

SHORT TAKES

RAIN FORECAST
FOR 75% OF
STATIONS

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier, it was predicted that the monsoons would set in over Kerala on May 31.

Director of IMD, Amaravati, Stella S said the rainfall activity should be in more than 75 per cent of the weather stations in Kerala for declaring the onset of monsoons. Along with other factors like wind direction, wind speed, and quantum of outgoing long wave radiations over specific areas in the equatorial Arabian Sea, the main criterion remains the rainfall over the designated stations.

CHRISTIANS SEEK
AIDING OF ALL
SECTIONSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 30

The Christian fraternity praised the dedication of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy towards fulfilling the election promises by implementing welfare schemes in the two years and sought aiding all sections of society in the next three years.

PHOTO-SHOOT
TURNS TRAGIC,
3 DROWNDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 30

A photo-shoot led to drowning of three youngsters in a water body in Vizag Agency on Sunday. The police are still searching for the missing bodies.

Agency police said a group of 10 friends from different places went to the waterfalls (Guddugummi) located near Olubedda village under Hukumpeta Mandal in Vizag Agency for a photo-shoot and to swim in the water body.

While they were taking the photos, one youngster accidentally slipped into the waters. In an attempt to save him, two more ventured into the waters and they also went missing.

Two of the missing persons are Intermediate second year students while the third is a degree student. They were identified as Mori Niranjan, a native of Bakuru of Hukumpeta mandal, Vinod Kumar and Siva Nagendra Kumar, both from Sanyasampalem of Hukumpeta mandal.

Based on the information, the police rushed to the spot and launched a search operation. However, their efforts proved futile due to sunset.

Locals fear that the missing persons might have drowned. The police appealed to youngsters in the region to stay indoors during curfew timings and not to go for adventure events.

VACATION FOR
UP TO SSC TILL
JUNE 30DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 30

The summer vacations for Classes 1 to 10 functioning under all managements has been extended to June 30 in view of the Coronavirus crisis in the state.

Director of School Education Vadrevu Chinaveerabhadru issued the orders to this effect on Sunday.

Recently, the government postponed SSC exams which were scheduled from June 7. It would review the situation in July month.

According to the order, keeping in view the present situation and since the government decided to postpone the SSC examinations due to the second wave of Covid-19, the summer vacation for teachers and students of Classes I to X for all types schools is extended till June 30. The Director, SCERT, is requested to prepare a detailed academic calendar and the activities to be taken up through various means i.e., DD, radio, YouTube, personal contact through WhatsApp groups etc., for the online education for all classes from June 12 onwards. In case of SSC students, the headmasters concerned have to extend necessary academic support to the students from June 1 itself.

The Coronavirus infection has been gradually decreasing for the past few days in AP and medical experts are expecting the Covid-19 second wave to subside by June last week or July first week and, hence, the government will take a fresh decision about the schools reopening after reviewing the situation in the coming days.



YSRC leaders celebrate with CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy the completion of two years in office, at his camp office in Tadepalli on Sunday.

YSRC: AP has seen 15 years' development in just 2 years

CM successful in assuring people that tomorrow would be even better

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 30

The YSR Congress affirmed on Sunday that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has fulfilled many dreams of the people in the last two years, which had been awaiting implementation in the AP region for the past 15 years.

The YSRC on Sunday celebrated its second anniversary of coming to power in the state. Government adviser on public affairs Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy hoisted the party flag, cut the cake and paid floral tributes to the late chief minister Y.S. Rajasekar Reddy at the party's central office in Tadepalli.

Addressing a press conference, Ramakrishna Reddy said the CM has fulfilled the aspirations of the people and brought about revolutionary changes in the state since 2019. He has been "working tirelessly for the welfare of the people".

Ramakrishna Reddy said the CM has overcome the financial constraints due to the state's bifurcation and the Corona pandemic.

The Chief Minister has set up village secretariats and completed several schemes within the stipulated time frame, extended the benefits to all the eligible. He has implemented schemes like the YSR Rythu Bharosa, crop insurance, input subsidy, interest free loans for farmers and also one for

Gold standard set in AP governance, say leaders

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 30

Marking the second anniversary of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy as the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, the Kurnool unit of YSR Congress said 31 schemes have been granted to the district, touching upon all the sections of the society.

It was indeed an 'epoch-making victory' that has brought revolutionary changes in the governance, with the poorest of the poor being the target of people's welfare government, said B.Y. Ramaiah, a senior leader of YSRC. The last two years were a "golden rule" as money directly reached the accounts of the public. It is a Gold Standard, he said.

Panyam MLA Katasani Rambhupal Reddy said the major benefit to the district was declaring it as the Judicial Capital of the state.

The government earmarked 2,000 acres at

financially supporting women self-help groups.

Reddy said the CM has been successful in assuring people that tomorrow would be even better. "The

Jagannath Gattu on the outskirts of Kurnool for the purpose of developing a judicial complex with complete infrastructure. The MLA further said that bringing transparency in tenders, the Jagan Mohan Reddy government called for reverse tendering for the Vedavathi project, RDS, and Owk tunnel and conserved precious money.

Reddy said Kurnool airport has been named after Uyyalavada Narasimha Reddy, fulfilling the aspiration of the district. Taking the governance to the doorsteps of the people, the government opened 845 Sachivalayams where 545 services are provided to the public.

Health was accorded top priority by the government as ₹500 crore was sanctioned for improving infrastructure at Kurnool Government General Hospital. School buildings were also given a facelift under the Naadu-Nedu programme, the MLA added.

CM has revamped the education sector, ensuring better education. He will be laying the foundation stone for 14 medical colleges in the state tomorrow by online video-mode.

JAGAN WILL BE
CM FOR ANOTHER
40 YEARS: MLADC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 30

Kamalapuram legislator P. Ravindranath Reddy said that Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will be the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for another 40 years.

Leaders cut a cake at the district party office here on Sunday to mark the two years completion of the YSR Congress government.

Ravindranath Reddy said that Jagan Mohan Reddy was a young leader with a good vision and one who implemented welfare schemes as promised during the financial crisis due to the corona pandemic. He said that Jagan Mohan Reddy would be a competent administrator like his father.

YSRC activists and followers, under the leadership of Jagan Mohan Reddy, are striving for a better Andhra Pradesh," he said.

MLA DISTRIBUTES
100 PUSH CARTS
TO POOR PEOPLEDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 30

Marking the occasion of completion of two-year rule of the Jagan Mohan Reddy government, Srikalahasti MLA Biyyapu Madhusudhan Reddy distributed 100 pushcarts worth ₹10,000 each to poor vendors free of cost in his constituency on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, the MLA heaped praises on the Chief Minister for ruling the state effectively and providing welfare to all sections of people, despite several hardships in his way. "In order to mark Jagan's good governance and his commitment to serve the poor, today we have distributed nearly 100 pushcarts to poor vendors. This initiative helps in decentralising the vegetable and fruit stalls at the town market, where huge crowds are coming to purchase vegetables and fruits almost every day, during the curfew relaxation time," he said.

The MLA hoped that the vendors from market would cover every street in the town.

Jagan has been giving top priority to both welfare and development activities, he said.

Many orphans miss
₹10L Covid aid: TDPATHRI RAJASEKHAR |
DC
NELLORE, MAY 30

While praising the government aid of ₹10 lakh each for the children who lost their parents to Covid as well as ₹15,000 toward funeral expenses to families of Covid victims, TD state spokesperson Anam Venkataramana Reddy said the benefit would have reached many children but for underreporting of Covid deaths by the government.

"Both the schemes are of no use to a majority of children who lost their parents to Covid as the government downplayed the real figures of Covid

deaths to showcase that they are containing the deadly virus," he alleged.

According to the TD leader, the district administration showed 302 Covid deaths between March and May this year, which means 3.3 deaths per day in the entire district, but the rush at graveyards contradicted the government figures. A grave injustice was done to the poor, as a result, he alleged.

Referring to the announcement of Prime Minister of ₹10 lakh deposit for orphaned kids, he took a dig at the state government for claiming it as its own scheme even while not recording all the deaths.

Covid rendering
children orphansDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 30

Covid-19 virus played havoc with many families, snatching both parents of some children and rendering them orphans.

In some cases, one of the parents is gone. If the deceased happens to be the breadwinner or mother, the future of the children would be bleak.

Officials identified 17 children who have become orphans by losing their both father and mother while 206 children lost either their mother or father. Covid-19 also belied the hopes and dreams of parents about their children.

The state government has announced ₹10 lakh to each orphan child. The amount will be deposited in the name of the orphaned child when he or she attains age 25. The guardian can avail the interest money to educate and help shape the future of such kids.

Parents of an 11-year-old girl wanted to see her daughter as doctor. But, her father Vaddi Babji (lorry driver) and mother Achutha Kumari of Thimmapuram have died of Covid-19, leaving their daughter an orphan.

"I will look after my granddaughter till I am

alive," said Babji's father Vaddi Subba Rao. East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy told the girl that she would be a doctor and the government would help her get good education.

When relatives brought two boys, five-year-old and two-year-old, to the collectorate, even some of the officials were in tears. Their father Peruvalli Rajesh was working as a security guard in a paper mill at Rajamahendravaram. He had shifted his family to Kontha-muru village from Gokavaram for the education of his two sons. But he and his wife Rani died of Covid.

His brother P. Kumar Babu, a painter, is looking after the two kids. Muralidhar Reddy said that these two kids will be given ₹10 lakh each for their education and their future career.

Meanwhile, the women and child welfare department has issued an advisory to local officials to pay ₹500 for children under the sponsorship programme.

ICDS officer Venkat said the department is making all arrangements for the welfare of the orphans. ICDS is processing necessary documents of such kids and their parents for the aid scheme.

Confinement of
Bonigi lamentedDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 30

Senior TD leader Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy lamented the confinement of Bonigi Anandaiah at a time when people have placed him on a highest pedestal, treating him like a god.

In a letter addressed to Anandaiah on Sunday, Somireddy said his name is echoing all over the country and people from all walks of life are hailing his concoction irrespective of political affiliations.

"People are feeling sad for constraining you under the pretext of security and it is unfortunate that they are denying freedom which is enjoyed even by the prisoners. In fact, the entire Krishnapatnam is behind you and they are ready to provide protection to you even if the government

fails to extend the security cover," he wrote.

The former minister said that there is a worry over his health among people after noticing the pressure being applied on him by some vested interests.

Somireddy said that keeping him in a private building, which is equipped with a huge kitchen, makes it seem, "your medicine will be distributed to people only after fulfilling the requirement of ruling party leaders, their followers, and officers. You will be freed only after the completion of this process."

Right from Vice President of India to district-level leaders, everyone is hailing Anandaiah but unfortunately Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is yet to open his mouth, Somireddy said in the letter.

Jagan has committed 96 crimes in two years: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 30

TD state president K. Atchannaidu alleged that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had committed 96 crimes in his two-year rule. Releasing a booklet 'Rendellalo Vidhwamsam' (destruction to two years) here on Sunday, Atchannaidu said that after coming to power, Jagan Mohan Reddy began his rule with a destructive attitude unlike others. He started off by demolishing Praja Vedika and continues to demolish properties of

people who are critical of his government.

He said JCB, ACB and PCB became his tagline to take on the Opposition. He had taken over CID completely and had unleashed terror among Opposition leaders, he alleged.

He said that Reddy drove the state into a debt-trap of one lakh crore and each individual in the state now has ₹1 lakh debt on his head, he said.

"Had he allowed completion of Amaravati, the state would have acquired ₹2 lakh crore worth lands," the TD leader said. On Polavaram, Atcha-

naidu said that his leader N. Chandrababu Naidu had ensured sanction of ₹52,000 crore but Reddy succeeded in getting only ₹26,000 crore. In the name of reverse tendering, the CM allotted works to people known to him. His promise of completing the project by June 1 remains a distant dream.

Alleging that the CM was responsible for the death of construction workers, who were deprived of livelihood, Atchannaidu said during the TD rule, sand was sold for ₹1,500 for a tractor-load, which today costs ₹5,000.

POSITIVE NEWS

With 94 deaths in 24 hours, the toll has touched 10,832

Covid cases continue to decrease in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 30

Coronavirus cases continue to decrease in Andhra Pradesh with 13,400 new Covid-19 infections registered in the past 24 hours on Sunday. With 94 deaths, the toll has touched 10,832. Earlier 20,000 to 22,000 new infections were reported across the 13 districts every day. The decrease is raising hopes of an early containment of the second wave.

As many as 21,133 persons recovered on Sunday,

taking the overall tally to 15,08,515. Of the total 16,85,142 cases, around 1,65,795 are active cases. The daily positivity rate of 84,232 samples tested on the previous day was 15.91 per cent, which is the lowest in the last one month. The overall positivity rate of the 1.91 crore samples tested so far is 8.79 per cent.

East Godavari reported the single day highest of 2,598 infections followed by Chittoor with 1,971, Anantapur 1,215, and Visakhapatnam 1,054



Police checks documents during curfew in Vizag.

while West Godavari reported 968 new infections. Krishna registered 858 new cases followed by Guntur 848, Prakasam 838,

Kurnool 712, Kadapa 701, Nellore 652, Srikakulam 623 and single day lowest cases of 362 registered in Vizianagaram district.

The highest single day deaths of 14 were registered in Chittoor district, followed by nine deaths each in Prakasam and West Godavari districts, eight each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam districts. Six deaths each were reported in Krishna and Vizianagaram districts, five each in Kurnool and

Nellore districts and four each in Guntur and Kadapa districts.

East Godavari is on top in with a total number of 2,23,713 Covid-19 cases followed by Chittoor with 1,89,806, Guntur 1,49,130, West Godavari 1,40,511, Anantapur 1,37,754, Visakhapatnam 1,36,621, Nellore 1,17,679, Kurnool 1,14,716, Srikakulam 1,06,753, Prakasam 1,06,761, Kadapa 94,410, Krishna 88,331 and the lowest of 74,062 was registered in Vizianagaram district.

SHORT TAKES

DELHI IDENTIFIES 32 KIDS ORPHANED DUE TO COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

The Delhi Commission For Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) has identified 32 children who were orphaned during the Covid-19 pandemic in the national capital.

Ten more children have been identified who have lost their single parent to the viral disease, DCPCR chairman Anurag Kundu said.

He said a survey was started earlier this month to trace children in similar distress. "Sixteen children have been identified who lost their parents during the second wave. We have been enquiring about them whether they require medical attention, rations, counselling, immunisation etc," said DCPCR member Ranjana Prasad.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had on May 14 said the Delhi government will bear the cost of education and upbringing of children who were orphaned during the pandemic. The government has also planned to give ₹2,500 per month to such children, and a proposal is likely to be tabled before the Cabinet soon for approval, a senior official said.

NAVY CONVERTS ITS CHOPPER INTO AIR AMBULANCE

Panaji, May 30: The Indian Navy has augmented its capacity to evacuate critical patients even in unfavourable weather conditions by fitting a medical intensive care unit (MICU) on-board an Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) at Goa's naval air station INS Hansa, an official said.

The MICU has been installed on-board ALH Mk-III from INAS 323 at INS Hansa by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), a naval spokesman said in a media statement issued here.

"With ALH Mk-III, an all-weather aircraft, being equipped with MICU, the Indian Navy can now undertake medical evacuation of critical patients by air even in unfavourable weather conditions," he said.

The MICU has two sets of defibrillators, multipara monitors, ventilator, oxygen support as well as infusion and syringe pumps, he added.

"It also has a suction system to clear secretions in the mouth or airway of the patient. The system can be operated on aircraft power supply and also has a battery back up of four hours," the spokesman said.

MANY THINGS THAT HELP TO KICK THE BUTT

DR PAWAN GUPTA

Most often people quit tobacco only to relapse faster than they had quit. It leads them to frustration and loss of confidence. On this World No-Tobacco Day, we must understand how a person gets addicted to tobacco.

Most people take to smoking because of peer pressure or experimentation. But it, later on, leads to frustration and a desire to quit, mostly due to health reasons. The only wish is someone to help quit successfully.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) had recognised tobacco as a complex disease that needs treatment. All tobacco users will have some other disease. So it would be better to commit early to quit smoking.

So why do people find it so difficult to quit smoking? There are two main reasons. One, nicotine affects the brain causing physical dependence, leading to severe cravings. Two, it is the psychological misconception of tobacco users that they can quit with willpower alone.

For quitting smoking, one needs to have a proper assessment and grading of tobacco addiction, which will help a Certified Tobacco Cessation Specialist to finalise an appropriate treatment required. A tool — an Android app ICAN-CARE — is available to assess the willpower, addiction level and type of tobacco dependence of the person.

One can follow the ICANCaRe 7Ds of quitting tobacco by drinking plenty of water, deep breathing exercise, delay, distract, diet, discuss and use drugs for comorbidities and symptom relief.

— *The author is a director of surgical oncology at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Vaishali, Patparganj and Noida.*

CENTRAL VISTA WORK: HC VERDICT TODAY

New Delhi, May 30: The Delhi High Court will decide on Monday whether to allow the continuation of the Central Vista project work during the prevailing Covid pandemic.

A bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice Jyoti Singh, which had been hearing a plea for suspending the ongoing construction work during the Covid pandemic, has fixed May 31 for delivery of its judgement on it, the high court's cause list revealed on Saturday.

The court had reserved its judgement on May 17 on the joint plea by Anya Malhotra, a translator, and Sohail Hashmi, a historian and documentary filmmaker.

The two had contended in their plea that the project was not an essential activity and can be put on hold for time being. During the May 17 hearing, the Centre had termed the plea as a "facade" or a "disguise", aimed at stalling the project.

The petitioners on the other hand had contended they were only interested in the safety of workers at the site and citizens living in the area. — PTI



A medical worker inoculates a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to a beneficiary at a vaccination camp on the complex of Golden Temple in Amritsar on Sunday. — PTI

NDRF gets nod for mini O2 plants

Home ministry finds sudden rise in oxygen demand, lack of transportation behind crisis

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

Taking serious note of the acute shortage of oxygen faced across the country during the lethal second wave of the Corona pandemic Union home ministry in a major initiative will soon allow the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to have their own "cryogenic oxygen containers and mini oxygen plants" that can be set up at any required location within a few hours.

The NDRF is a highly specialised nodal agency of the Government to deal with any natural or man made disaster. Home ministry sources said the government had taken the oxygen shortage in the country extremely seriously and was putting in place a robust mechanism to avoid a repeat of such a situation in future.

Officials claimed a detailed analysis of the oxygen shortage revealed that apart from the sudden increase in the demand the other main reason was transportation of oxygen. Officials added that there is no dearth of oxygen production in the country and the main problem was of transportation.

"Adequate oxygen was available across various industrial plants in the country. But the main problem was that of transportation since highly specialised tankers are required for its transportation and not enough of them were available in the country. Now this problem would be resolved before the anticipated third wave which is likely to strike sometime in September or October," an official said.

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 30

In a first in the country, a cargo aircraft from China carrying over 1,350 oxygen cylinders landed at the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) in Odisha capital here on Sunday.

Informing about it, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's chief advisor Western Odisha Development Council (WODC) Chairman Asit Tripathy said the incident was first-of-its-kind for the country.

ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India), one of the largest steel makers of the world, delivered the cylinders to the Odisha government. The delivery of 1,350 oxy-

● **ARCELORMITTAL NIPPON** Steel India, one of the largest steel makers of the world, delivered the cylinders.

gen cylinders to the Odisha government was the first tranche of a consignment of 5,150 cylinders pledged by AM/NS India to be given as a part of its contribution to bring relief to victims of Covid-19 across the state. Describing it as a step ahead in oxygen security, Tripathy said the Chief Minister had directed that no patient shall suffer due to lack of oxygen.

The state government is ensuring efficient distribution of oxygen cylinders to all medical institutions and developing reserves. In two months,

more than 14,000 additional oxygen cylinders were added. With today's import and further consignments, the situation will become better, the official said.

Sunday's consignment for the government of Odisha extends AM/NS India's support for Covid-19 to six states across India. It has been supporting relief work in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana. The company has built a 250-bed Covid hospital in Gujarat which is now being expanded to 1,000 beds. It has been providing daily supply of 250 metric tonnes of liquid medical oxygen to destinations in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana.

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 30

With the Coronavirus cases on rise in rural areas of the state, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has announced a new drive "Corona-Mukta Gaon" (Corona-free village) in Maharashtra. If villages in the state become corona-free, the entire state will inevitably get rid of the virus, he said on Sunday.

The cases in Maharashtra state are on decline in recent days. However, while the Covid-19 pandemic in urban areas has seen a drop, the rural areas have witnessed a gradual rise. The new drive is aimed at bringing the cases in rural areas under control.

While announcing the corona-free village drive

in a virtual address, CM specially mentioned the villages in Ahmednagar and Solapur districts, which have managed to become free of pandemic. "People like Popatrao, Ruturaj Deshmukh, Komal Tai have made commendable efforts in eradicating Covid from their villages. If we fight the pandemic in a disciplined manner like them, we can also make villages in the state corona-free," he said.

The CM also extended the lockdown-like restrictions in the state till June 15.

However, the restrictions will not be uniform throughout the state, but they will vary in cities and districts according to the positivity rate and the availability of oxygen beds, he added.

SII: Can supply 10 cr doses in June

New Delhi, May 30: Serum Institute of India (SII) has informed the government that it will be able to manufacture and supply nine to 10 crore doses of Covishield in June, official sources said on Sunday amid complaint by states about the shortage of anti-coronavirus vaccine jabs.

In a recent letter to Union home minister Amit Shah, SII said its employees have been working round the clock in spite of various challenges

because of the pandemic.

"We are pleased to inform that in the month of June we will be able to manufacture and supply nine to 10 crore doses of our Covishield vaccine to the country as compared to our production capacity of 6.5 crore doses in May," Prakash Kumar Singh, the director of government and regulatory affairs at SII, said in the letter.

Singh also thanked Shah for his "valuable guidance and continuous support" at various stages of their

endeavour to make India "aatmanirbhar" (self-sufficient) in Covid-19 vaccines and making it available for the people of the country.

"Serum Institute of India has always been sincerely concerned about the protection of the citizens of our country and world at large from Covid-19. Under the leadership of our CEO, Adar C. Poonawalla, our team have been working relentlessly shoulder to shoulder with our government to fight the Covid-19 pandemic,"

he said in the letter.

"We assure you that with the support of the Government of India and under your kind guidance, we are trying our best by utilising all of our resources to increase our production capacity of Covishield in the coming month also." In early May, SII had communicated to the Centre that production of Covishield would be ramped up to 6.5 crore in June, seven crore in July and 10 crore each in August and September. — PTI

STRANGE | FEARS

Villagers afraid that swab strip used for test would infect them Tribals flee into forest to avoid virus test

Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand), May 30: Residents of a tribal village here ran to a nearby forest when a team of district health workers came to their doorsteps recently to test them for Covid-19.

Kuta Chaurani village is inhabited by Banarwats — an endangered tribe. The shy tribals fled to the adjoining forest on getting information about the arrival of a Covid testing team in their village on Friday, Didihat SDM K.N. Goswami said on Sunday.

"While we could test residents of Aultari and Jamtari villages, those living in Kuta Chaurani fled to the forest, the SDM said. The Banarwat community was declared a primitive tribe on the verge of extinction by the Government of India in 1967.

"Over 500 members of this highly endangered tribe are living in eight localities of Didihat sub division. We had sent our corona testing team to Aultari, Jamtari and Kuta Chaurani villages to test them. A total of 191 members of the community from Aultari and Jamtari came forward to undergo the test but residents of Kuta Chaurani fled to the forests to avoid tests," Goswami said.

"The villagers were afraid that the swab strip taken for the test would infect them," the SDM said.

Jagat Singhling Rajwar, an elderly member of the community from Kuta Chaurani village, said the swab tester could cause further infection to them.

● **THE ADMINISTRATION** has also been informed about the poor conditions in which the members of the endangered tribal community are forced to live with no work for them due to the Coronavirus lockdown, Sanju Pant, coordinator of Didihat youth society, said.

"We are ready to go for a health check, take medicines but do not agree to let the strip enter our body," Rajwar said.

According to the SDM, his team has persuaded some literate members of the community to create awareness among the locals about the necessity of the tests.

"We will make another attempt to test them in two-three days," Goswami

said. Sanju Pant, coordinator of Didihat youth society, said corona kits have been distributed among some members of the community after taking them into confidence.

The administration has also been informed about the poor conditions in which the members of the endangered tribal community are forced to live with no work for them due to the Coronavirus lockdown, Pant said.

"We have requested the administration to distribute consumer goods other than food material to the community members," he said.

The SDM said packets of spices, edible oil and other essential items besides food packets have been distributed among them for

free. According to Didihat youth society sources, the community is facing dire shortage of essential goods as there is no earning for them due to the lockdown.

"If their plight is not addressed, they might face hunger and death," Pant said.

SDM Didihat said he has written to the block development officer of Didihat and the district development officer of Pithoragarh to give members of the community work under the MGNREGA.

"We will not let the community face hunger. We maintain a vigil on them through our revenue officials lest they should face any shortage of food," he said. — PTI

STAN SWAMY TESTS POSITIVE FOR COVID-19

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 30

Stan Swamy has reportedly tested positive for the Coronavirus infection after he was moved to a hospital. Swamy, who is in custody in connection with the 2018 Bhima Koregaon case, was moved to the private hospital following the directives given by the Bombay high court on Friday.

Swamy is amongst the 16 persons arrested in connection with the Elgar Parishad case. Soon after he was remanded to jail custody, he had to be shifted to the jail hospital and he has personally complained to the Bombay High Court that his health is continuously deteriorating since he has been shifted to jail.

He had stated before the court that he was able to walk, write, eat and do all of his work by himself, but with every passing day in hospital, he has become so weak that he needs help to do his day-to-day work.

According to one of Swamy's friends, his co-prisoners were assisting him to do his day-to-day work, the jail authorities should get all those tested who had come in contact with Swamy.

During hearing on his interim bail plea on health grounds before the high court he had told judges that he didn't wanted to get admitted to any hospital, however, later he agreed to go to hospital and at the directions of the Bombay HC he was shifted to Holy Family Hospital, where he has been found to be positive for Covid-19.

LABOUR MINISTRY DECLARES MORE EPFO, ESIC SOPS

New Delhi, May 30: The ministry of labour and employment on Sunday announced additional benefits for workers through social securities schemes run by the EPFO and the ESIC amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

These benefits include pension for dependents of insured persons with Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) who died due to Covid-19 and hike in maximum sum assured under the group insurance scheme Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (EDLI), run by Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), to ₹7 lakh from ₹6 lakh.

"The ministry of labour and employment has announced additional benefits for workers through ESIC and EPFO schemes to address the fear and anxiety of workers about wellbeing of their family members due to increase in incidences of death due to Covid-19 pandemic," a ministry statement said.

Enhanced social security is sought to be provided to the workers without any additional cost to the employer, it added. — PTI

Lockdown lifted partially in J&K

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MAY 30

The Jammu and Kashmir authorities have announced partial lifting of 'Corona curfew' in the Union Territory from Monday morning.

While 50 per cent shops and other businesses will be allowed to remain open on alternate days from Monday, the public transport can resume services with half passenger capacity.

However, a complete lockdown will remain in force at weekends — from Friday evenings to Monday mornings — till further orders. J&K's all twenty districts were brought under 'Corona curfew' from April 30 in view of an alarming

surge in Covid-19 deaths and fresh positive cases.

Also, the night curfew will remain in force in entire UT from 8 pm to 7 am next day.

"There shall be a complete 'Corona curfew' (during night time and weekends) with no movement of people except for permissible activities only at the time of curfew except essential and emergency services, movement, work and essential supplies shall remain exempted subject to production of wedding cards / ID cards, etc. and wholesalers, fruit and sabzi mandies may also remain open as necessary in a regulated manner to ensure provision of essential supplies", said an official order.

SHORT TAKES

ONE KILLED IN PLANE CRASH IN UTAH

Eden, May 30: One man died and another man suffered severe burns when their single-engine aircraft crashed Saturday morning near the Powder Mountain area near Eden in northern Utah, authorities said.

The National Transportation Safety Board said it is investigating the crash of the Cessna 172S.

It's not clear why the plane went down.

Authorities said the injured man was transported by air to the University of Utah burn center.

The plane had left Ogden's Hinkley Airport not long before the crash.

The crash resulted in a small fire, but officials say the crash site was cold and wet so the fire was quickly extinguished.

PLANE CRASHES INTO LAKE, 7 BELIEVED DEAD

Smyrna (US), May 30: A small jet carrying seven people crashed into a Tennessee lake on Saturday, and authorities indicated that no one on board survived. The Cessna C501 crashed into Percy Priest Lake near Smyrna after taking off from a nearby airport about 11 am, the Federal Aviation Administration said in a statement. Rutherford County rescue crews were still at the scene of the crash late Saturday and planned to work through the night, Rutherford County Fire Rescue Capt. Joshua Sanders said at a news conference.

He indicated that there were no survivors. "Our efforts have transitioned from a rescue effort to that of a recovery effort. ... We are no longer ... looking for live victims at this point," Sanders said.

He said none of the names of the victims would be released until their families had been notified. Earlier Saturday, officials confirmed that at least one person had died in the crash.

CHINESE CRAFT DOCKS WITH ORBITAL STATION

Beijing, May 30: An automated spacecraft docked with China's new space station carrying fuel and supplies for its future crew, the Chinese space agency announced.

Tianzhou-2 spacecraft reached the Tianhe station eight hours after blasting off from Hainan, an island in the South China Sea, China Manned Space said. It carried space suits, living supplies and equipment and fuel for the station.

Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, is third and largest orbital station launched by China's increasingly ambition space programme. The station's core module was launched April 29. The space agency plans a total of 11 launches through the end of next year to deliver two more modules for the 70-ton station, supplies and a three-member crew.

China was criticised for allowing part of the rocket that launched the Tianhe to fall back to Earth uncontrolled. There was no indication about what would happen to the rocket from Saturday's launch.

Beijing doesn't participate in the International Space Station, largely due to US objections.

TIGRAY WAR: ETHIOPIANS FLAY U.S. SANCTIONS

Kampala, May 30: Thousands of Ethiopians gathered in the nation's capital Sunday to protest outside pressure on the government over its brutal war in Tigray.

Protesters at the rally in Addis Ababa carried banners that criticised the United States and others in the international community who are voicing concern over atrocities in Tigray, where Ethiopian forces are hunting down the region's ousted and now-fugitive leaders.

Troops from neighbouring Eritrea are fighting in Tigray on the side of Ethiopian government forces, in defiance of international calls for their withdrawal.

But the protesters in Addis Ababa carried placards that said "Ethiopian young people denounce the western intervention."

Others said Ethiopia's sovereignty was at stake. The US said last week it has started restricting visas for government and military officials of Ethiopia and Eritrea, who are seen as undermining efforts to resolve the fighting in Tigray, home to an estimated 6 million of Ethiopia's 110 million people.



People on Boscombe beach, as the holiday weekend is expected to bring blue skies and widespread sunshine, in Boscombe, England, on Sunday. The holiday weekend and relaxation of Coronavirus restrictions has enabled many to visit the beach, as warm weather spreads across the region. — AP

More US states ease rules as vax rates rise

Infections fall just in time for Memorial Day weekend

Providence, May 30: Just in time for Memorial Day weekend, more US cities and states are shrugging off lingering Covid-19 restrictions as vaccination rates rise and the number of infections falls.

Massachusetts lifted a mask requirement Saturday, a day after New Jersey dropped its mandate. In New York City and Chicago, officials reopened public beaches, though winds and cool temperatures kept crowds away.

"Welcome back, Chicago," Mayor Lori Lightfoot said in a video announcement. The lakefront is open. "Chicago's Navy Pier also reopened retail stores and restaurants, carnival rides, and tour boats and cruises after the pandemic forced months-long closures at the busy tourist destination."

It's one more sign of progress that reflects increasingly positive health data. On Saturday, Illinois' Department of Public Health reported 802 new confirmed and probable infections, the second-lowest one-day total in the last six months.

For businesses nationwide, the improving outlook and long holiday weekend offered a chance to welcome customers back to in-person shopping. Midtown Scholar Bookstore in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, opened its doors to customers for the first time in nearly 14 months Friday. Masks are still required.

The business had switched to internet orders, sidewalk sales and virtual author events to survive the pandemic.

We had to get creative, we had to pivot, store manager Alex Brubaker said.

— AP

Rio De Janeiro, May 30: Tens of thousands of people in Brazil staged another day of protest against President Jair Bolsonaro, in particular for his chaotic handling of the pandemic, which has claimed more than 461,000 lives here. In downtown Rio de Janeiro, some 10,000 people wearing masks marched through the streets, with some chanting "Bolsonaro genocide" or "Go away Bolsonaro."

Similar rallies were held in other major cities, the

latest in a wave of anger against Bolsonaro that began months ago. After the United States, Brazil has the world's second highest Coronavirus death toll.

At the outset of the pandemic, the far right Bolsonaro dismissed Covid-19 as "a little flu" and as the death toll has risen steadily he has gone on to infuriate people in other ways, opposing stay-at-home measures and masks, touting ineffective medications, refusing offers of vaccines, and failing to anticipate oxygen shortages that left patients to suffocate.

One of the themes of the rally Saturday was how many lives might have been saved if the Bolsonaro government had started Brazil's vaccination drive earlier. The drive is going slowly and has sputtered frequently for lack of supplies.

"We must stop this government. We must say 'enough is enough,'" businessman Omar Silveira said at the Rio rally.

— AFP

PM TO UPDATE SINGAPOREANS ON VIRUS FIGHT

Singapore, May 30: Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Sunday he will share his government's plan on how to combat the Covid-19 pandemic while slowly reopening the country for business in a speech to be broadcast on Monday.

The prime minister said the Covid-19 restrictions were working and the government was taking strict measures to keep Singaporeans safe from the deadly virus.

"Thank you for staying home and complying with the guidelines," said Prime Minister Lee while announcing his address to the nation in a Facebook post on Sunday.

— PTI

Vax mandates: US hospital sued

Houston, May 30: A hospital in the US has been sued by over 100 staffers for turning them into Covid-19 vaccine "guinea pigs" by mandating them to get the shot. The plaintiffs filed suit against Houston Methodist Hospital Friday, the latest group of workers to challenge mandatory inoculations at essential workplaces.

Attorney Jared Woodfill said he is representing 117 workers. The lawsuit states that for the first time in US history, an employer is forcing its employees to be vaccinated "with an experimental Covid-19 mRNA gene modification injection" or be fired.

The lawsuit cited that

the US Food and Drug Administration issued its first emergency use authorisation for Covid-19 in December 2020, but the vaccines are awaiting full FDA approval and licensing, which will likely take months for the agency to review additional data.

The complaint cited that forcing employees to get the vaccine violates Nuremberg Code, a medical ethics code that bans forced medical experiments and mandates voluntary consent. "Methodist Hospital is forcing its employees to be human 'guinea pigs' as a condition for continued employment," the lawsuit states.

— PTI

Call for action, inclusion at Seoul climate summit

Seoul, May 30: World leaders on Sunday called for more action and inclusion of all countries in the global drive towards a cleaner and greener planet at a climate summit hosted virtually by South Korea. Climate change is a major threat to global growth, with perils ranging from declines in crop yields, extreme weather that devastates tourist economies, disease outbreaks and other catastrophes that would sap productivity.

South Korea — which recently announced plans to cut finance for international coal projects — is seeking a bigger role in the global initiative to go green. "South Korea will play a responsible role as a bridging nation between developing and advanced nations," said President Moon Jae-in as he opened the 2021 Partnering for Green Growth and the Global Goals 2030, or P4G, summit.

The two-day summit is the second of its kind following the inaugural meeting held in Copenhagen in 2018, and is focused on public-private partnerships, especially in develop-

ing countries. Advanced nations have laid out ambitious emissions-cutting goals in recent months, as well as plans to ultimately go carbon neutral by 2050.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called on the countries to phase out their dependence on fossil fuels, warning climate change is threatening people's lives and the economy as much as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier this month Germany tightened its targets to reduce CO2 emissions — including a 65 percent cut in emissions by 2030 — after a landmark ruling by the country's top court declared a flagship climate protection law "insufficient".

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said coun-

tries must now deliver on their green pledges.

"It's a great start, but let's not pat ourselves on the back just yet because our planet and our people need more," he said.

"We need governments that will not just make promises on climate and nature but match those words with deeds."

World leaders committed under the 2015 Paris accord to keeping the global temperature increase to under two degrees Celsius — and ideally closer to 1.5 degrees C — by 2050.

Yet many of the largest emitters have so far failed to keep up their commitments and countries have not even agreed on a unified rulebook governing how the Paris agreement works in practice.

The UN says that emissions must fall nearly eight percent annually to keep 1.5C in play — equivalent to the emissions saved during the pandemic every single year through 2030.

World leaders also stressed the importance of making sure that poorer countries are not left out in the global initiative to go green.

CHINA FRICTION IN MORRISON ARDERN TALKS

Christchurch, May 30: Growing friction with China and how to reopen borders after the pandemic will likely be among the topics discussed by the leaders of Australia and New Zealand in their first face-to-face meeting since the Coronavirus outbreak began.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison arrived in the tourist resort of Queenstown for an overnight visit Sunday. He greeted his New Zealand counterpart Jacinda Ardern with a traditional Maori hongi, in which the pair pressed noses together. Morrison is the first major world leader to visit New Zealand since both countries shut their borders last year to contain the virus.

The neighbouring countries opened a quarantine-free travel bubble last month, although a recent outbreak of the virus in Melbourne has prompted New Zealand to suspend the travel bubble with Victoria state.

Morrison's visit came as New Zealand was dealing with extensive flooding in the Canterbury region following heavy rains. Video footage showed one farmer being rescued by helicopter from a raging river, while other swelling rivers threatened to flood thousands of homes. — AP

INDIAN GETS 10-YEAR UAE GOLDEN VISA

Dubai, May 30: An Indian student has received the UAE's coveted 10-year Golden Visa, which is mostly reserved for prominent global personalities, for her merit and excellent academic credentials, according to a media report.

Tasneem Aslam from Kerala received the Golden Visa in the exceptional student category and is allowed to stay in the country till 2031, *Khaleej Times* reported.

The UAE government in 2019 implemented a new system for long-term residence visas, enabling foreigners to live, work and study in the UAE without the need of a national sponsor. These golden visas are issued for five or 10 years and will be renewed automatically.

This is one of the best moments in my life. I feel privileged to achieve this and I am thankful to Almighty Allah. My parents support has been enormous, and Insha Allah I hope to sponsor them in near future, Tasneem said.

Tasneem studied Islamic Sharia from Al Qasimia University in Sharjah and topped her class with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.94 on 4. — PTI



In this image released Sunday by Rebecca Fulton, Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Carrie Johnson pose together for a wedding photo in the garden of 10 Downing Street after their wedding on Saturday. Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds are newlyweds, according to an announcement saying they were married Saturday during a small private ceremony in London. — Rebecca Fulton via AP

Boris, Carrie wed in pvt ceremony

London, May 30: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his fiancée Carrie Symonds married Saturday in a small private ceremony in London, his Downing Street office said Sunday.

Johnson's office confirmed reports in the *Mail on Sunday* and the *Sun* that the couple wed at the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral in front of a small group of friends and family.

The *Sun* said senior staff in Johnson's 10 Downing St. office were unaware of the wedding plans. Under current Coronavirus restrictions in England, no more than 30 people can attend a wedding. Johnson, 56, and 33-year-old Symonds, an environmental advocate, announced their engagement in February 2020 and have

a son together, one-year-old Wilfred.

The marriage is Symonds' first and Johnson's third. He has at least five other children from previous relationships. The last British prime minister to marry in office was Lord Liverpool in 1822. The reported nuptials come after a tumultuous political week for Johnson, who was accused by former top aide Dominic Cummings on Wednesday of bungling the government's response to the Coronavirus and being "unfit for the job."

On Friday, an ethics inquiry found the prime minister acted "unwisely" in renovating his Downing Street apartment without knowing where the money had come from but it cleared him of misconduct. — AP

RECENT EXCAVATIONS

In Nov., archaeologists had announced the discovery of 100 coffins

Egypt bets on ancient finds to revive tourism

Cairo, May 30: Workers dig and ferry wheelbarrows laden with sand to open a new shaft at a bustling archaeological site outside of Cairo, while a handful of Egyptian archaeologists supervise from garden chairs.

The dig is at the foot of the Step Pyramid of Djoser, arguably the world's oldest pyramid, and is one of many recent excavations that are yielding troves of ancient artifacts from the country's largest archaeological site.

As some European coun-

tries re-open to international tourists, Egypt has already been trying for months to attract them to its archaeological sites and museums.

Officials are betting that the new ancient discoveries will set it apart on the mid- and post-pandemic tourism market. They need visitors to come back in force to inject cash into the tourism industry, a pillar of the economy.

But like countries elsewhere, Egypt continues to battle the Coronavirus, and is struggling to get its

people vaccinated. The country has, up until now, received only 5 million vaccines for its population of 100 million people, according to its Health Ministry. In early May, the government announced that one million people had been vaccinated, though that number is believed to be higher now.

In the meantime, authorities have kept the publicity machine running, focused on the new discoveries. In November, archaeologists announced the discovery of at least 100 ancient

coffins dating back to the Pharaonic Late Period and Greco-Ptolemaic era, along with 40 gilded statues found 2,500 years after they were first buried.

That came a month after the discovery of 57 other coffins at the same site, the necropolis of Saqqara that includes the step pyramid.

Saqqara is a treasure, said Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled el-Anany while announcing the November discovery, estimating that only 1% of what the site contains has

been unearthed so far. Our problem now is that we don't know how we can possibly wow the world after this, he said.

If they don't, it certainly won't be for lack of trying.

In April, Zahi Hawass, Egypt's best-known archaeologist, announced the discovery of a 3,000-year-old lost city in southern Luxor, complete with mud brick houses, artifacts and tools from pharaonic times. It dates back to Amenhotep III of the 18th dynasty, whose reign (1390-1353 B.C.) is considered a golden

era for ancient Egypt.

That discovery was followed by a made-for-TV parade celebrating the transport of 22 of the country's prized royal mummies from central Cairo to their new resting place in a massive facility farther south in the capital, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization.

The Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh is now home to an archaeological museum, as is Cairo's International Airport, both opened in recent months. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

31 MAY 2021

Centre petty in a needless confrontation with Bengal

The manner in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "review meeting" — or, really speaking, so-called review meeting, in light of everything that's transpired since — concerning the devastation caused by the cyclone Yaas with West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee was conducted, it would seem the idea was not so much to discuss cyclone-related damage in the middle of the second wave of Covid but to provoke a fresh round of confrontation between the Centre and the state.

In the three weeks since the state Assembly election result became known, and Ms Banerjee led her party to a record victory, in the process trouncing the BJP which had hoped to form government, not a day has passed without the exchange of bitterness and acrimony between the Centre and the state and the BJP and the Trinamul Congress.

Regrettably, governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has taken it upon himself to be at the centre of these activities in ways that suggest he values his party association more than the neutrality his constitutional duties cast on him. He had been invited to the "review" meeting at the Kalaikunda air base, along with a clutch of BJP leaders, including the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

This is far from usual. In the event, the CM did well not to have any part in any of this. That would have set a dreadful precedent. A meeting between the PM and a CM ought to be just that, the presence of senior aides apart; else it would always be a crowd commandeered by the Union government. The governor decidedly has no role to play in such a meeting. Nor do Opposition party leaders since this was not billed as an all-party meeting.

The CM, therefore, met the PM at the airbase, handed him an estimate of financial requirements to repair the damage caused by the cyclone, and with the PM's "permission" proceeded to her next meeting along the damaged coastal belt. Nevertheless, through the BJP's propaganda network, which alas includes sections of the impressionable media, it has been given out that the CM "skipped" the meeting called by the PM to review the damage.

Ms Banerjee is a very combative street politician and is known to give as good as she gets. This does not always make a pretty picture. However, events initiated by the Centre after her party's recent electoral triumph suggest that her actions have been reactive, not pro-active. It is ironical that a PM who skipped talking about "federalism" after taking office and insisted on calling it "cooperative federalism" should be the presiding deity when ugly fracas plays out on daily basis in relation to a state in which his party has been firmly placed on the electoral mat.

Perhaps nothing shows this more graphically than the way the Centre chose to deal with the chief secretary, Alapan Bandyopadhyay. He was asked to report for duty at the Centre on the last day of his service as an IAS officer. Ironically, only four days before he was to superannuate, at the state's request, the Centre had granted him an extension of three months in service (as against the six sought). This has been widely viewed as an act of infinitesimal smallness — a part of the act of continuing jousting against a state with whose CM the Centre is at odds.

2 yrs of Modi 2.0: Little to celebrate

The conspicuous absence of celebrations around the completion of two years of the NDA-2 regime betrays how tumultuous they have proved to be. There are many reasons why this period was far from memorable from among the seven years of Narendra Modi rule since 2014. Waves of a rampant pandemic, which have tested the capacity to govern in over 200 nations, have had less to do with why the last two years have been particularly filled with turmoil in India.

The biggest mandate in democratic India's history in 35 years since 1984 was squandered by the regime giving primacy to a Hindutva agenda, beginning with the abrogation of Article 370 in the "taming" of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The pursuit of an amended citizenship bill promising to give citizenship to all refugees except Muslims tore the fabric of a pluralistic democracy asunder leading to communal riots in New Delhi. The seeming foreign policy gains from the showmanship of the "Howdy Trump" and "Howdy Modi", besides the positive vibes generated by the banning of the triple talaq had all but evaporated.

While the verdict in the sticky dispute over the Ayodhya shrines, courtesy of an obliging judiciary, was welcomed with the enthusiasm reserved for the resolution of any historical disagreement, there was a ruthless persistence in a divisive agenda, which seemed to be driven by the itch to settle scores more than repaying the people who voted again for the BJP over the combined opposition. In prioritising a blatantly political agenda, from Kashmir to Lakshwadeep and Puducherry, even the new farm laws became suspect, triggering a long running agitation.

In promoting electoral aims above governance, which was largely left to bureaucrats even during the pandemic, the ruling party lost the perception battle, too. Image management and a tributary stance against the public media run by Big Tech are seen now like a pushback by a federal regime fast losing its popularity, also reflected by poll verdicts in many prominent states. The second Covid-19 wave has simply added to the image of a faltering Centre and the ruling party, which now has less than three years to undo the post-2019 damage.

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Subhani



Flux in Centre-state ties with breakdown of trust

Sanjaya Baru

An outstanding address to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council by Tamil Nadu's finance minister P.T. Rajan, a contentious interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and the questionable remarks by V.K. Paul, a member of the Niti Aayog, blaming state governments for the mess over the Covid vaccination strategy once again draw attention to the sorry state of Centre-state relations today. Mr Modi came to power in New Delhi in 2014 promising to adopt "cooperative federalism" as his watchword. Seven years into office he is reminding many people across India of the Indira Gandhi era when the Centre rode roughshod over the states.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent direct interaction with district magistrates, ignoring their chief ministers, was also a reminder of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's attempt to empower the district level bodies, funding them directly from New Delhi, by-passing state governments. The Indira-Rajiv era of unhappy Centre-state relations was challenged by several powerful chief ministers, including Jyoti Basu, N.T. Rama Rao and M. Karunanidhi. The Centre is a conceptual myth, declared NTR, who in the early 1980s emerged as a stout defender of the rights of state legislatures and state governments.

Seeking to retrieve the trust of provincial political leaders, Indira Gandhi appointed the Justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations in 1983. Every time that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had problems in dealing with state governments he would, in jest, recall NTR's assertion and remind himself of Justice Sarkaria's views.

In the quarter century from 1989 to 2014, successive PMs had managed Centre-state relations within a framework of consensual politics. Prime Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh maintained excellent personal, political and administrative relations with all the chief ministers, irrespective of their party political affiliation.

Against this background, it is disconcerting to hear the Tamil Nadu finance minister speak of "a deterioration of the 'relationship of trust' between the governments of the Union and the states". It was even more worrisome to see a photograph of a scheduled meeting between the PM and the West Bengal CM in which the PM was seated at the head of the table and the CM and other officials, including the Leader of the Opposition BJP in the state Assembly, were required to be seated along both sides of the table. In the event, Ms Banerjee chose not to attend the meeting.

During his first term in office, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh travelled to many state capitals to chair meetings with state CMs and their ministerial colleagues and officials, often accompanied by the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission and senior Central government officials. The seating arrangement always had the PM and his team seated across the table facing the CM and his/her colleagues. It was a gesture of respect that built trust. These meetings were meant to discuss the implementation of various Centrally funded projects at the state level. The Centre has the money, but it is the states that implement all the projects and programmes. A cooperative relationship between the two is essential for good governance in a quasi-federal administrative system like that of

India.

The "deterioration in the relationship of trust" that the Tamil Nadu finance minister spoke of contrasts with the environment of trust and mutual accommodation that former finance minister Arun Jaitley referred to when he addressed a special midnight session of Parliament launching the new GST system. The late Arun Jaitley paid handsome tribute to three state finance ministers affiliated to political parties that opposed the BJP — Thomas Isaac of Kerala, Haseeb Drabu of Jammu and Kashmir and Amit Mitra of West Bengal — for their cooperation and contribution to making the introduction of the GST possible. Jaitley's consensual style, which he learnt at the feet of Prime Minister Vajpayee, served the nation well.

Narendra Modi's imperious manner as Prime Minister contrasts with his attitude towards the Central government as the chief minister of Gujarat and his promise of pursuing "cooperative federalism". When Ms Banerjee objected over not being allowed to speak during the PM's interaction with district magistrates, BJP spokespersons chided her for speaking out of turn. This incident reminded me of what used to happen at New Delhi's Vigyan Bhavan during chief ministers' conferences during the first term of Dr Manmohan Singh. Mr Modi would step out of these meetings to address a group of select media people, summoned by the CM's staff, in the lobby of Vigyan Bhavan. Ms Banerjee may well have learnt from that example of how a CM could upstage a PM at a national conference.

Whatever the banter and the normal party political

Narendra Modi's imperious manner as PM contrasts with his attitude towards the Central government as the chief minister of Gujarat and his promise of pursuing 'cooperative federalism'

differences, the fact is that such interactions between the PM and CMs were usually cordial and businesslike during the tenures of consensual PMs like Narasimha Rao, Vajpayee and Dr Manmohan Singh. The current phase of discord and distrust must be brought to an end if India's political leadership as a whole has to deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and restore momentum to the economy.

Neither the management of the pandemic and the vaccination drive nor the challenge of fiscal stabilisation and restoration of growth momentum can be handled by the Central government alone. The citizen demands a rational and efficient vaccination programme, a humane and competent healthcare administration and revival of economic growth, employment opportunities and confidence in the medium-term prospects of the economy. The bizarre games of political one-upmanship, the consequent weakening of federal institutions and systems and the mutual blame game between politicians at the Centre and in the states does not serve the interests of the citizen and the nation.

India has lived through many crises and it has recovered speedily when the Centre and the states have shared a spirit of cooperative federalism. Any excessive politicisation of federal governance does no good to either pandemic management or economic revival, nor indeed to an overall improvement in the welfare of the citizen. A prolonged period of political grandstanding and continued tensions between the Centre and the states has already adversely impacted governance and economic development. In the event, the nation needs a renewed commitment to cooperative federalism as defined by the principles of the Constitution.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

LETTERS

YSRC'S 2-YEAR RULE

The two-year rule of the YSRC government could be rated as unique for two reasons. Firstly the establishment of village/ward secretariats ably assisted by over three lakh volunteers. Secondly, implementation of 94 per cent of the party's poll promises including the much appreciated Navartnalu. Though the government had to endure the pandemic for most of its rule, the socio-economic welfare schemes were not altered even when there was severe strain on the state's exchequer due to heavy borrowing.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

There is a jubilant mood among YSRC leaders and cadres as their government completes two years in power and enters the third year. No doubt its welfare schemes have benefitted students, farmers and women. The problem is continuing the programmes to meet the expectations of the beneficiaries. The state is reeling under a deep financial crisis and is unable to get further loans. We need to see if the welfare schemes benefitted the state's development.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

If the YSRC government has spent ₹95,000 crore on weaker sections and beneficiaries, the other section of society is being made to starve. To uplift the party image by giving freebies, the state is being auctioned.

Jagannath
Vishakapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Refugees nearing 4-million mark

CALCUTTA, MAY 30.

The number of Bangla Desh evacuees in West Bengal is fast nearing the four-million mark, according to State Relief Commissioner B.B. Mondal.

He said thousands of evacuees entered the border districts of 24 Parganas and Nadia today.

Mr. Mondal said because of the ceaseless influx the situation in the eight border districts had assumed "unmanageable proportions" and "unprecedented complexities" had arisen.

Mohan Guruswamy



Tobacco India's top health crisis: Act now, or just go up in smoke!

The consumption of tobacco in all its forms — cigarettes, cheeroos, bidis, gutka and other forms of chewing tobacco — is our number one health challenge now.

According to the World Health Organisation, there are approximately 120 million smokers in India, and India is the home of 12 per cent of the world's smokers. More than 10 million die each year due to tobacco in India. According to the same study, 70 per cent of adult males in India smoke. Among adult females, the figure is much lower, at between 13-15 per cent. The total tax revenue derived from cigarettes and tobacco products is about ₹30,000 crores.

According to a study commissioned by the Government of India, the total economic costs attributable to all diseases related to tobacco consumption is over ₹104,000 crores.

In recent years, the cigarette business has been reporting a drop in consumption. But we do not know if there was a corresponding decrease in the incidence of cancer and other smoking induced ailments. The government, presumably under pressure from the rich and powerful cigarette industry, has not yet conducted a detailed study

of this and the consequential cost to the economy in spite of a specific request from the revenue department to enable it to evolve a scientific basis for cigarette taxation.

Whatever be the drop in stick sales, it is very evident that rupee sales and profits have not shown any decline. Industry bosses can, like the cigarette-smoking Dev Anand in the film Hum Dono did, continue to sing "barbadhion ka jashn manata chala gaya, har fikr ko dhuey mey udhaitha chala gaya."

Objectively speaking, this is not a bad situation at all, and is proof that the government policy, whether deliberate or accidental, is still halfway good. For, as far as this industry goes, a good policy will ensure that the state gets more revenue, while the consumption keeps dropping each year. But this does not necessarily mean any good news on the health front, as dropouts may have switched to bidis? Nevertheless, the decline in consumption, attributed by the industry to higher excise duties in each of the previous few budgets, means the policy is in the right direction and that there is a case for further increasing the tariffs on cigarettes and bidis once again this year.

The cigarette industry will, no

doubt, argue now that it is not wise to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. In this case it is not a golden egg but a time bomb, as each cigarette smoked now implies a future medical cost. Very recently the US government negotiated a \$368 billion damages package from the US cigarette industry to pay for future health costs. As the finance minister's adviser, I had once recommended that the health ministry be asked to similarly estimate future health costs in India. It followed that excise duties should be determined with the idea of recovering these costs now. I also advised that raising excise duties each year is a win-win situation. If consumption drops, it means future savings.

It is not that the incidence of smoking is low in India if we take into consideration the widespread bidi habit. NCAER has estimated that 348 million people belong to households with an annual income of over ₹12,500. Logic suggests that the vast majority of cigarette and bidi smokers must come from this segment. This is, by any standards, a very high and dangerous figure. Another point of concern is that the US congressional investigations have revealed that cigarette companies rou-

tinely spiked tobacco with extra nicotine to intensify addiction. It is rumoured that similar practices are still widespread in India. There is, therefore, a case for pegging excise duties with nicotine content as well.

One reason suggested for the drop in stick sales in the first half is that smuggled cigarettes ate into the share of locally produced brands. Industry analysts estimate that a third of MNC production are for illegal exports. The port of Antwerp is the hub of the international cigarette smuggling business. Antwerp is to cigarettes what Dubai is to gold! The Indian cigarette industry estimates that smuggled international brand penetration now accounts for two per cent of the market and to some 30-40 per cent of the segment for king-size cigarettes.

Cigarettes are an easy target because they are in the organised sector. But the consumption of bidis and chewing tobacco is just as dangerous and these sectors are growing. Therefore, the danger to public health only keeps increasing. The unfortunate part of this is that the government actively supports and subsidises the increased production of tobacco. Tobacco farming makes a huge

footprint on our agriculture and now accounts for 4,95,000 hectares of the most fertile land. Apart from using up valuable agricultural land, tobacco farmers derive all the largesses the state and Central governments confer on them. Free water and free power are the more obvious ones. Then there is subsidised fertiliser and tax-free status for all farming. The government must review these policies. I would like to see tobacco farming taxed on an acreage basis to make it less profitable and for the government to recover all the unmerited subsidies that tobacco farmers encash.

This is easier said than done. The tobacco sector is a powerful vested interest. ITC and the other cigarette manufacturers are the top half of that pyramid. It is easy to take it on, but it's now time to take on the base.

Today, May 31, is World No Tobacco Day

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

quick BITES

INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	51,422.88	0.60
Nifty 50	15,435.70	0.64
S&P 500*	4,204.11	0.08
Dollar (₹)	72.43	0.22
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.74	-0.24
Euro (₹)	88.28	0.23
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,910▼205	0.42
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.78	0.46
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.003	0.27
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.599	-0.011

* As of Friday/Saturday

FDI in software, hardware jumps 3-fold to \$26 bn

FDI in computer software and hardware jumped over threefold to \$26.14 billion during 2020-21, according to DPIIT data. The sector received \$7.67 bn FDI in 2019-20 and \$6.41 bn in 2018-19. The sector accounted for about 43 per cent in the total \$59.63 bn foreign inflows that India attracted in 2020-21. The technology space in India is growing significantly on the back of the rapid digitisation of businesses, Deloitte India's Rajat Wahi said.

Nepal's CG Corp in talks to buy listed India hotel



Nepal-based CG Corp Global is in advance talks to acquire a publicly listed hotel brand in India. The firm also plans to add 26 new managed hotel properties, expected to be operational in 2022. "We are in the process of acquiring a very well known brand of a listed hotel company," CG Corp global chairman Binod Chaudhary said. The firm operates 112 hotel properties with 6,013 rooms in 10 countries.

Burlington English readies IELTS coaching in India

With Covid-19 shifting the dynamics from traditional to online training methods, Burlington Group is focusing on its IELTS programme besides a range of other web-based English language learning solutions in India. Ratnesh Jha, CEO, Burlington Group South East Asia & India, an education conglomerate present in nearly 40 countries, says India is currently home to the largest number of IELTS test takers in the world.

470 infra projects show ₹4.38-L cr cost overrun

As many as 470 infrastructure projects, each worth Rs 150 crore or more, have been hit by cost overrun totalling more than Rs 4.38 lakh crore. Of the 1,737 such projects, 470 reported cost overrun and 525 were delayed. Total original cost of implementation of the 1,737 projects was Rs 22,33,409.53 crore and their completion cost is likely to be 26,71,440.77 crore, an overall cost overrun of 4,38,031.24 crore.



Five-year personal loans at easy rates Banks to offer ₹5L Covid loan

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MAY 30

Public sector banks on Sunday announced that they would be offering unsecured personal loans of upto Rs 5 lakh to salaried, non-salaried as well as pensioners to meet the treatment cost for Covid-19 at a concessional rate.

The banks also announced new loan schemes for hospitals/dispensaries, vaccine manufacturers, oxygen and ventilator manufacturers and suppliers, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs logistics firms.

Loans extended under the above schemes would form part of the Covid loan book under the guidelines issued by the central bank this month and are under priority sector lending.

Addressing a joint press conference, State Bank of India (SBI) chairman Dinesh Khara, Indian Banks Association (IBA) chairman Rajkiran Rai and IBA chief executive Sunil Mehta announced various support measures and launch of three new loan products by all nationalised banks to mitigate the impact from the pandemic resurgence.

Khara said, "Individuals, including salaried, non-salaried and pensioners, can avail of unsecured personal loans from Rs 25,000 to Rs 5 lakh to meet Covid-19 treatment. The repayment tenure would be five years. SBI would charge interest of 8.5 per cent per annum while other banks



are free to decide their interest rate."

The PSBs have also offered to provide upto Rs 2 crore as healthcare business loan for setting up oxygen plant along with power backup system to existing hospitals, nursing homes under the govern-

ment's Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS). The loan tenure is of five years. Capped at an interest rate of 7.5 per cent these loans are backed by 100 per cent guarantee cover of the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC) under ECLGS 4.0, which was announced by the government on Sunday. The third product is a business loan for healthcare facilities up to Rs 100 crore to setup/expand healthcare infrastructure and to manufacturers of healthcare products at a concessional rate.

The government has announced modifications to the ECLGS by enlarging the scheme's scope. The validity of ECLGS has

been extended to September 30, 2021 and disbursement is permitted up to December 31, 2021.

Similarly, to address the disruptions caused by the resurgence of Covid pandemic, the Reserve Bank of India on May 5 announced several measures, including a term liquidity facility of Rs 50,000 crore to Ease Access to Emergency Health Services (Covid Loan Book) such as resolution framework 2.0 for Covid related stressed assets of individuals, small businesses and MSMEs, re-assessment of working capital limits, etc.

While the economy had revived well from the beginning of fourth quarter of FY21, the pandemic's resurgence from April 21 has impacted the lives of individuals, and cash flows of businesses and MSMEs.

"In regard to Resolution framework 2.0, PSBs have formulated a templated approach for restructuring of loans," a release from SBI and IBA said.

PAYTM BOARD OKAYS ₹22K CR IPO IN Q3

PRASOON SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, MAY 27

Digital payments and financial services firm Paytm has received in-principle approval from the company's board to raise around Rs 22,000 crore through an initial public offering in the October-December quarter this year, according to an industry source.

The company is looking at an enterprise value of over Rs 2 lakh crore for the IPO, which is likely to be discussed at its board meeting scheduled for Friday.

"The board of directors of Paytm has given in-principle approval for the mega IPO planned to be launched in October-December quarter. The company expects to raise around Rs 21,000-Rs 22,000 crore from the IPO. This will also give some of the existing investors to offload some of their stake," the source told PTI.

The board meeting of the company was held on Friday.

When contacted, Paytm spokesperson declined to comment.

It is likely to be one of the largest IPOs in India.

Paytm shareholders include Alibaba's Ant Group (29.71 per cent), Softbank Vision Fund (19.63 per cent), Saif Partners (18.56 per cent) and Vijay Shekhar Sharma (14.67 per cent). AGH Holding, T Rowe Price and Discovery Capital, Berkshire Hathaway hold less than 10 per cent stake.

Paytm claims to be 30-50 per cent larger than mobile apps in the segment. —PTI

With 1,400 semiconductors in a car, chip-makers get upper hand

IAN KING & KEITH NAUGHTON
MAY 30

A century after automakers showed the world the value of assembly-line manufacturing, a shortage of semiconductors is teaching the industry a painful new lesson in what it takes to build a car.

For most of its history, the industry has relied on a distinct approach to buying car parts, procuring components from suppliers right at the moment they're needed. It's referred to as just-in-time manufacturing and is designed to streamline production and eliminate the costs of keeping warehouses stocked with parts waiting to be used.

But the shortcomings of that system were made starkly clear this year as the automakers confronted a dearth of the chips they need to build advanced functions into their vehicles, and found themselves near the bottom of chipmakers' customer lists because of their just-in-time

approach. That shortage is threatening to cut \$110 billion in sales from the industry, and forcing auto manufacturers to overhaul the way they get the electronic components that have become critical to car design.

"Customers need to change," said Hassane El-Khoury, chief executive officer of ON Semiconductor Corp, which gets more than a third of its revenue from the automotive market. "That just-in-time, mindset doesn't work."

Semiconductor makers are demanding guaranteed, long-term orders rather than the short-term flexibility the carmakers are used to. The chipmakers' assertiveness, even under pressure from lawmakers, underscores the rebalancing of power from the companies whose logos are on the cars to those that provide the advanced technology that runs them.

As these components play a bigger role in everything from in-car entertainment to self-



driving functions, chip manufacturers say they're willing to invest in expanding production to head off a repeat of shortages that have forced the industry to mothball factories and furlough workers—if the carmakers give them orders that can't be cancelled and commit to long-term agreements.

"Why would I have invested a single dollar when my customer can cancel within 30 days and it takes me two years to build capacity?" El-Khoury asked.

There are signs the industry is listening. A week before, Ford Motor Company CEO Jim Farley indicated a new willingness to reverse decades of outsourcing for parts.

"As the industry changes, we have to in-

source now, just like we in-sourced powertrains in the '20s and '30s," said Farley, who has shut down half his factories.

Automakers can no longer "assume the dominance of an 800-pound gorilla" in negotiations with chip companies and battery makers, said Mark Wakefield, head of the auto practice at consultancy AlixPartners.

Pioneered by Toyota Motor Corp. in the 1960s, just-in-time strategy helped the industry organise a system for sourcing the 40,000 or so components that go into a modern vehicle, many of which can be made in a matter of days. But semiconductors—the heart of sensors, engine management and battery controllers, infotainment and eventually systems that will pilot vehicles—are created in a process that takes months.

Today's cars contain an average of 1,400 semiconductors—and that puts the chipmakers at an advantage. —Bloomberg

ECLGS extended to aviation, scope widened

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MAY 30



The government on Sunday announced extending the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to the civil aviation sector that has been facing headwinds since the onset of the pandemic, besides expanding the scope of the scheme. It also extended the validity of the scheme till September 30, 2021 or till guarantees for an amount of Rs 3 lakh crore are issued.

Disbursement under the scheme will be permitted up to December 31, 2021. In a statement, the finance ministry said that on account of the disruptions caused by the second Covid-19 wave to businesses across various sectors of the economy, it has been decided to enlarge the scope of ECLGS.

In March, ECLGS 3.0 was introduced to cover business enterprises in hospitality, travel and tourism, leisure and sporting sectors.

The ministry has also removed the current ceiling of Rs 500 crore of loan outstanding for eligibility under ECLGS 3.0, subject to maximum additional ECLGS assistance to each borrower being limited to 40 per cent or Rs 200 crore, whichever is lower.

As per an official statement by the finance ministry, under ECLGS 4.0, 100 percent guarantee cover will be extended to loans of up to Rs 2 crore given to hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, medical colleges for setting up on-site oxygen generation plants. The interest rate has been capped at 7.5 per cent for

the same, which means the banks can offer loans at lower rates than this ceiling.

"Borrowers who are eligible for restructuring as per the RBI guidelines of May 5, 2021, and had availed loans under ECLGS 1.0 of overall tenure of four years comprising of repayment of interest only during the first 12 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter will now be able to avail a tenure of five years for their ECLGS loan i.e. repayment of interest only for the first 24 months with repayment of principal and interest in 36 months thereafter," the ministry said.

Also, the new scheme has made a provision of additional ECLGS assistance of up to 10 per cent of the outstanding as of February 29, 2020, to borrowers covered under ECLGS 1.0, in tandem with restructuring as per the RBI guidelines of May 5, 2021.

The revised operational guidelines are being issued by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC).

Addressing a joint press conference, State Bank of India chairman Dinesh Khara, Indian Banks Association chairman Rajkiran Rai and IBA CEO

Sunil Mehta said the new measures and loan products announced by the banks were aimed at mitigating the impact from the resurgence of the Covid pandemic.

To implement the expanded ECLGS measures, the public sector banks have put in place systems and processes for seamless implementation of RBI's Resolution Framework 2.0, they said.

Declining to comment on the likely number of resolution applications by the MSMEs this time, Rai said last time out of the 8.5 lakh eligible firms only 60,000 had availed of the facility.

Recently the government had announced collateral-free automatic loans worth Rs 3 lakh crore for micro, small and medium enterprises, out of which Rs 2.54 lakh have been sanctioned, IBA and SBI officials said, adding there was still headroom to lend another Rs 46,000 crore under this scheme.

To a question, Rai said the Covid second wave has impacted the collections of public sector banks in the month of May. "It is difficult to give numbers but can say that we faced difficulty in collections in the month of May and we are offering the available reconstructing scheme to customers," Rai said.

Intrastate e-way bills see rise, interstate bills dip

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 30

While intrastate e-way bills continued to grow even in the pandemic year of FY21, interstate bills registered a decline. Textiles was the top sector generating e-way bills last fiscal.

At 37.55 crore, intrastate e-way bills registered a marginal growth of 1.65 per cent from 36.94 crore in FY20. However, the restrictions across state borders during the nation-wide lock-down and even during unlock phases interstate e-way bills saw a decline by 7 per cent from 25.94 crore in FY20 to 24.13 crore in FY21. Gujarat was the top state to produce the highest number of interstate e-way bills, while Maharashtra generated the highest intrastate bills, as per government data.

However, Karnataka was the top state to verify e-way bills followed by Gujarat and Kerala.

Textiles continued to be the top sector generating e-way bills even in FY21, but there was a decline of 21 per cent in the number of bills from 8.20 crore in

FY20 to 6.47 crore in FY21. In FY20, the sector had seen a growth of 15 per cent in e-way bill generation. Electrical machinery and equipment, machinery and mechanical appliances, iron and steel articles and automobiles were the other top e-way bill generating sectors. Among them, electrical machinery and equipment as well as machinery and mechanical appliances continued to register growth.

E-way bills meant for both exports and imports were down in line with the decline in overseas trade in FY21.

Bills for imports fell 15 per cent, while exports were down 4.7 per cent. About 98 per cent of the 61.68 crore e-way bills generated in FY21 were meant for road transport, while one per cent each used them for rail and air transport.

A large chunk of bills were meant for shorter distances. Around 44 per cent of the bills were generated for transporting goods for less than 100 km. Another 14 per cent for distance between 100 and 200 km.

SANITISERS WITH LEUKEMIA-CAUSING BENZENE IS LATEST WORRY



ANNA EDNEY
MAY 30

Four decades ago, the US government used rarely deployed emergency powers to reduce workers' exposure to benzene, a chemical linked to a five-fold increased risk of leukemia. After a landmark study in 1977 highlighted its health risks, employers and manufacturers were forced to limit the industrial compound in their workplaces. Yet just within the past few months, elevated levels of benzene have appeared in some hand sanitisers, and last week, an analysis by an independent testing lab revealed its presence in some sunscreens and after-sun skin soothers.

While the amounts found in skin products have been relatively small—far less toxic than the doses that resulted in blood cancers and regulatory action—they're still spurring alarm from public health experts. Questions are being raised about how benzene was allowed into the common lotions, and how to keep it out.

"There's no such thing as a safe level of exposure, and that's especially true for children," said Philip Landrigan, director of the Global Public Health Program and Global Pollution Observatory at Boston College who has studied toxic chemicals and human health for 40 years. "Benzene actually causes DNA mutations, it's a potent carcinogen. Even a small dose can set in motion the chain of events that can lead to a cancer a few years later."

—Bloomberg

—Bloomberg

KEEPING OFF | CROWD

"We saw a lot of first-time customers coming into the stores"

Virus fear speeds gold buyers' shift to retail chains

SWANSY AFONSO
MAY 30

The world's worst coronavirus outbreak is changing the way Indians buy gold, hastening a shift to modern, retail stores.

While buyers have been slowly shifting away from the thousands of family-run jewellery shops that control the bulk of the world's second-biggest gold market, the pandemic has sped up the process, according to Ramesh Kalyanaraman, executive director at Kalyan Jewellers India Ltd.

"We have seen in the last quarter that the shift has become very, very steep," he said in an interview. "We saw a lot of first-time

customers coming into the stores, about 50 per cent more than a year before. In this Covid scenario, people don't want to go to crowded streets and small shops and instead they prefer stand-alone stores like Kalyan."

Demand for gold slumped to a more than two-decade low last year although it bounced back in the first three months of 2021 on softening gold prices and a sharp pickup in economic activity. The change in buying behaviour and resilient wedding-related purchases boosted Kalyan's profits by 54 per cent in the January-March quarter.

The company, which counts Warburg Pincus



LLC and the Singapore government as investors, raised \$158 million in an initial public offering in March, one of the biggest share sales among Indian jewellers.

"The shift to national and regional brands is clearly on the rise as consumers get more comfortable and feel secure in

terms of quality, which is still a problem with the unorganised sector," said Gnanasekar Thiagarajan, director at CommTREND Risk Management Services. Concerns by consumers are also prompting smaller jewellers to accept new government rules on quality standards to try to retain

their customer base, he said.

The government's efforts to bring the country's informal economy to book through measures such as increased digitization, a goods and services tax and stricter quality standards have improved the market share of established chains like Tata Group's Titan Co, Kalyan and Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

About 60 per cent of Kalyan's domestic stores are located in south India. The Kerala-based jeweller plans to add a dozen more stores in the country this year as it remains optimistic on a demand recovery despite the second wave of the pandemic. It

also expects the shift to chain stores to lead to higher revenue along with its plan to open more stores outside of southern India.

Though this year India has only localised lockdowns unlike last year, "the fear factor is much higher because we see a lot of people dying," Kalyanaraman said. "But we have an advantage of experience as we faced this kind of crisis last year, we have a strengthened our balance sheet post our IPO, and the way revenue came back last year, we know that demand cannot go away, it can only move to different quarters."

SHORT TAKES

Teen rider dies in Moto3 crash

Florence: Swiss motorcycle rider Jason Dupasquier has died following a crash during Moto3 qualifying for the Italian Grand Prix, the Careggi Hospital in Florence announced Sunday. He was 19. "Despite the best efforts of circuit medical staff and all those subsequently attending to the Swiss rider, the hospital has announced that Dupasquier has sadly succumbed to his injuries," MotoGP said in a statement. Dupasquier was involved in an accident with Ayumu Sasaki and Jeremy Alcoba toward the end of Saturday's session, which was immediately red-flagged. Meanwhile, Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro took a 12th place finish in Mugello MotoGP. Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo won the race. After a promising start, star Honda rider Marc Marquez's race lasted just over a lap as he fell at turn three on lap two. — Agencies

Diya-Swastika assured of medal

New Delhi: Young Indian padlers Diya Chitale and Swastika Ghosh put up solid performances at the 2021 WTT Youth Star Contender in Tunisia as they confirmed a medal in the U-19 girls doubles besides advancing to the knockout stage of the singles category. The Maharashtra duo of Diya and Swastika, who received a bye in the opening round, registered convincing 11-5, 6-11, 11-9, 11-8 victory against the local favourite Fadwa Garci and Maram Zoghliani in the last-8 match in Tunis, and secured at least a bronze medal with an entry into the semi-finals. The Indian pair will take on Czech Republic's Linda Zaderova and Croatia's Hana Arapovic in the last-four match. — PTI

Milkha is back home, wife in ICU

Chandigarh: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh was on Sunday discharged from a private hospital where he was getting treatment for Covid-19 infection even as he continues to be on oxygen support. While the 91-year-old Milkha was discharged in stable condition on the request of his family, his 82-year-old wife Nirmal Kaur had to be shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) on Saturday night due to increasing oxygen requirement. "On the request of the family, Mr Milkha Singh was discharged from the hospital today in a stable condition. He is on oxygen and nutritional support," the Fortis hospital, Mohali, said in its update. "Mrs Milkha Singh had to be shifted to the ICU last night due to increasing oxygen requirements. She continues to be stable." The hospital had earlier said that they were being treated for pneumonia. — PTI

Iniyar wins chess World Cup qualifier

Chennai: Indian Grandmaster P. Iniyar on Sunday qualified for the FIDE World Cup, scheduled to be held in July, by winning the AICF World Cup qualifier online chess tournament. Iniyar and fellow GM from Tamil Nadu, D. Gukesh had finished on 12.5 points each after 17 rounds but the former took the top prize since he had emerged winner in the match between the two in round 14. Iniyar entered the final day with 10.5 points in his pocket and ahead of Gukesh by half a point. He defeated Ritwik Raja in the 15th round and Saravana Krishnan in the 16th before losing to Deep Sengupta. — PTI

Giannis delivers for Milwaukee

Washington: Giannis Antetokounmpo managed his first NBA playoff triple double on Saturday and the Milwaukee Bucks defeated Miami 120-103 to sweep the Heat out of the post-season in the opening round. Antetokounmpo had 20 points, 12 rebounds and 15 assists to spark the Bucks, who were led by 25 points from center Brook Lopez and 22 more off the bench from Bryn Forbes while Khris Middleton added 20. — AFP



Chelsea players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Champions League on Saturday. They beat Manchester City 1-0 in the final. — AP

ROYAL BLUE

Chelsea edge City to emerge kings of Europe

Portugal, May 30: Chelsea won the Champions League for the second time as Kai Havertz goal secured a tense 1-0 victory over Manchester City in Saturday's final in Porto, shattering Pep Guardiola's dream of lifting the trophy for the third time.

Havertz rounded Ederson to score three minutes before half-time at the Estadio do Dragao and the Chelsea players ran to celebrate with the German.

Coach Thomas Tuchel, full of energy on the touchline just like his opposite number, punched the air in celebration, and later jumped with joy on the pitch after Chelsea held on for victory in the second half after City lost distraught skipper Kevin De Bruyne to injury.

The London club finished fourth in the Premier League, a huge 19 points behind champions City, but this, remarkably, was their third win over Guardiola's side in six weeks.

They ended City's hopes of a domestic treble when they triumphed in the FA Cup semi-finals in April and delayed their title celebrations with victory in Manchester.

Now, in a final watched by a limited crowd of just over 14,000 fans who created a raucous atmosphere, they have denied City the first Champions League crown they and Guardiola so crave.

City had to wait 13 years after being taken over by

CL WINNERS (SINCE 2010)

2010-11	Barcelona
2011-12	Chelsea
2012-13	Bayern Munich
2013-14	Real Madrid
2014-15	Barcelona
2015-16	Real Madrid
2016-17	Real Madrid
2017-18	Real Madrid
2018-19	Liverpool
2019-20	Bayern Munich
2020-21	Chelsea

It was an incredibly tough fight. They were determined to win this. We wanted to be the stone in their shoe. The effort was huge. We overcame some difficult moments and had a fantastic attitude to defending

— THOMAS TUCHEL, CHELSEA COACH

Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour just to get to the Champions League final.

They are now the eighth consecutive team to lose in their first appearance at this stage. The same misfortune befell Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain last year as well as Tottenham Hotspur when they were beaten by Liverpool in the last all-English final in 2019.

"It is the first time we're here, we'll learn, we'll come back," Guardiola said.

"The players did everything, they wanted to do



Chelsea's Kai Havertz celebrates after scoring a goal against Manchester City in the Champions League final in Porto on Saturday. — AP

well, to win this competition, sometimes you perform well, sometimes not."

Chelsea also lost when they first got to the final, on penalties against Manchester United in Moscow in 2008.

They overcame the final hurdle by beating Bayern Munich in a shoot-out in 2012 and now they have their second European Cup to move level with Juventus, Benfica and Porto as well as another English side, Nottingham Forest.

Their transformation

into one of Europe's super clubs has been down to the riches of Roman Abramovich, their Russian oligarch owner who was in attendance in Portugal.

"It's such a special occasion. At this moment in time, we're the best team in the world. You can't take that away from us," said Mason Mount, who has been outstanding for the Stamford Bridge side this season.

Chelsea have been transformed since the appointment as coach in January of Tuchel. — AFP

WORKED 15 YRS FOR THIS, SAYS HERO HAVERTZ

Portugal, May 30: German forward Kai Havertz said he had "worked 15 years" for the moment when he scored the goal that won the Champions League for Chelsea against Manchester City on Saturday.

Havertz's 42nd minute strike -- his first goal for the club in the Champions League -- gave Chelsea their second European crown nine years after they beat Bayern Munich to win their first.

"I don't know what to say, I waited a long time. I've worked 15 years for this moment, I am overwhelmed," 21-year-old Havertz told *BT Sport*.

Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta hailed the young forward.

COACH TUCHEL SET FOR NEW DEAL

Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel is set to reap the rewards with a handsome new contract, although whether he will be allowed to put down roots in west London remains to be seen given how managerial cycles tend to go at Stamford Bridge.

"We have a strong bond, a strong group who can really defend and play and have answers on all questions in the game," Tuchel said.

"Once the celebrations are over and once we digest this experience, it is the moment to grow, to evolve, to learn from it and become better."

There is huge room for improvement in the EPL after Chelsea finished 19 points behind champions City. — AFP

IPL PHASE 2 | IN UAE

Pat to skip, other Aussies doubtful

Sydney, May 30: Kolkata Knight Riders pacer Pat Cummins is set to miss the UAE-leg of the IPL and Cricket Australia needs to make a call if it is prudent to let other Australian players compete in the League and spend more time in mentally tough bio-bubble.

The BCCI on Saturday approved IPL's resumption in September in the UAE. The organisers were forced to suspend the league earlier this month after multiple cases of Covid-19 were reported inside the bio-bubble.

"Cummins, despite a multi-million dollar IPL contract, has already said he will not return to the T20 tournament this season," a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* said.

Cricket Australia will have to factor in the workload and bio-bubble fatigue ahead of the T20 World Cup, scheduled to take place in India in October-November.

The Australian players had to serve a quarantine period upon their arrival back home via Maldives from India due to travel restrictions in the country in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

"CA will need to decide whether it's in the best mental health interests of its players to spend even more time in a bio-secure bubble," the report said.

"CA could decide the IPL will ensure players are fine-tuned for the World Cup, which could also be held in the UAE," the report added.

ECB's Director of Cricket Ashley Giles has already said due to a busy international schedule from June onwards, the English players are unlikely to be available for the remainder of the tournament.

Australia have a tour of West Indies scheduled from late June ahead of the T20 World Cup, followed by



Pat Cummins

a Test against Afghanistan and the Ashes series.

"The Australians could also have a short tour of Bangladesh in August but that has not been confirmed. However, the Bangladesh board is planning for five Twenty20 matches."

The currently-suspended IPL saw participation from over 40 Australian cricketers, support staff and broadcasters.

The IPL, which was held in the UAE last season, has 31 matches remaining.

BCCI WANTS CPL TO BE ADVANCED

The BCCI is trying to convince Cricket West Indies to advance the start of the Caribbean Premier League by a week or 10 days to ensure a seamless bubble-to-bubble transfer of players for the IPL's resumption.

The CPL is scheduled to get underway from August 28 with the final to be played on September 19, while the remaining part of IPL is likely to be held from September 18 to October 10, not leaving the players with any time to settle down.

"We are in talks with Cricket West Indies. We are hoping that if CPL can be finished a few days in advance, it would help in bubble to bubble transfer of all players to Dubai and in time to complete the mandatory three-day quarantine," a BCCI source, privy to the development, said on Sunday. — PTI

MITHALI MOVES ON FROM 2018 SPAT WITH POWAR

New Delhi, May 30: Personal likes or dislikes don't matter when one is playing for the country, India's Test and ODI captain Mithali Raj said on Sunday, insisting that she and head coach Ramesh Powar have "moved on" from a bitter past to take the team forward.

Mithali and Co. are currently quarantining in Mumbai ahead of the UK tour, which is expected to provide a big push to the team's preparations for the ODI World Cup in New Zealand early next year.

The full-fledged series comprising India's first Test in seven years will also be Powar's first assignment as head coach. The former India spinner returned to the role after being sacked following India's semifinal defeat in the 2018 World T20. Mithali was controversially dropped from that game and relations between the two went south with both accusing each other of unprofessional conduct.

"We can't be living in the past. I've played for so many years, I don't have an ego or I don't give attention to my personal likes and dislikes. And 21 years has been a long time for me to sort of, you know, go through many challenges," she said. — PTI

Mary goes down in summit clash

Dubai, May 30: Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg) signed off with a silver medal in the Asian Boxing Championships after going down in an intense final against Nazym Kyzaibay of Kazakhstan here on Sunday. Mary Kom lost in a split 2-3 verdict. It was her seventh medal in the tournament, the first being a gold that came way back in the 2003 edition.

Up against an opponent 11 years younger to her, the 38-year-old made an impressive start and clinched the opening round comfortably by relying on her sharp counterattacks.

The intensity picked up in the second round and both the boxers showed aggressive intent. The Kazakh drew level at this point with her jabs landing perfectly.

Mary Kom fought back in the final three minutes but that was not enough to get the judges' nod. The Manipuri legend also won a prize money of \$5,000 for her campaign, while Kyzaibay was richer by \$10,000.

Kyzaibay is a two-time world champion and a six-time national champion.

On Monday, Amit Panghal (52kg), Shiva Thapa (64kg) and Sanjeet (91kg) will fight it out in the men's finals.

Panghal will square off against reigning Olympic and world champion Shakhobidin Zoirov of Uzbekistan. It will be a repeat of the 2019 world championship final in which the Indian had lost to settle for silver.

Thapa will be up against Mongolia's Baatarsukh Chinzorig, who is the Asian Games silver-medalist.

Sanjeet will take on Kazakh legend Vassiliy Levit, who is chasing his fourth gold at the continental showpiece. Eight other Indians — the Olympic-bound trio of Simranjit Kaur (60kg), Vikas Krishan (69kg), and Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), and Jaimee (57kg), Sakshi Chaudhary (64kg), Monika (48kg), Saweety (81kg) and Varinder Singh (60kg) — secured bronze medals after semifinal losses. — PTI



Japan's Naomi Osaka in action against Romania's Patricia Maria Tig during their first round match in the French Open in Paris on Sunday. — AFP

Osaka lets racquet talk, Andujar shocks Thiem

Paris, May 30: World number two Naomi Osaka let her racquet do the talking at the French Open on Sunday, maintaining her media boycott but briefly telling a TV interviewer that her clay court game is "a work in progress".

Osaka opened the first day of action at Roland Garros with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over Romanian world number 63 Patricia Maria Tig.

However, Osaka was threatened with disqualification from the French Open if she persists with her controversial media boycott, officials said.

"We have advised Naomi Osaka that should she continue to ignore her media obligations, she would be exposing herself to possible further code of conduct infringement consequences," said a statement from the four Grand Slam tournaments after issuing the world number two with a \$15,000 fine.

"As might be expected, repeat violations attract tougher sanctions including default from the tournament."

Meanwhile, fourth seed Dominic Thiem blew a two-set lead to be dumped out in the first round by Spanish veteran Pablo Andujar on Sunday.

The 35-year-old Andujar staged a remarkable comeback to defeat the two-time Roland Garros runner-up 4-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 after almost four-and-a-half hours on Court Philippe Chatrier.

It is the first time in his 17-year career that Andujar has come from two sets behind to win. "It's a very special moment because I'm 35 and I don't know how long I'm going to play," said Andujar. "I had to believe to be able to get this result."

"It was very difficult, in the third set he wasn't quite as strong."

It is Thiem's first opening-round exit at Roland Garros and the first time he has failed

to reach at least the quarter-finals of the tournament since 2015. — AFP

RESULTS (ROUND 1)

Women: Anhelina Kalinina (UKR) bt Angelique Kerber (GER x26) 6-2, 6-4; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x21) bt Elsa Jacquemot (FRA) 6-4, 6-1; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS x31) bt Christina McHale (USA) 6-4, 6-0; Danka Kovinic (MNE) bt Clara Burel (FRA) 6-3, 7-6 (10/8); Ana Bogdan (ROM) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (ITA) 6-1, 6-3; Naomi Osaka (JPN x2) bt Patricia Maria Tig (FRA) 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

Men: Karen Khachanov (RUS x23) bt Jiri Vesely (CZE) 6-1, 6-2, 6-3; Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt Yannick Hanfmann (GER) 6-1, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2; Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP x11) bt Mario Vilella Martinez (ESP) 6-4, 6-4, 6-2; Fabio Fognini (ITA x27) bt Gregoire Barrere (FRA) 6-4, 6-1, 6-4; Marton Fucsovics (HUN) bt Gilles Simon (FRA) 6-4, 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); Pablo Andujar (ESP) bt Dominic Thiem (AUT x4) 4-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 6-4.