suspension of IPL due to multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble, and Slater, also a former Australia opener, said "nothing happened".

"There is absolutely nothing to the rumour mill Buzz. Davie and I are great mates and absolutely zero chance of (having) a fight," Slater was quoted saying by *foxsports.com.au*.

Warner also said: "There has been no drama. I don't know where you get these things from. Unless you were here and have got concrete evidence you can't write anything." — PTI

"Nothing happened."

WRESTLER | MURDER CASE

Police hunt on to trace Sushil

New Delhi, May 9: The Delhi Police recorded the statements of the victims of Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, officials said on Sunday.

The police said the clash took place over vacating a flat in Model Town area.

Two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, who has been named in the FIR in this case, is absconding and efforts are on to trace him. Raids are being conducted in Delhi/NCR and neighbouring states, a police officer said.

The victims alleged that Kumar was present at the spot when the incident took place, he said.

A 23-year-old wrestler died and his two friends got injured after they were allegedly brutally assaulted by other wrestlers inside Chhatrasal Stadium of the city on the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday.

According to the police, the brawl took place between Kumar, Ajay, Prince, Sonu, Sagar, Amit and others in the parking area. Thereafter, police registered the case under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act at the Model Town Police Station.

"The crime scene and all the five vehicles were inspected. During the inspection, a double barrel loaded gun with five live



Sushil Kumar

cartridges was found in one Scorpio and two wooden sticks were also recovered from the spot.

"All the five vehicles and weapons of offense were seized. The crime scene was further inspected by forensic experts of FSL, Rohini," Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (northwest) Gurigbal Singh Sidhu had said.

The police had apprehended one Prince Dalal (24), a resident of Hajaraj in Haryana, and seized one double barrel gun from his possession.

"It was not a case of trespassing. The accused took the victims inside the stadium where they assaulted them in the parking area. Kumar was present at the spot when the incident happened, however, police are investigating his role in the assault," an official source had said. — PTI

NZ PLAYERS REACH HOME AFTER IPL'S SUSPENSION

Auckland, May 9: All New Zealand cricketers and coaches, who were involved in IPL 2021, have arrived home safely by private jets in two groups after the indefinite suspension of the T20 league midway into the season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

They arrived on board a Bombardier Global Express private jet via Tokyo in the first of two chartered flights repatriating the Kiwis after the league was suspended.

On Sunday, former Black Caps captains Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming were among the second group of cricketers to touch down here.

Meanwhile, five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Sunday said that all foreign players and support staff of their team have reached their respective destinations safely.

A total of 14 foreign players and support of MI have left India after the cash-rich tournament had come to a halt on May 4.

PBKS DOMESTIC PLAYERS ARE HOME

All the Indian members of the Punjab Kings team have reached home safely after the suspension of the IPL, the franchise said on Sunday.

"Following the suspension of the IPL 2021, all PBKS team members have reached home safely while a few are quarantining outside India before they head back to their respective countries," the club said in a statement on twitter. — PTI

T20 Cup could be delayed: Chappell

New Delhi, May 9: Australian great Ian Chappell feels the suspension of IPL is a reminder of cricket's vulnerability and does not rule out the Covid-19 pandemic forcing a postponement or shifting of the upcoming T20 World Cup from India.

The 2021 edition of the lucrative T20 league was suspended earlier this week after four players — Sunrisers Hyderabad batsman Wriddhiman Saha, Delhi Capitals spinner Amit Mishra and KKR's Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier — tested positive for Covid-19 in the bio-bubble.

"The suspension of the 2021 IPL tournament because of surging Covid infections and deaths among the public, and a number of participants testing positive, was a reminder of the game's vulnerability," Chappell wrote in his column for *ESPNCricinfo*.

India, which is grappling with a devastating second wave of the pandemic with cases rising by over 4 lakh everyday, is scheduled to host the T20 World Cup in October-November.

"In the current disastrous climate, the suspension of the IPL could also produce a precedent. It

may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved.

— IAN CHAPPELL
Australian legend

may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved.

Chappell recalled a few incidents that led to the disruption of the game in the past. "In the past, tours have been aborted and matches abandoned for a variety of reasons. Many of these involved back stories, some of which were tragic and others amusing."

The 77-year-old recollected how poor weather during the 1970-71 Boxing Day Test between Australia and England led to the first ever

One-Day International. "In 1970-71 the MCG Boxing Day Test between Australia and England was abandoned without a ball being bowled after heavy rain ruined any chance of a competitive match." — PTI

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