

SHORT TAKES

JOGI SLAMS RAJU FOR TARGETING CM JAGAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

YSR Congress MLA from Pedana, Jogi Ramesh, slammed Narsapur MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju for targeting their government despite getting elected on the party ticket. The legislator seconding the thanksgiving motion to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan's address in the joint session of the legislature for the budget session here on Thursday lost his cool and made derogatory remarks against the MP.

He said, "Our government and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy are being targeted by the MP for the last one year. He should remember that he was elected on our party symbol and by using a picture of the CM. People are despising his unwarranted criticism."

"I challenge him to contest without the name of our party and photo of our CM. I am sure that he will not get elected as a ward member even in his native place. The government has implemented welfare schemes worth ₹1 lakh crores, benefiting each and every section and making SCs, STs, BCs and minorities to live with respect and content."

The legislator said, "As the MP is trying to instigate communal violence and caste conflicts, he, and those who have been supporting him, should be arrested and punished as per law."

Meanwhile, Raghu Ramakrishna Raju's family members met the Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and sought his intervention on the arrest of the MP by the AP CID sleuths on charges of sedition. MP's wife Ramadevi, son Bharat and daughter Indira Priyadarisni complained to the Speaker that the MP was arrested without taking any prior permission from the Speaker even as he was the member of the Lok Sabha. They alleged that the MP was harassed during interrogation.

The Speaker learnt to have assured them to look into the issue.

TD STAGES A WALKOUT FROM MOCK ASSEMBLY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Opposition Telugu Desam which boycotted the one-day Assembly budget session on Thursday conducted a mock Assembly to awaken people about the failures of the Jagan Mohan Reddy government. Interestingly, its members staged a walk-out from the mock assembly in protest against the 'anti-people and tyrannical' policies being pursued by the YSRC government at a time when the people were suffering greatly due to the unchecked Covid infections.

Mock Assembly Speaker D.B.V. Swamy struggled hard to control the members. Stormy scenes were witnessed in the 'mock assembly' as the Opposition members relentlessly raised slogans and held up placards, criticising the Chief Minister's indifference.

LOKESH FLAYS CM FOR VIOLATING FACE MASK NORMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday condemned Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for not wearing a face mask while taking part in the AP Assembly session proceedings.

He wondered what message Reddy was trying to send across to the five crore population of Andhra Pradesh by not following coronavirus guidelines.

Lokesh recalled that advertisements carrying the CM's photo were being released in which he is ironically asking the public to wear face masks while on the floor of the House he was showing utter disregard for the Covid-19 protocol and also to his own publicity slogans.

The TD leader recalled how complacent the Chief Minister was during the first wave of Corona when he said 'it is a small fever, which comes and goes. We have to coexist with it'. Reddy had also used terms like 'paracetamol' and 'bleaching powder' when speaking about the epidemic.

Lokesh lamented that now the situation had turned deadlier and the entire State has turned into a 'burial ground' but Reddy continued to flash smiles.

Spent ₹2.2 k cr in past 14 months for Covid

Revolutionary changes to save lives, free vaccine to all, once sufficient doses reach AP, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy declared in AP Legislative Assembly that everyone in the state will be vaccinated against Coronavirus for free once sufficient doses reach Andhra Pradesh. Until then, he asked public to strictly adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines and make them part of their life.

Replying to the debate on motion of thanks to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan's address, the CM pointed out that the government is setting up 53 oxygen generating plants in all identified Covid-19 hospitals across the state, apart from purchasing additional 50 cryogenic tankers, 18,500 oxygen concentrators and 10,000 b-type cylinders at a cost of ₹309 crore.

Paying his tributes to all those who have lost their lives in the Coronavirus pandemic, Jagan Mohan Reddy pointed out that his government has spent ₹2,229 crore on dealing with Coronavirus during the past 14 months. But opposition parties, particularly Telugu Desam, are being irresponsible in levelling baseless charges against the government.

The Chief Minister asserted that his government has brought in revolutionary changes in Aarogyasri. The previous government had provided for only 1,000 types of treatments under Aarogyasri. But in the last 23 months, his government has provided for treating 2,400 ailments under Aarogyasri, including Covid-19 and black fungus. He underlined that the government has identified 17 hospitals for treating patients suffering from black fungus.

Asserting that the entire country is fighting the battle with the Coronavirus, Jagan Mohan Reddy underlined that vaccination is the only way to win over the pandemic. He asserted that the government is ready to spend any amount of money to procure vaccines for all aged above 18 in the state. It has already called for global tenders for sourcing vaccine doses.

The Chief Minister pointed out that the state will require seven crore doses to cover all those above 18 years of age. But the centre has so far given only 76.29 lakh doses, which are around 10 per cent of the total requirement. Further, he said only two companies are currently manufacturing vaccines just seven crore doses per month in the country. In this context, he underlined that global tenders have been floated to secure vaccines for Andhra Pradesh.

Govt combating Covid well: Gov

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has appreciated the state government for its relentless efforts for Covid-19 management and vaccination by setting up testing facilities from zero in March 2020 to sub-district level at present, despite a severe strain on the economy.

Addressing the joint session of both the houses



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Chief Whip G. Srikanth Reddy, and MLAs greet Governor before he addressed the Assembly session in virtual mode on Thursday.

— By Arrangement

HOUSE PASSES APPROPRIATION BILL, ADJOURNS SINE DIE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY. 20

The Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Vote on Account Bill, 2021. Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill No.2, 2021 and Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill No.3, 2021.

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy tabled the three Appropriation Bills required to meet the supplementary grants made by the State Assembly for the year and supplementary expenditure charged on the consolidated fund of the state of AP for that year. The Bills were passed by voice vote.

The State Legislative Assembly also passed AP Medical Education and Research Corporation Bill 2021, Andhra Pradesh Survey And Boundaries Amendment Bill 2021, Andhra Pradesh Municipal Laws Amendment Bill, 2021 and Andhra Pradesh Municipal Laws Second Amendment Bill 2021 and withdrawn Andhra Pradesh Electricity Duty Bill 2015.

AP State Legislative Assembly also adopted a resolution to request the Government of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation to change the name of Orvakal Airport, Kurnool as "Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy Airport, Kurnool".

The State Legislative Assembly was later adjourned sine die by Speaker Tammineni Sitaram.

of state legislature virtually from Raj Bhavan on Thursday, on the occasion of presentation of the budget for 2021-22, the Governor conveyed deep condolences to all those who lost their near and dear ones to Covid-19. He saluted all frontline workers for performing their duty with utmost courage and selflessness to combat the deadly virus during the second wave.

SALUTING | KESARI

K.S.N. MURTY | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20A

Once a poor student of Class IV was crestfallen as he could not pay three rupees towards his exam fee and even a 25-mile walk to his brother's-in-law's place did not help. Moved by plight, his mother sold off the silk saree which she had worn at the time of her marriage and gave him the money. The boy went on to excel in studies and pursued Bar at Law in London.

Unfazed by the presence

of Tamil legal luminaries, he started his practice where they did - at Mylapore in Madras. His success was such that by 1917-18, his earning was ₹1,000 a day - a fabulous sum in those days. In no time, he acquired riches, lands and bungalows in coastal districts.

By now, many of you would have recognised the protagonist as none other than Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu. His stupendous success is inspiring, considering he was born with a copper spoon in his

Victory in polls due to good ruling, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Thursday that his government takes the responsibility in reaching welfare schemes to all sections of the people despite the looming pandemic conditions and stands for public welfare.

The chief minister said good governance has resulted in tremendous victory for the ruling YSRC in all polls, nearly wiping out the opposition.

He said that in a first-of-its-kind gesture, the government released a welfare calendar for public knowledge, detailing the implementation schedules for the state's welfare schemes for the 2021-2022 fiscal starting from April 2021 to February 2022.

During the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, the Chief Minister reiterated his commitment to transparent, accountable and corruption-free governance and said that the manifesto is like a Holy Book.

Reddy said his government has fulfilled over 95 per cent of its promises, taking welfare to the doorstep of the people without any taint of corruption or discrimination.

The Chief Minister said that, in the last 23 months, the state government had directly credited ₹93,708 crore into the beneficiaries' accounts and indirectly spent over ₹31,714 crore on schemes of Sampoorna Poshana, free power to farmers, Goru Muddha and the like, the total spent being of ₹1.25 lakh crore.

Allocation of funds under several schemes

Vijayawada: Proposed allocation of funds under several schemes in the budget include: Dr YSR Free Crop Insurance - ₹1,802.82 crore; YSR Sunna Vaddi Patna Runalu - ₹500 crore; for Dr YSR Polambai, an amount of ₹61.91 crore was proposed from the Centrally sponsored schemes; Organic Farming Policy - ₹311.62 crore under APCNF from the Centrally Sponsored Schemes; Dr YSR Agriculture Testing Labs - ₹88.57 crore; Natural Calamity Relief Fund -

₹2,000 crore; Ex Gratia to farmers families - ₹20 crore. In total, agriculture department has got a total allocation of ₹14,049.29 crore in the budget.

An amount of ₹610.8 crore has been proposed for allocation towards marketing department with specific allocation for price stabilisation fund to the tune of ₹500 crore. Proposed allocation of funds for various departments include: Department of Cooperation - ₹303.04 crore; food processing - ₹186.91 crore; horticulture

— ₹537.03 crore; sericulture - ₹97.36 crore; animal husbandry - ₹1,026.37 crore; fisheries - ₹329.48 crore; agriculture power subsidy to farmers - ₹5,000 crore; MGNREGS works - ₹8,116.16 crore and YSR Jal Kala - ₹200 crore. For developmental works and research aspects, Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University got an allocation of ₹359.76 crore and Dr YSR Horticultural University ₹69.91 crore in the budget.

He said true development comes with women empowerment, wherein the government has kept its word in empowering women by assisting them with schemes like YSR Aasara, YSR Cheyutha, YSR Sunna Vaddi Runalu and YSR Sampoorna Poshana.



Commission, he tore his shirt and bared his chest to the guns of the British Police and roared like a lion: "Fire at me, if you have guts." From then on,

he came to be known as 'Andhra Kesari' (The Lion of Andhra).

In 1937, he became the Revenue Minister in the cabinet of C. Rajagopalachari in Madras Presidency. Later, he became the first Chief Minister when the Telugu state of Andhra was formed in 1953. After a short period, his rivals moved a no-trust vote which he lost by a single vote. Not heeding pleas for another voting, even from his rivals, he quit and thus stood by his ideals.

Additional scheme for BC women

FROM PAGE 1

He went on to announce an additional scheme for the economically backward classes women.

The state might have witnessed a huge gap between the budget outlay and actuals for 2020-21, ₹1.85 lakh crore being realised out of the ₹2.24 lakh crore outlay, but it has become a regular feature for successive governments ever since Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, then Chief Minister of combined Andhra Pradesh, came up with a ₹1 lakh crore budget some two decades ago. The outlay for this year will be ₹2.29 lakh crore.

If the dream versus reality is left to the Opposition of the day to criticise the government, a close look at the Revised Estimates for 2020-2021 reveals that the finance department could manage the heavy load of DBTs with the revenue receipts, which grew at a very low rate due to the lockdowns, standing at ₹1.85 lakh crore. The unforeseen expenditure due to Covid-19 management had to be factored in while the huge pendency of payments which will be carried forward to the current fiscal, again a regular feature, was discounted.

The seven per cent overall expenditure growth from ₹1.73 lakh crore in 2019-2020 to ₹1.85 lakh crore in 2020-21 was manageable for DBTs with six per cent growth in revenue from ₹1.74 lakh crore to ₹1.85 lakh crore for the corresponding period. The revenue expenditure growth was close to 11 per cent.

This year, the state will borrow ₹6,000 crore less than last year's ₹50,000 crore from the open mar-

ket. The borrowing from the Centre was also slashed to ₹2,000 crore from ₹5,000 crore. It showed a meagre ₹2,000 crore hike in the share of Central taxes from ₹24,441 crore, all coming close to the reality.

This was possible partly due to the government offloading some of its loan burden to power utilities and other corporations. For instance, of the total power subsidy of ₹8,000 crore, the government agreed to pay only ₹6,000 crore. However, the exceptions to realistic projections are grant in aid from the Centre and state's own tax and non-tax revenues. The state fell ₹21,000 crore short of the projected grant-in-aid from the Centre last year but it continued to project ₹25,000 crore excess this year. Similarly, the state projected ₹85,000 crore from state tax revenues against ₹57,000 crore realised last year and ₹7,000 crore from non-tax revenue against ₹3,300 crore.

"The GST growth in worst conditions was 18 per cent and we are expecting the growth to be higher this year once normalcy is restored. We lost heavily on tax on petrol and diesel because of low consumption and this will definitely improve. Non-tax revenue will also go up through auction of prime land," explained a senior finance official. Even after all positive factors contributing to revenue receipts, there will still be shortfall in achieving budget outlay. "This means no deviation from the regular phenomenon witnessed year after year and enough ammo for the Opposition," he quipped.

SUB PLAN FOR SCs

Revenue expenditure	₹1.82 lakh cr
Capital expenditure	₹31,198.38 cr
Revenue deficit	₹5,000.05 cr
Fiscal deficit	₹37,029.79 cr

SUB-PLAN FOR SCHEDULED CASTES IS PROVIDED WITH ₹17,403.14 CRORE

Vijayawada: The Sub-Plan for Scheduled Castes is provided with ₹17,403.14 crores, while that for Scheduled Tribes is proposed to spend ₹6,131.24 crore. The government allotted ₹28,237.65 crore for BCs, ₹3,840.72 crore for minorities, ₹3,306 crore for Kapu welfare and ₹5,478 crore for welfare of economically backward

classes (EBC).

Other allocations include Vaahana Mitra (₹285 crore), YSR Nethanna Nestham (₹190 crore), EBC Nestham (₹500 crore), Jagannatha Chedodu (₹30.00 crore), Kapu Nestham (₹500 crore), YSR Law Nestham (₹16.64 crore), Rural Development (₹18,580.70 crore), Urban Development (₹8,727.08 crore).

TENDER DOCUMENTS FOR PROCURING 350 AC E-BUSES SUBMITTED FOR JUDICIAL PREVIEW

Vijayawada: As the state government approved for induction of electric buses in APSRTC recently, the department of heavy industries sanctioned 350 AC e-buses of 9M/12M size to be inducted.

A tender document was prepared for induction of 350 e-buses by the intending bidders to procure, maintain and operate through gross cost contract model under phase-II of FAME India Scheme. The tender documents comprising request for proposal and draft conces-

sion agreement, were submitted to the judicial preview judge B. Sivasanakar Rao as per AP Infrastructure Act.

Accordingly, the tender documents were placed in public domain of judicial preview website on Thursday to invite objections/suggestions from the general public and intending bidders and they have to be submitted to the judge, judicial preview within seven working days by May 28 through judicial preview website 'www.judicialpreview.ap.gov.in' only.

And what a great service he rendered in so short a period of 13 months as the CM. He constructed 14 irrigation projects and set up Sri Venkateswara University. He also established a High Court for the Telugu people. He used state funds to restore the dilapidated barrage at Vijayawada as the centre refused to provide funds. Later it was named after him. On the formation day of the state, he released prisoners, the first of its kind.

In his last years, he suf-

fered from grinding poverty. When he was felicitated with a shawl, he commented "Instead of this shawl, had you provided two plantains it would serve as my dinner."

He never craved power. He stood for pure politics but not for power politics. In the scorching summer, at the age of 85, he paid a visit to the bereaved families of two old people and he suffered sunstroke and died on May 20, 1957. Indeed, his life was one of great integrity and honesty!

SHORT TAKES

COURT SERVES
NOTICES OVER
RUIA DEATHSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday served notices to Chittoor SP and state government, asking them to file counter affidavits. The vacation bench comprising Justices C. Praveen Kumar and K. Lalitha heard a public interest litigation filed by Telugu Desam leader P.R. Mohan that though the number of deaths due to lack of medical oxygen supply was 36, the state government was claiming only 11 deaths at Ruia government hospital at Tirupati. The petitioner prayed to the court to order a judicial probe and register case against responsible officials at the hospital on the issue.

Petitioner's counsel Y. Balaji argued that though a complaint was lodged at the police station concerned, the police did not register a case and submitted to the court that the death of patients in the hospital was caused only due to lack of supply of medical oxygen. He informed the court that though the Centre had sanctioned five oxygen plants, they were not set up.

Responding to it, the court issued directions to serve notices to Tirupati SP and also to the state government and posted the next hearing in the case after completion of summer vacation to the court.

TTD TO RELEASE
JUNE QUOTA OF ₹300
DARSHAN TICKETS

TIRUPATI: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) is going to release the online quota of ₹300 special entry darshan tickets for the month of June on Friday by 9 am.

The temple administration made it clear that only 5,000 tickets will be available per day and requested the devotees to make note of this and book darshan tickets in advance.

255 CHILDREN
RESCUED IN
KADAPA DISTRICTDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 20

District Superintendent of Police Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan said that 255 children were rescued in Kadapa district on Thursday as part of the second day of Operation Muskan Covid-19. Of the rescued children, 237 were boys and 18 were girls. He said that all the children were handed over to their parents.

Operation Muskan was carried out under the direction of SP Anburajan along with DSPs, inspectors, sub-inspectors and staff of other departments within all the police stations in the district. The police rescue children working as child laborers in railway stations, bus stands, hotels, garages, industries, workshops and other workplaces and conduct counseling in the presence of ICDS, District Child Welfare Committee, CWC/JJB and hand them over to their parents.

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People wait in a queue for Covid vaccination at the urban primary health centre near One Town Police Station in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. —P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

No let-up in Covid cases
despite partial curfew

On Thursday, the dist sees the highest single-day caseload at 3,184

AVINASH P.
SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, MAY 20

Even after two weeks of imposing partial curfew, there is no let-up in the spread of Covid-19 in Chittoor district, which on Thursday registered a record 3,185 fresh cases — the single-day highest number since the first case was reported on March 24 last year. What is causing more concern among the public as well as officials is that the district is holding a dubious distinction of registering highest Covid-19 death toll in the state with 1,137 persons succumbing to the deadly virus.

The escalating fresh positive cases continue to pose threats to the officials and people as well. The cases have been going up every day and a record 3,185 patients got infected in the last 24 hours. With this, the total positive cases in the district till now has gone up to 1,67,043 and the total active cases have reached 23,967, while 1,41,939 patients were recovered and discharged.

The district recorded around 18,583 cases and 69 deaths in the last seven days and the daily break-up from May 14 to May 20 was 2,708, 2,884, 2,885, 1,621, 2,630, 2,670 and 3,185. Around 15,220 cases and 59 deaths were registered during the previous seven-day period (May 7-13) and the daily break-up was 2,260, 2,269, 2,169, 1,543, 2,426, 1,908 and 2,646.

The continuous surge in new cases reflects the

22,610 new cases,
114 deaths in APDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 20

Andhra Pradesh has registered a surge with 22,610 new Coronavirus infections, along with the highest number of 114 deaths during the last 24 hours.

State health authorities reported on Thursday that out of 1,01,281 samples tested, 22,610 persons have been found infected with Covid-19. Out of the total 1,83,42,918 samples tested so far in the state, 15,21,142 persons have been found infected with the virus. Of them, 13,02,208 have recovered following treatment while 2,09,134 are still active with the virus.

Ten out of 13 districts of the state have on Thursday reported more than 1,000 Coronavirus infections. East Godavari district is leading the state with 3,602 cases, followed by 3,185 in Chittoor, 2,066 in West Godavari, 1,984 in

Visakhapatnam, 1,794 in Anantapur, 1,584 in Guntur, 1,523 in Prakasam, 1,517 in Srikakulam, 1,219 in Nellore, 1,178 in Kurnool, 1,084 in Krishna, 989 in Kadapa and 885 in Vizianagaram. East Godavari is the worst hit, recording the highest number of cumulative 31,673 Corona positive cases, followed by 23,967 in Chittoor, 22,603 in Prakasam, 20,217 in Visakhapatnam, 18,729 in Nellore, 17,113 in Guntur, 14,421 in West Godavari, 12,995 in Srikakulam, 12,189 in Anantapur, 10,522 in Krishna, 8,484 in Vizianagaram, 8,806 in Kadapa and 7,415 in Kurnool.

Among daily cases of deaths due to Covid-19 during the last 24 hours, West Godavari recorded the highest 17 deaths, followed by 15 in Chittoor, 10 each in East Godavari, Guntur and Visakhapatnam.

tered between May 7-20.

Meanwhile, health experts opining that the curbs imposed as part of partial curfew are proving to be inadequate if these Covid numbers are taken into account. Hectic movement of people and vehicles is being observed all over the dis-

trict. The state government has already held talks with it in this regard. Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) has developed 6,553 acres at Kopparthi Industrial Estate for setting up industries. Following this, industrialists are coming forward to set up their units as all the necessary facilities are in place. At present, there are about 10 small and medium scale industries. APIIC is also in the process of setting up an Electronic Manufacturing Cluster

(EMC) in 500 acres there. An amount of ₹250 crore has been earmarked in the budget for the creation of infrastructure facilities for a steel plant to be set up in Kadapa district in public-private partnership mode under the auspices of the YSR Steel Corporation. With an investment of ₹11,000 crore, the government expects the steel plant, which has an annual production target of three million tonnes of high-grade steel, to employ 25,000 people directly and thousands indirectly. Essar Steels

was recently selected as a partner for the steel plant. Also, an amount of ₹100 crore has been allocated for Pulivendula Area Development Authority (PADA). Besides, ₹502.26 crore has been allocated for taking up irrigation projects in the district. Meanwhile, Telugu Desam politiburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy (Vasu) criticised the government for failing to keep the promises made in the last budget and for introducing another budget with juggling of figures to deceive the people again.

FIGHT BACK

To defy orders, organise its distribution in Krishnapatnam today

MLA backs Ayurvedic medication for Covid

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, MAY 20

Even as the district administration issued orders against preparation and distribution of Ayurveda medicines for Covid at Krishnapatnam, till they are certified and permitted by any government agency, legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy was defiant and declared that the distribution would nevertheless commence on Friday.

Krishnapatnam is located in Sarvepalli assembly

constituency represented by Govardhan Reddy and the lawmaker's move to overlook the orders of authorities shocked official circles here on Thursday.

A team of Ayush doctors had examined the medicines prepared by Bonigi Anandaiah, with-out any qualification, and sent samples to a lab in Vijayawada.

Though they felt the medicine was harmless, they reported to the Collector that the formulation is not a standards recipe and the method of

preparation and dosages is sub-standard.

They opined that the ingredients used in the eye drops may harm eyesight in long run. The officials issued the restraining orders in view of the heavy flow of patients to Krishnapatnam. They

feared it would turn another super spreader event like Markaz in New Delhi last year.

However, Govardhan Reddy said he would oversee the distribution of medicine in the interest of public health as the Covid virus was spreading like wild-

MEDICAL AND
HEALTH STAFF
CALLS OFF STIRDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Timely intervention by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy who appreciated the services of the medical and health workers made them call off their agitation on Thursday.

The health workers had been staging demonstration by wearing black badges while attending duties and even chalked out an agitation programme for the next few days in protest against the alleged raw deal being meted out in the hands of health and family welfare commissioner K. Bhaskar during the review of Covid-19 management and vaccination.

They went to the notice of the CM who in turn appreciated the efforts of everybody for working hard to attend to Covid-19 duty. He also advised the officials not to lose their cool, understand and treat their staff kindly. He asked the officials to be sympathetic to the frontline workers as they were under tremendous pressure and to get the works done.

A delegation of leaders led by AP Government Employees Association president

K.R. Suryanarayanan and AP Public Health Employees Union president G. Askara Rao met the government senior representatives including Deputy CM and health minister Alla

Kali Krishna Srinivas and officials including principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal and health commissioner K. Bhaskar and discussed their issues in detail.

As the Deputy CM and the officials assured to look into their issue and promised to resolve it, the health workers called off their stir.

SPECIAL WARD AT
RIMS TO TREAT
BLACK FUNGUSDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 20

A special 40-bed ward for black fungus patients has been set up at Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) here.

Even as Coronavirus infections are spreading unabated in the district, those who recovered Covid-19 are facing a new threat in the form of mucormycosis or black fungus, which is causing panic. However, doctors say there is no need to panic and that there is no danger if precautions are taken.

District Collector Chevuru Harikiran said that the black fungus can be easily treated if it is detected early.

He advised that people suffering from Coronavirus should not use steroids on their own. Also, blood sugar levels should be carefully monitored during and after the Covid treatment.

He called upon the public to take adequate care so that the sugar levels do not rise excessively. Patients with pre-existing diabetes have a higher risk of contracting black fungus if steroid medications are taken even if sugar levels are not under control.

Isolation centres to
come up in villagesVADREVVU SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, MAY 20

As Covid-19 virus is spreading to villages rapidly, many people are compelled to visit towns or nearby Covid care centres for treatment at hospitals or in isolation centres. With the urban scenario itself aggravating by the day, people from rural areas are at a serious disadvantage to access proper medical care. Sensing the severity of the situation, the East Godavari district administration has come up with a novel concept of starting isolation centres in villages themselves. It expects such centre to ease burden on Covid care centres and hospitals in towns and cities.

It has come to the knowledge of the administration many rural people with mild nature of Covid-19 are staying at home, but due to their small houses isolation from other family members has become very difficult. Fearing that such cases would pass on the virus to their families, the officials have acted with alacrity and are setting up isolation centres with home food right in the villages.

District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy has chalked out a plan of action for setting up village isolation centres. These would be run by sarpanches or any group of volunteers. Village secretaries would monitor the health of inmates and provide kits and arrange medical help when necessary.

Already, there are community halls, primary, upper primary or high schools, cyclone shelters and others in many villages and they have power connections too. The administration will arrange beds and other amenities. Toilets, wash-

rooms and others would also be provided for. On Thursday, Joint Collector G. Lakshminsha inaugurated a Village Isolation Centre (VIC) at G. Ragampeta village in Peddapuram mandal. He called upon sarpanches, vice-sarpanches, ward members, youth and officials to come forward to set up such centres in their respective villages, as it would boost the morale of Covid affected to come forward and avail the services. Family members can provide homely food and donors can chip in by providing beds, he observed. He said that many of the organisations irrespective of castes and religions are rendering their services and the villagers should take a cue and come forward. He said that as many as 3,000 Covid-19 patients were getting treatment in government hospitals and 500 patients were on ventilators and 2,500 patients on oxygen supply in the district.

After inaugurating the centre, he interacted with the patients and enquired about their health. He also distributed fruits to the patients. District Panchayat Officer Nageswar Naick, Peddapuram RDO S. Mallibabu, Additional DMHO Dr. Saritha, Pulimeru Primary Health Centre Medical Health Officer Rambabu Naick, MPDO Ramana Reddy, Tahasildar B. Sridevi, panchayat secretary-select Raju and others were present.

Min to resolve
nurses' issuesDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

The minister for medical and health, Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, has assured that the state government will resolve the problems of government nurses as early as possible. He said this to AP State Government Nurses Association state president Manjula Devi, Government Employees Union state president K. Suryanarayana, Secretary G. Askara Rao and others when they submitted a memorandum on the long-pending issue.

The association leaders took various problems being faced by the nurses in the state to the notice of the minister. APGNA state president Manjula Devi said that they urged the government to announce home quarantine leave for the nurses discharging Covid

duties in government hospitals. She deplored that many nurses were infected by Corona and a few even succumbed to it due to lack of leaves. She said the nurses had been discharging duties continuously and urged the government to consider their situation.

Manjula Devi also appealed to the government to increase the salaries of temporary staff nurses, release incentives during the Covid period and implement the insurance scheme of ₹50 lakh for nurses who died while discharging Covid duties.

She further appealed to provide medical services to the family members of nurses, on a par with those provided to the family members of doctors. She also sought special vaccination centres to vaccinate the family members of nurses across the state.

HEAVY RAINS PREDICTED IN RAYALASEEMA

From page 1

Thunderstorms and lightning are very likely to occur at isolated places over north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam and South Coastal AP from Friday to Monday.

The IMD also predicted that heavy rainfall is likely over Rayalaseema region on Saturday.

The day temperature will be two to three degrees higher than the normal temperature.

Seperate ward for
Black fungus casesDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 20

Black fungus cases continue to come to Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) from different parts of the district. The treatment requires multi-pronged strategy involving ENT, pulmonology, general surgeons and neuro surgeons, said Hospital Deputy Superintendent Dr. C. Prabhakar Reddy.

At least four cases have been identified in the post-Covid patients and their samples have been sent for biopsy, Dr Prabhakar Reddy said.

With more than 1,000 Covid patients undergoing treatment at the hospital, it is not safe to treat black fungus cases along with others. Dr Prabhakar Reddy said there is a need to identify a separate ward with atleast ten beds exclusively to treat black fungus cases.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT
TENALI MUNICIPALITY, E-procurement Notice
EPTC NIT No. 148/20/2020-2021/AP Govt Grant & 08/2020-2021/14th FC Grant, Dt:19-05-2021,
Online tenders are hereby invited from the contractors/contracting agencies for the No. of
works:4 vide ECV Rs. 286.18 in Lakhs. The tender document is available for download from
Dt:19-05-2021 (8.00pm) and last date for bid submission is Dt:26-05-2021 (4.30pm) through
<http://tender.approcurement.gov.in> (AP portal). Further details can be seen at 'e-procurement
market Place i.e., www.approcurement.gov.in." Sd/- COMMISSIONER
TENALI MUNICIPALITY

IN BRIEF

POLICE THRASH WOMAN FOR NOT WEARING MASK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ONE DETAINED FOR REMDESIVIR BLACK MARKETING

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 20

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

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

Govind was, however, let off after interrogation.

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

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

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

SONIA URGES MODI TO HELP OUT COVID ORPHANS

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

- PTI

Vaccine will be available for all by December: Nadda

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulatively, 20,55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country.

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

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

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

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

tered in a span of 24 hours. Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 34,875, followed by Karnataka with 34,281 new cases.

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

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

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

Ten states account for

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

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

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

- PTI

NDRF to set up spl. unit to deal with pandemics

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2nd Covid wave hits K'taka hard

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to the data, as many as 467 people in their thirties, 1,037 in their 40s and 1,717 in their 50s died of Covid in the second wave.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Out of 68 infected, only one person died.

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

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

67 MORE DIE OF COVID IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MAY 20

Even as 67 more patients died of Covid-19 in Jammu and Kashmir during the past 24 hours, the authorities said the silver lining in the ostensibly gloomy situation is that over two lakh people who had contracted the virus have recovered completely over a period of time in the Union Territory.

The officials said that while 67 patients died of Covid-19 including 41 in Jammu region and remaining 26 in the Kashmir Valley, 4,169 new positive cases of the coronavirus surfaced in the Union Territory since Wednesday evening.

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

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

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

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

Asked about the Singapore High Commissioner's

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

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

chief minister on this topic".

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

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

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

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

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

FIGHTING | COVID

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

3rd wave likely if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist

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

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

immunity in six months.

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

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

A recent sero-survey by

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

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

"Using more stringent measures (more than 30

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

IMPEACHMENT
VOTE AGAINST
SLOVENIA PM

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

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

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

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

13 KILLED IN
AFGHAN ROAD
BOMBINGS

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

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

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

NIGERIA'S BOKO
HARAM LEADER
BADLY WOUNDED

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

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

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

2012 CAMPAIGN
FINANCING:
SARKOZY ON TRIAL

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

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



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

Israel unleashes strikes
as chances of truce rise

Bibi pushes back against US calls to wind down offensive

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

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

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

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

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

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

The official spoke on

Stop hostilities at
once, says UN chief

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

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

The mauling left Minish with a crushed jaw, a puncture wound in his scalp so deep the doctor told him he could see bone, lacerations and many stitches after a 4½-hour surgery. He also is wearing a patch over his right eye, saying the doctors are worried about it. All that damage came from a very brief encounter — he estimates it lasted less than 10 seconds — after he startled the bear Tuesday morning.

— AP

EXPECTED COSTLY
BATTLE: ISLAMIC
JIHAD LEADER

Beirut, May 20: The leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group says militant factions in Gaza went into the latest battle with Israel knowing it will be "costly but also knowing that it is the only road to freedom and to protect Jerusalem."

Ziad Nakhaleh said in a televised speech from Beirut on Wednesday that neither nuclear weapons, warplanes nor peace agreements with some Arab states could bring Israeli security and peace. He added that militant groups in Gaza have "made miracles that you can see with your own eyes and you live them every moment when you run to shelters."

Nakhaleh was referring to thousands of missiles and rockets that Gaza militants have fired toward Israel. Nakhaleh said that after Israel's moves that threatened the eviction of Palestinian families in east Jerusalem, "we were in front of two choices, to surrender and to give them everything or fight them over everything."

— AP

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

— AP

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

— AP

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

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

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

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

Lavrov says talks
with Blinken
constructive

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

UK TO REUNIFY
RAIL NETWORK
UNDER GOVT

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

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

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

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

— AP

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

China 2nd protest
over US navy move

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

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

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

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

MOBS ATTACK
SYRIANS HEADING
FOR PREZ VOTE

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

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

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

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

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

— AP

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

Along with building the world's largest navy and coast guard by numbers of vessels, China has fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea and created new island outposts by piling sand cement on coral reefs and topping them with airstrips and other infrastructure.

It has ignored rival territorial claims by its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours, as well as an international arbitral ruling that declared most of China's claims in the South China Sea invalid.

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

— AP

China delays mission to space station

Nasa says Beijing failed to meet standards regarding debris

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quick BITES

INDICATORS

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sugar exports subsidy cut to ₹4,000/ tonne

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

Bosch Q4 net jumps six-fold to ₹482 crore



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

Mindtree to buy L&T's NxT Digital Business

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

Nucleus Software gets Bank of Sydney contract

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



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

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HOME LOAN MARKET GROWS 9.6%

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

New Delhi, May 20: Banks are likely to transfer about 80 large NPA accounts for resolution to the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL), expected to be operational soon.

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

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

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

Gold to gain from crypto fall, dollar weakness

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 20

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

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

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



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

commodities and currencies, Angel Broking.

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

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

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

FY21 ITR filing deadline extended till Sept. 30

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Not very social' ByteDance founder to hand CEO reins to college buddy

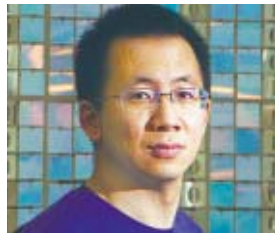
ECHO WANG &
YINGZHI YANG
MAY 20

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

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

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

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



Zhang Yiming

technology firms.

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

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

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

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

ment".

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

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

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

Liang, not a household name in China, roomed with Zhang at Nankai University in Tianjin, China. He also worked with him at real estate website 99fang.com prior to joining ByteDance. Liang on his LinkedIn profile said he is a ByteDance co-founder.

ByteDance, which employs over 100,000 people worldwide, had been preparing for a much-anticipated IPO this year, but halted the plans in April. — Reuters

DBS HAS FUNDS TO BUY CITI INDIA UNIT: BERNSTEIN

CHANYAPORN
CHANJAROEN
MAY 20

DBS Group Holdings Ltd has sufficient capital to bid for Citigroup Inc's consumer assets in India valued at \$2.7 billion (\$2 billion) without needing to raise additional funds, Sanford C. Bernstein & Co analysts said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

BADGE | OF HONOUR

Verification application to appear in Account Settings tab

Twitter starts verification for blue tick

New Delhi, May 20: Twitter will start rolling out its verification application process from Thursday after which approved user accounts can sport the 'blue verified badge'.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



fied badge from accounts that no longer meet the updated criteria for verification, such as those that are inactive or incomplete.

The coveted 'blue badge' is one of the ways Twitter helps people distinguish the authenticity of accounts that are of high public interest, and gives Twitter users more context about who they're hav-

ing conversations with.

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Legendary Milkha Singh is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh has tested positive for Covid-19 and is in isolation at his Chandigarh residence. The 91-year-old, popularly known as Flying Sikh, is asymptomatic and claims to be in "high spirits".

"A couple of our helpers earlier tested positive and so all the family members did the tests. Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha said.

"I am fine and there is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," he added. None of the other family members, including Milkha's wife Nirmal Kaur returned a positive test. — PTI

Shooting coach Monali dies at 44

New Delhi: In a big loss to the Indian shooting fraternity, coach and technical official Monali Gorhe died of mucormycosis on Thursday. She was 44 and is survived by her mother and a sister. Monali was admitted to a hospital after being diagnosed with Covid-19 but was discharged, only to get re-admitted to treat mucormycosis.

Many people recovering from Covid-19 have of late been afflicted by black fungus — or mucormycosis — disease. It is a fungal infection that affects the nose, eye and sometimes the brain. A few hours before her death, her father Manohar Gorhe too succumbed to Covid-19. Monali was the coach of the pistol core group. She had also served as the national coach of the Sri Lankan shooting team. — PTI

Bhuvneshwar's dad passes away

New Delhi: India pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar's father, Kiran Pal Singh on Thursday died at his Meerut residence after battling liver cancer for the last eight months. He was 63 and is survived by his wife Indresh Devi and son and daughter Bhuvneshwar and Rekha respectively.

According to *ESPNCricinfo*, Singh was first detected with the illness in September last year when Bhuvneshwar was playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in UAE for the IPL. "It is understood that Bhuvneshwar's return from the IPL in UAE, where he was representing Sunrisers Hyderabad, was mainly due to his father's health condition," the report said. Singh was undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy, at the All Institute of Medical Science here after consulting doctors in the UK. — PTI

Archer doubtful for India series

London: England pacer Jofra Archer will undergo a surgery on his right elbow on Friday, which could effectively rule him out of the first part of the five-match Test series against visiting India beginning on August 4. Archer is already out of the upcoming two-match Test series against New Zealand and this will be his second surgery after being operated upon on his right hand.

"Jofra has been reviewed by a medical consultant in respect of his right elbow soreness. He will now proceed to surgery tomorrow," the ECB said. — PTI

Medical insurance for sportspersons

New Delhi: The government has decided to widen its medical insurance cover for sportspersons by increasing the number of beneficiary athletes and including contractual coaches and support staff from this year in the wake of the pandemic. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Thursday said that with this decision, the coverage would increase to more than 13,000 athletes, coaches and support staff. Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said the well-being of athletes, coaches and support staff are his ministry's priority.

"We want to ensure that all our athletes and contractual staff have health cover during these difficult times and even after," he said. — PTI

REJUVENTUS

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

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

Goals in either half from Dejan Kulusevski and Federico Chiesa gave coach Andrea Pirlo his second second trophy of the season after the Italian Super Cup, on the day he turned 42.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was denied a first trophy of his coaching career, and Atalanta's second trophy after the 1963 Coppa Italia.

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

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

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

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

But ten minutes later Ruslan Malinovskyi blasted in the equaliser.

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

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



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

Liverpool move into top 4; Spurs' Euro hopes dented

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

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

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

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

Leicester host Tottenham on Sunday, while third-placed Chelsea travel to Aston Villa.

Firmino put Liverpool on course for their fourth consecutive victory with a clinical finish from Andy Robertson's 43rd minute cross. Phillips got the second goal in the 52nd minute with a header from Sadio Mané's cross for his first goal for the club. Oxlade-Chamberlain lashed in Liverpool's

third in the 88th minute.

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

Tottenham will have to wait until their last game of the season to discover their Europa destiny.

A second defeat in their last three games left them in seventh place, level on points with eighth-placed Everton and three points behind sixth-placed West Ham.

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

MBAPPE DAZZLES AS PSG CROWNED WITH FRENCH CUP

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

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



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

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM AWAIT COVID TEST RESULTS AFTER REACHING DOHA

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

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

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

matches," it added.

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

PEREZ LEADS 1ST PRACTICE SESSION, HAMILTON FIFTH

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

Perez had a best lap of 1 minute, 12.49 seconds on the sinewy 3.4-kilometre circuit that snakes around the picturesque Principality. Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz Jr. and Max Verstappen, Perez's teammate, were next.

AlphaTauri driver Pierre Gasly had the fourth fastest time. He was followed by F1 champion Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

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

Dravid to coach India on SL tour

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

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

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

It was reported on May 17 that Dravid was being considered for the assignment.

Bowling coach Paras Mhambrey will also be a part of the support staff.

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

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



Rahul Dravid

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bransgrove told the website that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the ICC are permitting a crowd of "4000 people" in the eagerly-awaited clash.

"I understand 50 per cent of the permitted crowds will be taken by the ICC for its sponsors and other stake holders and we will be selling the rest 2000 tickets. We have already received more than double applications from the fans," Bransgrove said.

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

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

India not safe for T20 WC: Hussey

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

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

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

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

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

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

— MIKE HUSSEY
former Australia player

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

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

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

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



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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