

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | WEDNESDAY 26 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 28°C
Rainfall: 3%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 12
Tithi: Pournami
Star: Anusham
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
Yamagandam: 9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.25 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.27 pm
Maghrib: 6.29 pm
Isha: 7.46 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.30 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.42 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 6.32 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 7.19 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,02,282)	(+3,963)
2,71,49,950	3,11,225

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+34,285) 468
TN: 19,11,496 21,340

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,82,91,599

DEATHS

34,93,087

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES 219

worldometers.info

CM wants Chengalppet unit to start vaccine production

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Chief Minister M. K. Stalin on Tuesday inspected the Central government-owned HLL Biotech's vaccine laboratory at Thirukazhukundram in Chengalppet district on Tuesday and wanted the facility to start manufacturing Covid-19 vaccines immediately.

Since there was a dire need for vaccines in the state, the facility should be made functional by the Centre at the earliest, he said, adding that the state would provide all support to start vaccine production.

Malayalam actor Unni Dev held for wife's suicide

Thiruvananthapuram: Actor Unni Dev, son of popular Malayalam actor and late Rajan P Dev, was arrested on Tuesday over the death of his wife Priyanka, police said here. A physical education teacher in a local school, Priyanka was found hanging in the bedroom of her home at Vembayam near Thiruvananthapuram on May 12.

COUNTER

POINT



Covid vaccines and medicines? You are late... the mafia has taken them all!



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AIADMK starts attacking new govt



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Blinken: US will aid Gaza without helping Hamas

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Sushil may lose WFI contract



New Covid-19 cases fall below 2 lakh; TPR is 9.54

■ **Daily caseload registers big drop after 40 days**

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The daily fresh Covid-19 cases, for the first time in 40 days, fell below two lakhs on Tuesday, with the Union health ministry terming this as an “encouraging sign” as new cases were 1.96 lakh along with 3,511 deaths. The active caseload too has fallen to 25.86 lakhs and the daily positivity rate has come down to 9.54 per cent.

“The active cases have decreased since its last peak on May 10, 2021. A net decline of 1,33,934 is witnessed in the last 24 hours,” said health ministry officials as India's daily recoveries continue to outnumber the daily new cases for the 12th consecutive day. In the last 24 hours, close to 3.27 lakh recoveries were registered, taking the national recovery rate to 89.26 per cent.

Delhi, the nation's capital, that has borne the second wave's brutal brunt of the second wave between April and May, is now witnessing huge relief as the detection of new cases fell to 1,568 on Tuesday and the positivity rate declined to 2.14 per cent. However, 156 deaths still remain an area of concern though hospitals are now seeing less serious patients, and of the 25,035 beds, only 7,872 are occupied. However, patients in ICUs and on ventilators or on oxygen support are still high.

Despite a slide in cases, the states continue to show caution. Assam on

TN team to explore black fungus source

DC CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, MAY 25

The state government will soon constitute a 10-member experts team to study the source of mucormycosis that has become a cause of concern among the patients recovered from Covid-19.

Health secretary J.Radhakrishnan said here on Tuesday that Chief Minister M.K. Stalin will announce the constitution of the team in the next few days.

As many as 181 cases of mucormycosis (black fungus) cases have been reported from CMC hospital, Vellore. “The source of the infection however is not yet known clearly,” he said. “The experts

team will conduct studies to find out source of the fungal infection.”

Mr Radhakrishnan said the Chief Minister has already held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union health minister Harsh Vardhan seeking adequate allocation of anti-fungus drugs Liposomal Amphotericin-B for treating the black fungus disease.

The government has instructed all government medical college hospitals in the state to create a 30-bed multi disciplinary ward each with a team consisting of an ophthalmologist, a neurologist and an ENT specialist for the treatment of mucormycosis persons.

RUSSIAN PLANE LANDS WITH REMDESIVIR

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Russian vaccines are reliable like Kalashnikov rifles since they are based on technology used for decades, Russian deputy chief of mission (DCM) Roman Babushkin said on Tuesday, informing reporters that the supplies of the Russian Sputnik V Covid vaccine to India are going on as per contractual obligations and that Russia is studying very carefully new requests for the vaccines from various Indian state governments and Indian companies.

The Russian DCM was speaking to news agencies after an aircraft landed from Russia with vials of antiviral drug Remdesivir along with other medicines used in the fight against Covid.

While India has already approved the use of the Sputnik V double-dose vaccine, the Russian DCM also said that the third phase clinical trials are ongoing for the Sputnik Lite single-dose vaccine, adding that its potential use in India also would help vaccinate a large number of people in a short period of time.

The Sputnik V double-dose vaccine is already a shot in the arm for India, which is looking to vaccinate its 1.3 billion population as quickly as possible.

Tuesday extended curfew in urban areas till June 5. As per new orders, all shops, commercial establishments and offices – both government and private – will shut down by 1 pm on all days.

Meanwhile, Bharat Biotech said regulatory approvals for Covaxin are in process in over 60 countries and emergency use authorisations have been obtained in 13 countries, with more to follow.

“Application for Emergency Use listing has been submitted to WHO-Geneva and regulatory approvals are expected by

July-September 2021,” Bharat Biotech said in a statement. This comes amid news that Covaxin is not among the vaccines that was approved by WHO for international travellers. On domestic production of its vaccines, Bharat Biotech said Covaxin had reached 30 cities in 30 days.

Several states facing an acute shortage of vaccines have started shopping abroad though the Centre said over 1.77 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines are still available with the states and Union territories.

SC notice to WB on poll violence

New Delhi, May 25: The Supreme Court Tuesday asked the Centre and West Bengal government to respond to a plea seeking directions to prevent alleged exodus of people due to “state-sponsored” violence and constituting a special investigation team to investigate and take appropriate action against culprits.

A vacation bench of Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gavai directed that the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission of Women be made parties in the matter after the petitioners said that they have taken note of situation of people in West Bengal.

The West Bengal government informed the court that three people have been arrested in connection with the alleged killing of two BJP workers in poll-related violence on May 2 in the state and FIRs have been registered in these cases.

On May 18, the apex court had issued notices to the Centre, West Bengal government on the plea filed by Biswajit Sarkar,

CENTRE APPOINTS CISF CHIEF JAISWAL AS CBI DIRECTOR

New Delhi, May 25: CISF chief Subodh Kumar Jaiswal was on Tuesday appointed the new CBI director for two years, according to a personnel ministry order.

Mr Jaiswal is a 1985-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Maharashtra cadre. He has also served as Maharashtra's director general of police in the past.

A three-member selection committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Monday shortlisted Jaiswal's name. Chief Justice of India N V Ramana and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury are the two members of the panel.

—PTI

whose brother was killed and Adhikari, whose husband was also killed in poll related violence.

—PTI



Rough sea in the Bay of Bengal ahead of Cyclone ‘Yaas’ landfall, at Digba in East Midnapore district, Tuesday.

— PTI

Lakhs evacuated as ‘Yaas’ to make landfall today

RAJIB CHOWDHURI, AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
KOLKATA/BALASORE, MAY 25

A day before the “very severe” Cyclone “Yaas” makes its landfall and strikes mainly two states in eastern India, a tornado hit two districts of West Bengal on Tuesday, leaving two persons dead due to electrocution and

injured several others, while damaging several houses. Eleven lakh people were evacuated to safer places in West Bengal, while in Odisha at least two lakh people were evacuated.

It was also found Cyclone Yaas had slightly changed its course; and will now have its landfall at Dhamra, in Odisha's Bhadrak district, at 5.30

am on Wednesday, instead of Balasore. Heavy downpours and squally winds lashed the coastal districts both states. In the midst of a raging pandemic, those who are Covid-positive are being placed in separate cyclone shelters.

“The storm will further intensify in the next 12 hours and turn into a very severe cyclonic storm,” the IMD said.

her his parents wanted to see her, according to the lottery winner. “I said ‘I’m working,’ and he said ‘no you have to come over’. So, I went over there and that’s when they told me. I was in total disbelief. I cried, I hugged them,” Fiega said.

“If I had kept that million, I wouldn’t have been this famous. So, I’m glad I gave it back,” Abhi said.

—PTI

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Social media giants Facebook and Google on Tuesday indicated that they will comply with the new guidelines issued by the Union government for the digital platforms with just hours left for them to take effect.

Another major, Twitter, has not commented on its compliance status.

A Google spokesperson said the company has consistently invested in significant product changes, resources and personnel to ensure that it is combating illegal content in an effective and fair way, and to comply with local laws.

A Facebook spokesperson said the company is working to implement operational processes and aims to comply with the provisions of the IT rules. The company said it continues to discuss a “few of the issues which need more engagement” with the government.

The government had on February 25 issued new rules which require large social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to follow additional due diligence, including the appointment of a chief

Cong wants Twitter to tag 11 Union mins

DC CORRESPONDENTS
DELHI, MAY 25

The Delhi Police on Tuesday served notices to two Congress leaders in connection with the probe into a complaint about the alleged ‘Congress toolkit’ matter even as the Congress once again wrote to Twitter asking them to flag tweets by 11 Union ministers referring to the alleged “Congress toolkit” as “manipulated media”.

The letter, written to Jim Baker, Twitter's deputy general counsel and vice-president (legal), and Vijaya Gadde, lead for legal, policy and

trust and safety, by Congress’ communications chief and general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala says, “The subject matter of the forged Toolkit document was created by certain BJP leaders to gain undue and wrongful political advantage by spreading potentially dangerous, false and fabricated material through their Twitter handles against the Indian National Congress and its leaders”.

The letter carried the URLs of the specific tweets by these ministers which the Congress demanded to be marked under “manipulative media”.

compliance officer, nodal contact person and resident grievance officer.

‘Significant social media intermediaries’-- defined as those with over 50 lakh registered users -- were given three months to comply with the additional requirements.

Non-compliance with

rules would result in these companies losing their intermediary status that provides them exemptions and specified immunity from liabilities for any third-party information and data hosted by them. In other words, they could be liable for action, sources said.

Teacher held under POCSO in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Chennai police on Tuesday arrested G. Rajagopalan, a teacher of PSSB School in Chennai's K.K Nagar, a day after the current and former students complained of alleged sexual harassment against him.

Ashok Nagar All Women police booked Mr Rajagopalan for under sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, IPC and the Information Technology Act. The charges include sexual harassment of children, insulting modesty of women, transmitting obscene material and material containing sexually explicit act in electronic form.

According to the police, Mr Rajagopalan, a commerce and accountancy teacher, was picked up from his house in Madipakkam and taken to Vadapalani police station.

JUNTA DETAINS MALI'S PRESIDENT, PM IN GARRISON

Bamako (Mali), May 25: Mali's transitional President and Prime Minister remain detained Tuesday after being taken by force to the military headquarters hours after a government reshuffle left out two members of the junta that had seized power in a coup nine months ago.

The African Union, the United Nations, the West African regional bloc known as ECOWAS and other members of the international community called for the immediate release of President Bah N'Daw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane, who were taken to the Kati military headquarters along with others late on Monday.

The garrison town sits 15 kilometers from the capital and is the former stronghold of the junta.

—AP

MEHUL CHOKSI ‘GOES MISSING’ IN ANTIGUA

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Fugitive diamondaire Mehul Choksi has reportedly gone missing in Antigua where he has been staying since January 2018.

According to reports, Mr Choksi, who had taken citizenship of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, was seen driving in the southern area of the island on Sunday. Later, his vehicle was found but there was no trace of him, reports said. A local news agency in Barbuda quoted commissioner of police Atlee Rodney as saying that the police are “following up on the whereabouts of Indian businessman Mehul Choksi”, who is “rumoured” to be missing.

Indian origin family returns \$1 million ticket to owner

New York, May 25: A woman in Massachusetts threw away her shot at \$1 million, but as luck would it, she got a second chance at the fortune, thanks to an Indian-origin family who returned the discarded lottery ticket to their long-time customer, earning appreciation for their honesty.

Lea Rose Fiega bought a Diamond Millions scratch-

off ticket in March at Lucky Stop, a store owned by the Indian-origin family in Southwick, where she was a regular customer.

“I was in a hurry, on lunch break, and just scratched it real quick, and looked at it, and it didn’t look like a winner, so I handed it over to them to throw away,” Fiega said. But the ticket was not fully scratched off and it sat

in a pile in the store for 10 days until Abhi Shah, son of the store owners, noticed the \$30 ticket in the trash, *New York Post* reported.

Abhi said the winning ticket was sold by his mother Aruna Shah to one of their regular customers.

“One evening, I was going through the tickets from the trash and [noticed] that she didn’t scratch the number. I

scratched the number and it was \$1 million underneath the ticket,” Abhi was quoted as saying by the local TV station WWLP.

“I was a millionaire for a night,” he joked.

Abhi said he initially thought of buying a Tesla car, but later decided to return the winning ticket.

“I mean I had \$1 million in my hand and on the other

hand I wanted to do something good,” he said.

The family said it was not an easy decision to return the ticket. “We didn’t sleep two nights,” said Maunish Shah, owner of Lucky Spot.

“He called my mom, grandparents in India, they said, ‘Give it back, we don’t want that money,’” Maunish said. The younger Shah came to find Fiega at work and told

OTHER STORIES

90-year-old overseas citizen of India dies of Covid-19 near Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

A 90-year-old overseas citizen of India (OCI) dies of Covid-19 in Chengalpet Government hospital on Friday.

The deceased person identified as, Leon De' Cruz (90), a native of Kolkata in West Bengal, was holding England citizenship. According to local police, Leon De' Cruz, came to Mamallapuram near Chennai a few months back for selling a property near Kalpakkam he had purchased before six years. He had stayed at a private hotel on Mamallapuram- Kovalam road.

Sources said last week he was tested positive for the coronavirus and subsequently was admitted to the Chengalpet Government for treatment. However, Leon died due to Covid-19 related complications on Friday. Officials in the district got in touch with the British embassy regarding the matter. Information on Leon's passing away has been conveyed to his family in London, higher officials said.

Direct delivery of veggies from farmers to apartment dwellers

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Coming as a relief to apartment dwellers in the suburbs, the horticulture department of the TN government will deliver veggies and fruits directly from the farmers to the apartment complexes, during the current week-long lockdown.

Since the vegetable and provision shops were closed owing to the lockdown, the horticulture department has facilitated the delivery of fresh farm products in large quantities directly to the apartment buildings in areas such as Madipakkam, Sholingannallur, Medavakkam, Sembakkam, Madambakkam, Chitalapakkam, Perungulathur in the city suburbs.

This initiative is welcomed by farmers as they face difficulty in selling their veggies, during the lockdown. This has also come as a huge relief for families and individuals living in the apartment as the veggies are fresh, cheap and procured on their apartment premises.

With the lockdown extended till May 31 st, both farmers and customers are benefiting from the initiative.

Given the freshness of produce they are receiving and that too for a reasonable price, residents are hoping that these farmers markets continue even after the lockdown is lifted.

Siddha officer warns against quacks

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MAY 25

Dr.S.Kamaraj Tiruchy District Siddha Medical officer said suitable legal action will be initiated against those who sell and dispose of fake Siddha medicines.

In a release at Tiruchy on Tuesday, Dr.Kamaraj said he has received several complaints that fake Siddha and Ayurvedic medicines are being sold at Tiruchy, Karur, Perambalur, and Ariyalur districts.

He said the medical shops selling the Siddha, Ayurvedic, and homeopathy medicals or Allopathy medicines should ensure they are government permitted. Besides they should also ensure that government license number is printed on the drug. He warned that if any lapses are detected by officials during inspection, the shop license will be cancelled and action taken on them, he added.



Greater Chennai corporation commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi and HR&CE minister K. Sekar Babu inaugurate vegetables and fruits sale by tricycle and pushcarts at KK Nagar.

— DC

Private hospitals to notify fever cases to corporation

ARUL PALANI | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 25

The Greater Chennai Corporation has introduced a new scheme to collect details of persons who take treatment in private clinics/hospitals for fever in the city as some private clinics/hospitals and general practitioners are treating persons with Covid-19 like symptoms and not notifying the same to the corporation.

The corporation directed the hospitals to alert them on a daily basis through an email id - gccpvthospitalreports@chennaicorporation.gov.in and nominated 15 entomologists to coordinate with private hospitals. Violators will be punished under the Disaster Management Act 2005.

Commissioner, Greater Chennai Corporation Gagandeep Singh Bedi directed all the private hospitals in the city to alert the corporation regarding the fever cases, which they attend. Often the persons with fever visit the private hospitals and take medicine and go home without taking the

Covid-19. The Corporation has decided to conduct RT-PCR test for the persons report with fever in order to reduce the Covid-19 cases.

An order under Disaster Management Act 2005 has been passed stating that it has come to the notice of the Greater Chennai Corporation that certain private clinics/hospitals and general practitioners are treating persons with Covid-19 like symptoms and not notifying the same to the Corporation.

Hence, the Corporation directed all the private clinics/hospitals and general practitioners to intimate the details of persons with Covid-19 like symptoms whom they have treated.

The hospitals have been directed to inform the Corporation about details including name of patient, address, phone number and symptoms. Such reports should be sent to the Corporation on daily basis to an email id - gccpvthospitalreports@chennaicorporation.gov.in

This order comes into immediate effect and any refusal to comply with the

direction will be liable for punishment under section 51of the Disaster Management Act 2005.

The Corporation also nominated 15 entomologists to coordinate with private hospitals. They are Shanthi, Junior Entomologist — 94444 22035, Malathi, Junior Entomologist — 63 800 72 982, Malathi, Junior Entomologist - 63800 72987 (incharge), Sooriya, Junior Entomologist — 80726 42988, Joshwa, Junior Entomologist - 98408 57792, Swaroop Rani, Junior Entomologist — 99416 27096, Paramaguru, Senior Entomologist — 99412 26410, G. Thenmozhi, Senior Entomologist-98847 96674, N.Thenmozhi, Senior Entomologist-98406 24209, Julie, Junior Entomologist — 63826 94104, Jagadheesan, Junior Entomologist — 74491 95461, Vasanthi, Junior Entomologist — 94446 82514, Porkodi, Senior Entomologist — 99403 74804, Sivakumar, Junior Entomologist — 98413 20440 and Velmurugan, Junior Entomologist - 98844 70278

2,409 cases registered, 1,805 vehicles seized

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

The city police have booked 2,409 cases and seized 1805 vehicles in connection with violation of lockdown. Moreover, 1,946 cases were booked against individuals for not wearing masks and 188 cases against those who did not follow physical distancing.

According to Greater Chennai police, till Monday night, the traffic police in the city registered 1,497 cases and seized 359 vehicles, out of which 319 were two-wheelers, while the law and order police booked 912 cases and seized 1,446 vehicles – 1,348 two-wheelers, 65 autos and 33 light vehicles.

Besides the police booked 1,946 individuals for not wearing masks and 188 cases for not following physical distancing.

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

Chennai Commissioner of Police Shankar Jiwai, IPS has made the restrictions strict by setting up check-points at various places in the city to monitor people's movement and lockdown violations. A total of 200 check-points come under the control of the law and order police and another 118 under the control of the Traffic Police were set up to restrict travel.

Chennai police regulates assemblies, processions, demonstrations for 7 days

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Chennai Police commissioner Shankar Jiwai had promulgated Section 41 of the Tamil Nadu City Police Act regulating all assemblies, processions, fasts, demonstrations and human chains within the city limits until May 31, 2021.

In his order, he said "Section 41 of the

Besides the police booked, 1,946 individuals for not wearing masks and 188 cases for not following physical distancing

'Gimme the jab'

Don't limit jabs to 100/camp, say Chennai residents

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Though the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has started special vaccination camps at 208 locations, prioritising residents in the age group of 18-44 years, the vaccination is limited to 100 despite high demand due to shortage of vaccines.

The GCC Commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi has ordered officers in all zones to increase the number of vaccinations to 30,000 every day, but jabs, despite more beneficiaries turning up, are limited to just 100 people at each camp.

For instance, 100 people randomly picked up from Nanganallur - Voltas Colony in Zone XII were vaccinated on Tuesday and wound up by afternoon. V.Rama Rao, member, Nanganallur

The GCC Commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi has ordered officers in all zones to increase the number of vaccinations to 30,000 every day, but jabs, despite more beneficiaries turning up, are limited to just 100 people at each camp

Residents Welfare Association, said that more than 100 youngsters did turn up hoping to get inoculated. 'The officials distributed more than 250 tokens as well. But they stopped the administration as they inoculated 100 people. The same process happened to all 12 divisions in the zone. On Monday also they stopped vaccination when they achieved jabs to 100 beneficiaries. The authorities should increase the number of beneficiaries to arrest the spread of the virus. Most of the benefi-

ciaries have received Covishield and residents aged above 45 had also been administered the vaccine at the separate camps at the primary health centres. We were told by the health officials that Covaxin had been restricted to those who need the second dose, because of the reduced stocks. We were engaged in the process after GCC officials requested the resident's associations to make arrangements for vaccination of persons in the age group of 18-44 on their premises. The youngsters were mobilised by resident associations and political parties, especially ruling party workers, he said.

Residents and companies have been asked to contact the Office of the Deputy Commissioner (Revenue and Finance) at Ripon Buildings or the Revenue

Department of Chennai Corporation at the regional and zonal level for organising special camps for vaccination. Residents can send details of persons enlisted for vaccination on WhatsApp number 9498346494 to make arrangements for special camps.

'The old batch of vaccines sent by the Central government has been used for vaccination of residents above the age of 45 at primary health centres of the city, while the new batch of vaccines procured by the state government has been used for vaccination of residents in the age group of 18-44. The Chennai Corporation has also prioritised the vulnerable population including physically challenged in the age group of 18-44 making vaccines available for them at doorsteps.

Steps taken on war-footing showing positive results: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, MAY 25

The state government's steps taken on a war-footing and the implementation of lockdown in the state have started giving positive results against Covid spread, said Ma. Subramanian, minister for health, medical education and family welfare.

The state health minister, who is on a two-day visit to the southern districts to review the ongoing anti-corona schemes of the government, said that the number of daily corona cases in the state has been going down, as the total daily cases in Tamil Nadu went down by around 1,500 to 34,800 against the 36,000 reported as daily average last week.

"The case load particularly in Chennai, one of the severely affected cities in the state has gone down to 4,900 on May 24, when compared to the 7,500 cases reported on May 12"

"The case load particularly in Chennai, one of the severely affected cities in the state has gone down to 4,900 on May 24, when compared to the 7,500 cases reported on May 12," added Ma. Subramanian, who added that the state has successfully tackled the acute oxygen supply shortage by making arrangements to bring in oxygen from Rourkela and Jamshedpur.

"Under the guidance of

our chief minister we are also working on to create new oxygen production plants so as to prevent any crisis if the third wave befalls," said the minister, who visited 9 villages in Thoothukudi district and inaugurated corona vaccination drive.

The health minister was accompanied by his cabinet colleagues, P Geetha Jeevan, minister for social welfare and women empowerment, and Anitha R Radhakrishnan, state fisheries and animal husbandry minister along with the health secretary, J. Radhakrishnan and Thoothukudi district collector, Dr. K.Senthil Raj during the inspection and the review meeting. He also reviewed ongoing anti-corona measures in Kanyakumari district.



TN Artists Association and Vadapalani police personnel create awareness on importance of facemasks at Vadapalani signal on Tuesday.

— DC

No written complaint received: PSBB

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

The PSBB issued a statement on Tuesday saying that the school had never 'received any written complaint' following the arrest of their teacher. The school also mentioned that the issue was first brought to their attention through social media.

The school's principal, Geeta Govindarajan said: "We have never received any written complaint on this matter from anyone. The behaviour of one teacher does not in any

way detract from the highest standards of professionalism that our teachers uphold. For us, our students' welfare is absolutely sacrosanct."

The statement also stated that the school welcomes all assistance from the concerned authorities to deal with this situation and take needed action.

"In our over 60 years' legacy, we have never had such a situation with an errant teacher. It is a wake-up call for all schools and we have to be ever vigilant. We are constituting a special senior group, drawn from both

legal and non-legal backgrounds, who will be guiding us to ensure that such incidents don't recur again," Sheela Rajendra, the Dean and Director of the school said.

Meanwhile, the All India Democratic Women's Association on Tuesday wrote to Tamil Nadu School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, urging a speedy trial in the case. They urged to protect the identity of the victims of sexual harassment so that they are not subjected to unnecessary ridicule and harassment.

Efforts on to fix hitches in veggie supply

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Though people in many parts of Chennai complained of not sighting the cart selling vegetables and fruits on the second day of complete lockdown on Tuesday in their localities, Chief Minister M. K. Stalin held a meeting with senior ministers and top level officials to fix the hitches.

An official press release said that 13,096 vehicles carried 6,509 tonnes of vegetables and fruits for supplying them at the doorsteps of residents

An official press release said that 13,096 vehicles carried 6,509 tonnes of vegetables and fruits for supplying them at the doorsteps of residents who had confined themselves to their houses all over the state on Tuesday

who had confined themselves to their houses all over the State on Tuesday. This was more than the quantity that was sold on Monday – 4,900 tonnes taken around through 6,296 vehicles. In Chennai alone, 1,670 vehicles were engaged to supply 1,400 tonnes of vegetables and

fruits, the release said. The unique service, introduced after the total lockdown was brought into force on Monday, would continue in the coming days and vegetables and fruits would be sold at reasonable prices, the release said. The Chief Minister was

very particular that essential items like vegetables, fruits and milk should be made available to the people during the lockdown time and has given necessary instructions to the various departments involved in the project.

Apart from involving the departments of Horticulture, Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing and Agriculture Business, the Chennai Corporation and the traders' associations have come together to supply the essentials at the doorsteps. In the districts, the local bodies are part of the project.

Activists, retired civil servants write to CM to revive vaccine complex

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

At least 51 individuals including retired civil servants and industry people have jointly written a letter to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin urging him to utilize the facility at the defunct Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) under HLL Biotech Limited (HBL) in

Chengalpet to make the state self-reliant in vaccine production.

The letter comes after the CM declared on May 18 that the government will initiate immediate steps to manufacture Covid vaccines within the state.

The latter demanded that the state government takes control of the unit floating a tender and Bharat Biotech

can be asked to use it for exclusively manufacturing Covaxin. Interested state governments can also be requested to place orders for vaccines.

The profit can be used to make the unit fully operational over a period of time. The state can fund partially and ask banks to lend more.

Also the Centre should be

asked to provide funds to produce vaccines using compulsory licensing options as Covaxin was developed and tested with the expertise of National Institute of Virology and Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The Centre should allot more funds to produce other vaccines as well, the letter said.

The IVC constructed in more than 100 acres was meant to be a nodal centre for the public sector manufacturing and research. The aim of the centre was to ensure supply of vaccines at affordable prices as it is having capacity of manufacturing 585million doses per year. If required the capacity can be augmented.

Though it was established in 2017, no vaccine production has taken place so far. In 14 blocks, it has 5 bulk vaccine antigen production units and 4 formulation units. It also has four filling lines with the speed of 200 vials per minute.

Three units can be used for Covid19 vaccine production with minimal expense, they said in the letter.

The letter comes after the CM declared on May 18 that the government will initiate immediate steps to manufacture Covid vaccines within the state.

The latter demanded that the state government takes control of the unit floating a tender and Bharat Biotech can be asked to use it for exclusively manufacturing Covaxin. Interested state governments can also be requested to place orders for vaccines

SHORT TAKES

SCBA'S SEEKS MORE VACATION BENCHES

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Vikas Singh on Tuesday wrote to Chief Justice N V Ramana to increase the number of vacation benches, category of matters they can hear and restore the system of oral mentioning.

"Today's cause list also surprisingly states that no oral mentioning will be allowed whereas this has never been a practice of this Court to forbid mentioning before vacation benches," Singh wrote.

The SCBA is a body of the lawyers practising in the top court. Noting that he has been practising in the Supreme Court for more than 30 years, Singh wrote that the practice being followed for hearing matters during the break has always been that a Vacation Judge/Bench exercised powers in respect of all special benches as well as hearing a particular matter if a case for urgency was made out and some urgent orders were required to be passed.

He also referred to the convention that the senior vacation judge also exercised the power of the Chief Justice of India in the matter of listing of the cases and once a judicial order is so passed, the matter could not be deleted by the Registry under any circumstances.

Singh also mentioned that only two courts are functioning during the present vacation despite the pendency of matters increased manifold due to the pandemic and a large number of matters are awaiting hearing.

'RUSSIA VACCINE RELIABLE LIKE KALASHNIKOV'

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Russian vaccines are reliable like Kalashnikov rifles since they are based on technology used for decades, Russian Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Roman Babushkin said on Tuesday, telling reporters that supplies of the Russian Sputnik V Covid vaccine to India are going on as per contractual obligations and that Russia is studying very carefully new requests for the vaccines from various Indian state governments and Indian companies. The Russian DCM was speaking to news agencies after an aircraft landed from Russia with vials of anti-viral drug Remdesivir along with other medicines used in the fight against Covid.

While India has already approved use of the Sputnik V double-dose vaccine, the Russian DCM also said that the third phase clinical trials are on for the Sputnik Lite single-dose vaccine, adding that its potential use in India also would help vaccinate a large number of people in a short period of time.

The Sputnik V double dose vaccine is already a shot in the arm for India which is looking to vaccinate its 1.3 billion population as quickly as possible in the wake of the deadly second wave of the Covid virus that battered the country. In mid-April, India's Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had granted permission for "Restricted Use in Emergency Situations" in India to the Russian Sputnik-V vaccine. Moscow had welcomed the move, saying it would "open up a new dimension" in the special strategic partnership between the two countries and support vaccination efforts in India.

ACTOR UNNI DEV HELD FOR WIFE'S SUICIDE

Thiruvananthapuram, May 25: Actor Unni Dev, son of popular Malayalam actor and late Rajan P. Dev, was arrested on Tuesday over the death of his wife Priyanka, police said here.

A physical education teacher in a local school, Priyanka was found hanging in the bedroom of her home at Vembayam near here on May 12, a day after she filed a police complaint of domestic violence against her actor-husband.

The 'Aadu' actor was taken into custody from his home in Ernakulam district on Tuesday morning after ensuring that he has turned Covid negative. A team of police personnel under Nedumangadu DYSP later brought Dev here as the case was registered in the capital district.



Army personnel distribute relief material among transgenders, amid COVID-19 restrictions, at a park in Srinagar on Tuesday.

—PTI

Maha ends home isolation for patients in 18 districts

Cases continue to drop; Assam extends curfew

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Mumbai, May 25: The Maharashtra government has decided to stop home quarantining of Covid-19 patients in 18 districts where the positivity rate is high and all active patients in these areas would be admitted to Covid Care Centers, health minister Rajesh Tope said here on Tuesday.

Of 36 districts in the state, Satara, Sindhudurg, Ratnagiri, Osmanabad, Beed, Raigad, Pune, Hingoli, Akola, Amravati, Kolhapur, Thane, Sangli, Gadchiroli, Wardha, Nashik, Ahmednagar and Latur have above-average positivity rates, as per the health department data.

Ordinarily asymptomatic patients or those who have mild symptoms of coronavirus infection are advised home isolation.

The state has 3,27,000 active Covid-19 cases and the recovery rate has improved to 93 per cent. The case positivity rate - proportion of positive cases in tested samples - is around 12 per cent while the case fatality rate is 1.5 per cent, Tope told reporters here.

But the positivity rate in 18 districts is higher than the state average, he said.

"The state government has decided to stop home isolation completely in these 18 districts. The district collectors have been asked to set up more Covid Care Centers (CCCs) and admit all active patients there," he said.

The collectors have also been asked to utilise the funds from the premium collected on the auction of minor minerals for setting up CCCs in villages, he added.

"Testing has to be done in

The daily fresh cases of COVID-19, for the first time in 40 days, fell below 2 lakh. The Union Health Ministry termed this as an "encouraging sign" as new cases on Tuesday were 1.96 lakh and deaths 3, 511. The active caseload too has declined to 25.86 lakh and daily positivity rate has come down to 9.54 per cent.

"The active cases have decreased since its last peak on 10th May 2021. A net decline of 1,33,934 is witnessed in the last 24 hours," said Union Health Ministry officials as India's daily recoveries continue to outnumber the daily new cases for the 12th consecutive day. In the last 24 hours, close to 3.27 lakh recoveries were registered taking National Recovery Rate to 89.26 per cent.

● Positivity rate continues to be higher in 18 districts. Collectors to setup more care centres.

a focused manner: Once a person tests positive for coronavirus, all high- and low- risks persons (who may have come in contact with the patient) should be tested. The collectors of the 18 districts (with high positivity rate) have been instructed to avoid random testing in large numbers to

National Capital Delhi that bore the brutal brunt of the second wave between April and May is now witnessing huge relief as fresh detection of cases came down to 1, 568 on Tuesday and positivity rate fell down to 2.14 per cent. However, 156 deaths still remain an area of concern though hospitals are now witnessing less serious patients and of the 25035 beds only 7872 are occupied.

However, the patients on ventilators, in ICU or on Oxygen support are still high. Despite a slide in cases, States continue to maintain caution. Assam on Tuesday extended curfew in urban areas till June 5. As per new orders, all shops, commercial establishments and officers - government and private - will shut down by 1 pm on all days.

The second wave has

also left the fate of CBSE students in suspense. Union Education minister Mr Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank had asked State education ministers to give suggestions on holding of CBSE Class 12 exams. Delhi education minister Mr Manish Sisodia has urged Centre to vaccinate students before exams. "If we cannot vaccinate school students, we advise to cancel board exam this year. Result can be declared based on their performance in last 2 yrs. Plan 'B' can be prepared for students disagreeing with it," Mr Sisodia said in the meeting.

Punjab Education minister Mr Vijay Inder Singla too rooted for vaccination of students before the exams and said examination of only selected subjects may be held in each discipline.

Severe cyclonic storm Yaas is likely to make landfall near Dhamra Port in Odisha's Bhadrak district early Wednesday morning, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Oxygen Expresses moved 680 tonnes of oxygen relief from Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours before the cyclone gets stronger. Eight Oxygen Expresses have moved from the region, a statement from the Railways said.

The country's major liquid medical oxygen (LMO) generation plants are based in this region and are now proving to be the source of the life-saving gas for other states for supply to hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

So far, the Railways has delivered more than 17,239 tonnes of LMO in more than 1,042 tankers to 14 states since it started operations last month. Providing relief to oxygen starved states, so far, 263 Oxygen Express trains have completed their journey while two more loaded trains with more than 134 tonnes of LMO in eight tankers are currently on the run. —PTI

Rlys moves 680 tonnes of oxygen from Odisha, WB, Jharkhand

New Delhi, May 25: Indian Railways moved 680 tonnes of oxygen from Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours in anticipation of Cyclone Yaas which is likely to hit the region soon, the national transporter said on Tuesday.

Severe cyclonic storm Yaas is likely to make landfall near Dhamra Port in Odisha's Bhadrak district early Wednesday morning, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

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Covid medicines, vaccines being smuggled to Nepal

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), the border guarding force for the Indo-Nepal border, has further intensified patrolling along the entire border following reports that critical medicines, vaccines, oxygen concentrators and other medical equipment were being smuggled from India to Nepal to be sold at a whopping profit there in wake of the Corona pandemic.

There were Intelligence reports suggesting that some organised criminal gangs operating along the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh borders of Nepal were taking advantage of the pandemic there and were involved in smuggling of crucial medicines and other medical equipment from India.

Following this additional troops were deployed in the border areas and SSB was now very closely monitoring the situation there. Even the local police of border districts of Bihar and UP were assisting central forces in this increased vigilance. Home Ministry has

issued strict instructions to all law enforcement agencies to take stern action to check black marketing or smuggling of essential medicine and medical equipment both within the country or to neighbouring countries also.

Intelligence reports had also cautioned the ministry that some Chinese made medical equipment, particularly oxygen concentrators, were being smuggled into India through the Nepal route and were being sold at exorbitant prices in the country.

"Cases have come to light from different states that Chinese-made oxygen concentrators have been smuggled into India using the Nepal route and then sold at a huge profit. This came to light during the Khan Market case also. So we can say that smuggling of essential medicine and medical equipment is happening both ways along the Nepal border. Deployment has been increased along the vulnerable points and patrolling has been further intensified to stop this trend," a senior SSB official remarked.

Narada case: CBI withdraws appeal

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed the CBI to withdraw its appeal against the Calcutta high court order directing the house arrest of four leaders, including two West Bengal ministers and a Trinamul Congress MLA, in the Narada bribery case. A vacation bench comprising Justices Vineet Saran and B.R. Gava took note of the fact that a five-judge bench of the Calcutta high court was already hearing the Narada bribery case and permitted solicitor general Tuahar Mehta, appearing for the CBI, to take back its appeal and raise all the grievances there before the high court.

The CBI had earlier assailed the conduct of West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee in staging a dharna outside its office at Nizam Palace in Kolkata and complained about the presence of state law minister Moloy Ghatak at the special CBI court where four TMC leaders arrested in the Narada sting tape case were produced.

The vacation bench gave the investigative agency and all other parties the liberty to raise all the issues before the five-judge bench hearing the plea for the grant of interim bail to the four TMC leaders. The court in its

● The CBI withdrew the petition after the court told the solicitor general to either withdraw it or they will pass an order on merits. The court repeatedly asked what CBI wanted from the court.

order said it had not expressed any view on the merits of the case.

The CBI had on May 17 arrested West Bengal ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim, TMC MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee over the Narada case. The CBI withdrew the petition after the court told the solicitor general to either withdraw it or they will pass an order on merits. All through the hearing that lasted nearly one hour, the court repeatedly asked what the investigative agency wanted from the court. "We want to know: what do you want from us", Justice Saran asked the S-G in a poser on what was the prayer of the CBI before the top court.

Sensing the mood of the court, Mr Mehta urged the court to adjourn the matter and take it up on Friday (May 28). After giving an opportunity to the S-G to consult his team, the court in the resumed hearing gave him two options: either withdraw the case or the court would pass orders after considering the matter on merit.

FIGHTING COVID

Yellow fungus has been observed in reptiles, not humans: ENT specialist

Don't panic by colour of fungus, exhort experts

New Delhi, May 25: Amid rising mucormycosis cases among Covid patients and those who have recovered from it, epidemiologists Tuesday advised people to not get panicked by the colour of the fungus causing it, and underlined the importance of analysing the kind of infection, its causes and associated risk-factors.

Health minister Harsh Vardhan had said on Monday that 18 states have reported 5,424 cases of mucormycosis, a life-threatening infection, prevalent among Covid-19 patients and those who recovered from the viral disease. Beside Black Fungus cases, White and Yellow fungus infections too were reported from different parts of the country recently, which scientists say are also mucormycosis.

Dr Samiran Panda, the Head of Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR),



A doctor attends to a patient suspected to have been infected with mucormycosis at NMMC Hospital in Navi Mumbai on Tuesday.

—PTI

said the use of "terms like black, green or yellow fungus" is making people scared and apprehensive. Also, black fungus getting synonymous with existing

mucormycosis is complicating things, he said. "For common people," he said, "I will say not to be driven by panic by colour - black, yellow, white. Let us

find what kind of fungal infection is the person infected with as most fungal infections that cause fatal or severe disease are invasive fungal infection so

● In Ghaziabad, a person was detected with three variants of the fungus -- Black, White and Yellow -- on May 24, claimed a doctor of a private hospital who is treating the 59-year-old patient in the NCR city in Uttar Pradesh.

that can occur when there is reduction or compromise in immunity. So basic underlying phenomenon is immunity or the ability to fight the fungal infection," he said.

In Ghaziabad, a person was detected with three variants of the fungus -- Black, White and Yellow -- on May 24, claimed a doctor of a private hospital who is treating the 59-year-old patient in the NCR city in Uttar Pradesh.

Yellow Fungus has been observed in reptiles, such as lizards, but not in human beings, claimed Dr B.P. Tyagi, an ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) specialist at Harsh Hospital in city's Raj Nagar area.

"The patient had come to me with conditions of extreme weakness, giddiness, fever and nasal dis-

charge. The Yellow Fungus was detected during the endoscopy," the doctor said.

"This is the first case of a person having three variants of the fungus -- Black, White and Yellow," he claimed. He said the patient, a lawyer by profession, had Covid-19 but was in home isolation and approached the hospital after enduring these problems for eight to 10 days.

"He is under treatment now. There is nothing to worry and the fungus would be removed. Had he come to me after one or two days' only, his problem would have been resolved by now," Tyagi said.

He said fungi attack people with compromised immunity and in this particular case, his patient is a diabetic. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

BAD DREAM STOPS
GUIDE FROM
CLIMBING EVEREST

Kathmandu, May 25: A record-holding Sherpa climber halted his attempt to scale Mount Everest for a 26th time because of a bad dream but plans to try again next year.

Kami Rita already reached the summit of the world's highest mountain for a record 25th time earlier this month but stopped his most recent climb more than halfway to the top. He was making (the 26th) attempt and had reached up to Camp Three "but the weather turned bad and I had a really bad dream," Rita said on return to Kathmandu on a helicopter from the mountain on Tuesday. "The gods were telling me not to go and because I really believe in God, I decided to return," he said but would not elaborate on the dream. Sherpas believe Everest to be a goddess and have a religious ceremony before stepping on the mountain to make their climbs.

TWO CHILDREN
AMONG 18
KILLED IN PERU

Lima, May 25: Two children and 16 adults were shot dead in a remote coca-growing area of Peru, the armed forces said Monday, blaming the attack on members of the Shining Path guerrilla group.

The killings late Sunday risk inflaming tensions amid a polarized campaign for the presidency between leftist Pedro Castillo and his rival from the right, Keiko Fujimori.

The villagers were mowed down at San Miguel del Ene in a coca-growing valley where members of the Maoist Shining Path group operate, according to the joint command of the armed forces. The head of the police counter-terrorism unit, General Oscar Arriola, said the dead included 10 men, six women and two children.

The armed forces command blamed the attack on fighters led by guerrilla leader Víctor Quispe Palomino, or Comrade Jose. A specialised terrorism unit has been tasked with investigating the killings.

GUAM CAN PURSUE
\$160M DUMP
CLEANUP LAWSUIT

Washington, May 25: The Supreme Court says the US territory of Guam can pursue a \$160 million lawsuit against the federal government over the cost of cleaning up a landfill on the island.

The justices on Monday unanimously overturned a lower court decision that had said Guam had waited too long to pursue the claim. The case before the justices involves a long-running dispute over the Ordot Dump on Guam. The lawsuit says the Navy built the dump during the 1940s and then deposited toxic military waste there before turning over control to Guam in 1950.

Guam operated the dump for decades. The US has said Guam "vastly expanded" it and "failed to provide even rudimentary environmental safeguards." In 2002, the government sued Guam over pollution from the dump. Guam ultimately agreed in 2004 to close the dump and take steps to stop pollution from the dump, among other things. In 2017, Guam sued the United States, arguing that it's responsible for some of the costs of the cleanup.

POPE PRAYS FOR
ITALY CABLE CAR
MISHAP SURVIVOR

Rome, May 25: Pope Francis offered prayers Tuesday for "little Eitan", the lone survivor of the cable car disaster in northern Italy that left 14 people dead when the cabin plunged to the ground after the lead cable snapped and the emergency brake failed to engage.

Francis sent a telegram to the local bishop offering his condolences to the families of the dead who, he said were "tragically lost while immersed in the marvels of creation".

Prosecutors have said they are investigating why the lead cable of the Stresa funicular snapped Sunday while it was bringing sightseers up to the Mottarone peak overlooking Lake Maggiore in Italy's Piedmont region. They have said the emergency brake on the supporting cable didn't engage, events that sent the cabin reeling back down the line until it pulled off, crashed to the ground and rolled over down the mountainside until it came to rest against some trees.

Five-year-old Eitan Biran, an Israeli citizen living in Italy, was the lone survivor and was hospitalized in Turin with several broken bones. Pope Francis offered particular thoughts for Eitan.

Mali's ex-coup leader
dismisses Prez, PM

EU leaders condemn kidnapping of civilian leadership

Bamako, May 25: Mali's former coup leader Assimi Goita fired the president and prime minister of the transitional government Tuesday but promises to still hold new elections next year.

The move came a day after the two leaders were arrested by the military following their announcement of a cabinet reshuffle. Goita said the president and prime minister had acted without consulting him.

President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane lead an interim government that was installed under the threat of regional sanctions following a putsch in August, and the detentions on Monday raised fears of a second coup.

Two senior officials, who declined to be named, said that soldiers had taken Ndaw and Ouane to the Kati military camp on the outskirts of the capital Bamako. Their detentions followed a sensitive government reshuffle earlier on Monday that was designed to respond to growing criticism of the interim government.

The military kept the strategic portfolios it controlled during the previous administration in the reshuffle. But two coup leaders — ex-defence minister Sadio Camara and ex-



In this file photo taken on September 22, 2020, Colonel Assimi Goita (C), President of CNSP (National Committee for the Salvation of People) addresses the press during the ceremony of the 60th anniversary of Mali's independence in Bamako, one day after announcing that the transitional presidency would be assigned to a retired colonel, Bah Ndaw, 70 years, ephemeral Minister of Defence in 2014. — AFP

security minister Colonel Modibo Kone — were replaced. Coup leaders and army officers have wielded significant influence over the government, casting doubts on a pledge to hold elections by early next year.

The reshuffle came at a time of growing political challenges in the capital Bamako and pressure to stick to the deadline for promised reforms.

Speculation of a coup swirled around Bamako late on Monday, but the city remained relatively calm. Briefly reached by phone before the line cut, Prime Minister Ouane said that soldiers "came to get him". EU leaders condemned what they called the "kidnapping" of Mali's civilian leadership, said council president Charles Michel. "What happened was grave and serious and

we are ready to consider necessary measures," he told reporters after a summit of the bloc's 27 leaders, describing events as "the kidnapping of the president and the prime minister". Earlier, a joint statement by the United Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, the European Union and the United States condemned the arrests. — AFP

Biden, Putin to
meet June 16

Washington, May 25: President Joe Biden will hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin next month in Geneva, a face-to-face meeting between the two leaders that comes amid escalating tensions between the US and Russia in the first months of the Biden administration.

The White House confirmed details of the summit on Tuesday. The two leaders' meeting, set for June 16, is being tacked on to the end of Biden's first international trip as president next month when he visits Britain for a meeting of Group of Seven leaders and Brussels for the Nato summit.

"The leaders will discuss the full range of pressing issues, as we seek to restore predictability and stability to the US-Russia relationship," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement announcing the summit.

Biden first proposed a summit in a call with

Putin in April as his administration prepared to levy sanctions against Russian officials for the second time during the first three months of his presidency. White House officials said earlier this week that they were ironing out details for the summit. National security adviser Jake Sullivan discussed details of the meeting when he met with his Russian counterpart, Nikolay Patrushev.

The Kremlin, in its own statement announcing the meeting, said that the presidents will discuss "the current state and prospects of the Russian-US relations, strategic stability issues and the acute problems on the international agenda, including interaction in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and settlement of regional conflicts." The White House has repeatedly said it is seeking a "stable and predictable" relationship with the Russians. — AP

HUMAN ERROR
LED TO MALAYSIA
TRAIN CRASH

Kuala Lumpur, May 25: A collision between two light rail trains in Kuala Lumpur that injured more than 200 people was caused by a train driver's negligence, according to a preliminary investigation, Malaysia's transport minister said Tuesday.

A fully automated metro train carrying 213 passengers collided Monday night with a vacant train that was being driven manually in a tunnel near the Petronas Towers, the world's tallest twin towers. It was the first major crash for the 23-year-old metro system. Pictures on social media after the collision showed bloodied passengers, some lying on the floors of carriages strewn with shattered glass.

"Preliminary investigations found that the accident was caused by the negligence and carelessness of the train driver ... who was driving in the wrong direction," said Transport Minister Wee Ka Siong. — AP

Iran Prez vote okays 7
but bars Rouhani allies

Dubai, May 25: Iran named the hard-line cleric running its judiciary and six others Tuesday as approved candidates in its June 18 presidential election, barring prominent candidates allied to its current president amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

The announcement carried by state television puts judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who is linked to mass executions in 1988, in the dominant position for the upcoming vote. He's the most-known candidate of the seven hopefuls, with opinion polling previously showing his anti-corruption campaign drew Iranian support.

He's also believed to be a favorite of Iran's 82-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But perhaps most notable was who Iran's Guardian Cou-

ncil barred from running. Chief among them was former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a conservative who allied with Rouhani in recent year. Larijani had been positioning himself as a pragmatic candidate who would back Rouhani's signature 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. That accord is now in tatters as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate a return of both Iran and the US to the agreement. Larijani seemingly signalled he wouldn't fight the decision.

"I have done my duty before God and the dear nation, and I am satisfied," Larijani wrote on Twitter. "Thank you to all those who expressed their gratitude and I hope you will participate in the elections for the promotion of an Islamic Iran."

Also barred was former

hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's senior Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, a reformist. Ahmadinejad ignored a warning from Khamenei in 2017 and registered, only to be rejected then as well by the Guardian Council, a 12-member panel under Khamenei. During an earlier session of parliament Tuesday, lawmaker Ahmad Alireza-beigi described Ahmadinejad's home as being "under siege" by security forces since the day before.

He also warned that the decision would suppress turnout. Iran's theocracy since its 1979 Islamic Revolution has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections. State TV quoted Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, the spokesman of the Guardian Council, as saying "only seven" had been approved. — AP

FLIGHTS AVOID
BELARUS AIRSPACE,
EU MULLS CURBS

Moscow, May 25: Belarus' isolation deepened Tuesday as commercial planes avoided its airspace, the European Union worked up new sanctions, and a senior UN official said he was concerned for the welfare of an opposition journalist arrested in Minsk after his plane was diverted there, apparently on the orders of the country's longtime strongman.

After his detention, Raman Pratasevich was seen in a brief video clip shown on Belarusian state television late Monday, speaking rapidly to say that he was confessing to some of the charges authorities have levelled against him. The spokesperson for the UN's human rights office, Rupert Colville, said Pratasevich's appearance was likely not voluntary and that he seemed to have bruising to his face, though it was difficult to tell from the footage. The 26-year-old journalist and activist was arrested Sunday after Belarusian flight controllers told the crew of a Ryanair jetliner he was aboard that there was a bomb threat against the flight and ordered it to land. A Belarusian MiG-29 fighter jet was scrambled to escort the plane in a brazen move by President Alexander Lukashenko, who has ruled the country with an iron fist for over a quarter-century. The diversion and arrest elicited widespread shock and fury, and EU leaders took unusually swift action in response at a summit Monday.

— AP



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C) talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, upon arrival at Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport, on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

Blinken: US will
aid Gaza without
helping Hamas

Jerusalem, May 25: Secretary of State Antony Blinken vowed Tuesday to rally international support to aid Gaza following a devastating war there while keeping any assistance out of the hands of its militant Hamas rulers, as he began a regional tour to shore up last week's cease-fire.

The 11-day war between Israel and Hamas killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused widespread destruction in the impoverished coastal territory. The truce that came into effect Friday has so far held, but it did not address any of the underlying issues in the conflict, something Blinken acknowledged after meeting Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We know that to prevent a return to violence, we have to use the space created to address a larger set of underlying issues and challenges. And that

US TO UPGRADE
RELATIONS
WITH PALESTINE

Jerusalem, May 25: Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Tuesday that the US would reopen its Consulate General in Jerusalem — a move that restores ties with Palestinians that had been downgraded by the Trump administration. The consulate long served as an autonomous office in charge of diplomatic relations with the Palestinians. But former US President Donald Trump downgraded its operations and placed them under the authority of his ambassador to Israel when he moved the embassy to Jerusalem. — AP

begins with tackling the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and starting to rebuild," he said. — AP

Lanka cargo fire: India sends help

Colombo, May 25: India has dispatched two Coast Guard vessels and an aircraft to help the Sri Lankan Navy douse the flames on a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Colombo last week, amid intensified efforts by the coastal command to extinguish the fiery wreckage.

The 25 crew members — of Philippine, Chinese, Indian and Russian nationality — on the ship have been rescued. Official sources said at least five Indians were among the crew rescued. The cargo vessel, 'X-PRESS PEARL', was

carrying a consignment of chemicals and raw materials for cosmetics from Hazira in Gujarat to Colombo Port. It caught fire 9.5 nautical miles from the coast here where it was anchored outside the port of Colombo on May 20.

The Indian High Commission in a tweet on Tuesday said, "Help on way! Responding promptly as ever to the request by Sri Lanka, India dispatches ICG Vaibhav, ICG Dornier and Tug Water Lilly for fighting the fire". A major operation was launched to

extinguish the flames of the ship.

A special team of the Sri Lankan Navy, Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Marine Environment Protection Authority reached the fire-hit container ship on May 21.

Officials said a loud explosion was heard on Tuesday morning, possibly the fire remains in the sub sections of the vessel where a load of nitric acid is stored.

The Navy, in a statement released on Tuesday, confirmed the forthcoming Indian assistance. The fire

was made worse by the strong winds.

"However, the crew of the ship and the members of the emergency response team have been safely brought ashore as of now," it said.

It said that due to rough seas and bad weather, the ship is now tilted to the right. As a result, some of the containers on board have tumbled to the sea and some of the containers have sunk.

The Navy said it has warned the fishing community to stay away. — PTI

LIMITED | SUCCESS

Debate causes sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town

Push to review 2020 US ballots spreads

Atlanta, May 25: Six months after Donald Trump's loss, conspiracy theorists and Trump backers are continuing their push for repeated examinations of ballots and finding limited successes. A Georgia judge last week awarded a group the chance to review mail ballots in a large Georgia county that includes Atlanta.

Officials in a rural Michigan county have expressed interest in a review of their voting machines.

A similar debate has caused sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town. In some cases, the efforts have been inspired by an audit of the votes in Arizona's Maricopa County, an elaborate exercise engineered by the GOP-led state Senate. The efforts are unlikely to yield any new revelations about President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election. The votes have been counted — and often recounted — and certified by local officials.

Still, the lingering debate and legal wrangling have propelled suspicions and advanced debunked theories. And their sometimes misleading conclusions have been amplified by Trump, whose false allegations of election fraud sparked the push.

The profusion of audits alarms election experts, who note that the Arizona audit has set a troubling new precedent of third-party, partisan review of the ballots, long after elections are over.

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Lr.No.: PDS/P2/1263/BRF/2020-21 Dated: 25.05.2021

SHORT TENDER NOTICE
EMPANELMENT OF SUPPLIERS THROUGH AP e-Procurement e-Reverse Auction PLATFORM FOR SUPPLY OF 1500 MTS OF FORTIFIED RICE KERNELS (FRKs) WITH THREE (3) MICRO NUTRIENTS (IRON, FOLIC ACID AND VITAMIN B12) IN 20KG BAG TO APSCL FOR FORTIFICATION OF BOILED RICE TO BE DELIVERED TO FCI.
Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd., invites tenders for appointment of Manufacturers/Suppliers for supply of 1500 MTs of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK) for boiled rice. For registration, interested Manufacturers/Suppliers of FRKs from all over India may visit <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or www.apscl.in to view and download tender documents at free of cost.
The details and procedure for obtaining Digital Signature Certificates are mentioned in website <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or contact the help desk of procurement portal, Phone numbers: 08645-246370/71/72/73/74.
Last date for online registration and completion of Formalities for the e-Reverse auction shall be up to 5.00 pm of 01.06.2021 and the tentative date of online e-auction through e-procurement auction platform would be on 03.06.2021. Sd/- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Tender Notice
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)
Sr. DMM, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110055, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-

Sr. No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	93215236	Fuse holder suitable for high voltage fuse of size-NHIL, Rated current-125A, Rated voltage-1000V AC, Make-EATON BUSSMAN (SD1L-1000), SIBA(2128001), or similar Make - EFEN, FERRAZ, ETI as per bill of material conf. to RD50 SPEC.NO RD50/PE/SPEC/0184-2015 (REV1), Suitable for switch board cabinet of LHB type EOGAC Coaches.	1500 NOS	21.06.2021

NOTE: 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.
2. No Manual offer will be entertained.
Sr. DMM/NS/LP/93215236/2021 Date:- 25.05.2021 1121/2021
Serving Customers With A Smile

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Notice Inviting Tender
Sr. DEE/TRD/FZR acting for and on behalf of the President of India invites E-Tenders for the works as under. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids upto closing date 16.06.2021 at 15:00 Hrs only. Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall not be considered.

Tender No.	Name of work	App. Cost. (Rs.)	Cost of Tender form (Rs.)	Date & time for submission of tender	Earnest Money (Rs.)	Completion period	Opening of tender	Website Particulars
301-TRD-FZR-2021-22	TRD work in connection with Providing complete facilities at SVDK station of Firozpur division	1,39,21,345.70	NIL	Upto 16.06.2021 15:00 Hrs	NIL	09 Months	16.06.2021 after 15:00 Hrs.	www.ireps.gov.in
302-TRD-FZR-2021-22	Replacement of corroded cantilever assemblies, Anti Creep and Tail Feeders in the polluted zone of Sahnewal (SNL)-Amritsar (ASR) section of Firozpur division to improve the reliability of OHE	2,10,00,207.60	NIL	Upto 16.06.2021 15:00 Hrs	NIL	06 Months	16.06.2021 after 15:00 Hrs.	www.ireps.gov.in

No.: 301 & 302-TRD-FZR-2021-22 Dated: 24.05.2021 1119/2021
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

DECCAN Chronicle

26 MAY 2021

Vaccines: Fix schedule, focus on procurement

Several state chief ministers are now a frustrated lot, what with their unsuccessful attempts to procure Covid-19 vaccines from the global market. Some of them have demanded that the Union government procure and distribute the doses to them. This is a demand the Centre must consider a top priority as the information from the field on vaccination is thoroughly disappointing.

It's a fact that India launched the world's largest vaccination programme in January but its pace has been on a downward slide as it has progressed. As of now, India has been able to fully vaccinate only around five crore people while it has administered at least a single dose to 19 crore people. Latest reports say that the average number of weekly administration of doses has fallen below one crore, almost a third of the figures one month ago when the drive was at its peak. Of this, almost half is being done by the state governments with the vaccines they procured from the market. However, several states, including Maharashtra and Delhi, have closed down their vaccination camps opened for people aged between 18 and 44 years; several others have complained that the Centre's supply of vaccine for those aged 45 and above is dwindling and the entire vaccination programme is now on a crawl. The story, in short, is that the programme is gasping for breath at a time it has to pace at full throttle. This is an unfortunate mess the government has created, and the government alone can clean it up.

The first step towards this end is for the government to take charge of vaccine procurement instead of making the state governments scour the international market with their limited experience and resources. That is made necessary for another reason, too: several prominent vaccine manufacturers have made it clear to them that they have no plans to do business with state governments or private companies and will deal directly with national governments. This stand of the foreign manufacturers also exposes the specious argument advanced by the apparatchiks of the ruling dispensation that the government was following the demand raised by the states for decentralisation of vaccination. It cannot be that the Union government is completely unaware of such setbacks. One fails to understand why the Centre makes state governments waste precious time competing unsuccessfully with one another at a juncture when they must be engaged in fighting the virus on the ground.

The government must not only take over the procurement process but also announce a proper schedule with definite milestones in the number of vaccinations to be administered before the third wave hits the nation. The schedule must be convincing in that it must specify how and when the government plans to procure the vaccine, whether from within the country or abroad and how it plans to reach the last man.

It will be too risky for this nation to think that it can ward off a third wave of the pandemic with an ostrich-like attitude. It must act, instead.

Freedom of speech in peril

The ruling party BJP and the Union government seem bent upon escalating the "Toolkit" issue through its proxy, the Delhi Police, with its big-footed and ham-handed ways of investigation. But this is only a small part of a larger pattern of official India operations to regulate digital content and which aim at not only muzzling criticism but to erase it altogether from popular social media platforms.

An even bigger issue lies ahead as major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are yet to comply with a May 25 deadline when government's new IT rules heralding a new digital ethics code, a three-tier supervisory system and a grievance redressal mechanism were to kick in. The very foundations of freedom of speech and expression are in peril as India tries to turn social media intermediaries, which post the contribution of individuals, into legally liable entities as "publishers" of content.

The police raids on Twitter offices in and around the capital New Delhi on Monday were clear attempts at intimidation and come in the wake of a clumsy attempt at counter propaganda by a prominent national spokesperson of the BJP, who had been adjudged to have manipulated media in making allegations against a person with avowed links to a major Opposition party.

Twitter may only have been responding to complaints from the Congress about certain tweets ascribed to persons with links to the party. Twitter has the technical capabilities to judge whether there was media manipulation in those tweets but the Delhi police put out a pedantic defence of its action on the grounds that the matter is under investigation and hence Twitter should not have been pro-active in judging the posts by BJP representatives.

As the BJP indulges in a blame game in these distracting sideshows while attempting image management, the country is being deprived of consolidated efforts against the second wave of the coronavirus. The perception is the battle against the pandemic is being progressively lost as evidenced in the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and critical drugs even as mortality rates have risen though positivity rates are dipping.

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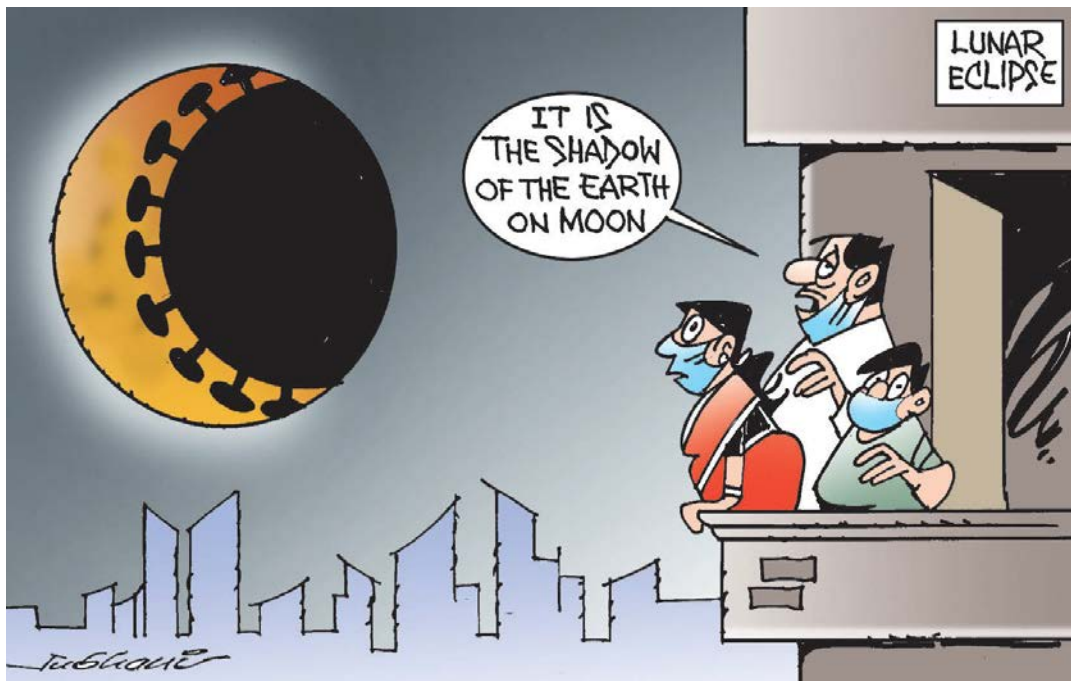
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Hubris, narcissism and moment of 'hamartia'



Mohan Guruswamy

The Greeks had words for every personality frailty. In the present case three of these words are of relevance to us: (1) Hubris; (2) Hamartia; and (3) Narcissism. Hubris is described in the dictionary to simply mean "excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance". Hamartia is usually an artifice in Greek drama as the inner quality that initiates a "movement of spirit" within the protagonist to commit actions which drive the plot towards its tragic end. Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification from vanity or egotistic admiration of one's idealised self-image and attributes. The term originated from Greek mythology, where a young man named Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. In the drama of Narendra Modi today, we see quite a bit of the hubris and overweening narcissism, both fatal flaws. The question before us now is whether this is the moment of hamartia which will drive the plot to its tragic end?

The sin of hubris has been a continuing theme that has captured the imagination of historians, philosophers and theologians alike. The Biblical saying "pride cometh before the fall" applies equally well to Ravan, the great king of the Rakshasas whose long years of penance secured him the favour of Brahma, who rendered him invulnerable to the gods and demons alike. We know what happened to him. We, the lesser Hindus, also know that it's not necessary to be a tyrant in order to attract the malefic attentions of the gods. Bali, the celebrated *daitya*, rose to such an eminence that

Indra and the other gods had to seek the intervention of Vishnu, who once again obliged the devas by consigning Bali to *patala*, or the nether-world.

On April 19, 1959, Cuba's Fidel Castro paid his first post-revolution visit to Washington and met then vice-president Richard M. Nixon for three and a half hours. Following this meeting Nixon appraised him thus: "The one fact we can be sure of is that he has those indefinable qualities that make him a leader of men. Whatever we may think of him, he is going to be a great factor in the development of Cuba and possibly in Latin American affairs generally." In October that year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorised a plan to overthrow Castro.

The plan called for the landing in Cuba of a force of Cuban émigré fighters armed and trained by the CIA. This force was then meant to storm its way inland, releasing in its wake a popular upsurge that would topple Castro, just like he did the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Fortunately for Castro, Bay of Pigs, the place chosen for the landing, suffered from two crucial disadvantages. The beach was close to Castro's favorite holiday home and hence had a Cuban military unit garrisoned on it. The shallow waters of the bay also concealed shoals that required the landing force to wade ashore from a great distance, making them sitting ducks. That is precisely what happened. As US warships watched helplessly, President John F. Kennedy realised that he was led up the path and the CIA's urgent pleas for US air strikes would strip whatever was left of the fig leaf of innocence donned by the

The PM then went on the push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history...

United States. He abandoned the landing force to its fate. The few who survived ended up in Cuban jails. When asked what went wrong, JFK's national security adviser McGeorge Bundy replied: "Hubris!"

In February 1961, Robert McNamara, a brilliant Harvard MBA and a former head of Ford Motor Company, took over as the US defence secretary. He took with him an equally brilliant team of systems analysts who were to transform the way the US fought its wars in the future.

The systems analysts quantified everything. Every weapons system ordered was subject to a cost-benefit analysis. Even military results were quantified in terms of "area pacified" and "body count".

When Clark Clifford, who took over from McNamara as defence secretary, topped up all the "body count" figures of the war, he found it had exceeded all intelligence estimates of enemy combatants by over half! When he asked: "Why are we then still fighting?", President Lyndon Johnson knew that he too was led up the path. Some years ago I met Robert McNamara at a seminar on the Cuban missile crisis organised by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. I asked him how he had got it so wrong. He replied with one word: "Hubris".

In 1987, Indian troops went into Sri Lanka at the invitation of the two warring parties to impose an agreement midwifed by

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. When the LTTE reneged on it, the then Indian Army Chief, Gen. Krishnaswamy Sundarji, assured the government that he would be able to eliminate or disarm the LTTE in just a few weeks. We know what happened. It continues to be sad chapter in the Indian Army's history. It even cost Rajiv Gandhi his life. The question that baffles is how is it that the Indian Army ended up fighting a group that was fostered and supported by the Indian government? And what made the Indian Army think that it would be able to wipe out its onetime protégé in just weeks, if not days? Hubris?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on January 28 this year, virtually addressing the World Economic Forum's Davos Dialogue, had declared India as one of the countries that had successfully controlled the coronavirus. He said: "India took a proactive public participation approach and developed a Covid-specific health infrastructure and trained its resources to fight Covid." He went on to declare "mission accomplished", very much like President George W. Bush had declared atop an aircraft-carrier off the coast of Iraq. He then went on the push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would now assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history and that India was once again poised for greatness.

Was this his moment of "hamartia"? Will this take us to the denouement or the final part of a play, film or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are resolved and the theatre ends?

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

LETTERS

FENCE EATING CROP

Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan is in the news for the wrong reasons. It is alleged that the teacher indulged in sexual advances towards some girls and also seems to have used unsavoury remarks and the PSBB management seems to have not known about it until it erupted in the social media in a big way. One puzzling aspect of the lead person taking up the cause was not the direct victim or affected party. The teacher seemed to have many charges against him and it has further come to light that the teacher is part of the 'Sexual Abuse Committee' of the school. PSBB should clear such serious allegations in the interest of society and discipline its system.

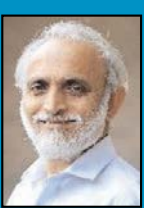
Venugopalan S
by email

YING FOR VACCINES

It seems certain that many recipients will pay more than in the first three phases of vaccination, but key questions about availability, distribution, and prioritisation remain unanswered. It was a relief to learn that the Union health ministry has decided to revise an earlier policy to allow family members and dependents of employees to get inoculated at industrial and workplace Covid-19 vaccination centres. The earlier notification, which had kept family members out of the purview, was a matter of grave concern as many were worried that they might not be able to ensure the vaccination of their loved ones given the acute shortage of vaccines. It is hoped that the revised policy will help accelerate the vaccination drive in India. The new policy allows the Centre to claim that it has done what the states asked for while allowing it to shift blame for shortages or high prices. The change in eligibility brought relief. Vaccines will now be open to Indians of working age, the vast majority of whom cannot rely on a work-from-home arrangement.

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr



As the Covid-19 pandemic rises, it's crucial to get 'numbers' right

Looking at the Covid-19 infection numbers which rose steadily from 33,610 in April 2020 to 1,82,143 in May, 5,66,840 in June (these were also the months of a total national lockdown) to 16,38,870 in July, 36,21,245 in August and peaked at 62,25,763 in September, it is evident the increase was at an alarming rate. In the same period, deaths due to Covid-19 rose from 1,075 to 97,497. While the total infections figure remained high, there was a monthly decline in new infections afterwards. For example, total infections in September were 26,04,518, in October 19,11,356, in November 12,94,572, in December 8,34,983. The lowest monthly rise was in January 2021, compared to December 2020: 4,79,509. It declined further to 3,50,548 from February-end to March-end this year.

There was a spurt in the numbers between the end of March and the end of April: 66,13,641. It seems the gap between the first and second waves was too short. There was no room for declaring the Covid-19 ended either at the end of January or end of February as there was just a decline in numbers but the monthly figures remained substantial.

They show Covid-19 was still raging. Again, the decrease in infections can't be attributed to the phased vaccination programme rolled out on January 16. The infection was moving along a trajectory of its own and the vaccination on its own. Somewhere the two trajectories should reach a point in future, either at the end of this year or sometime in 2022, or even later, when the infections must touch zero and the vaccinations should be at a permanent peak.

When the first wave receded in January-February this year, and the second wave surge became evident in April, the interpreters of Covid-19 numbers made the error of believing things were getting better. It's not just the issue of learning from the pattern seen in other countries that there was an imminent second wave. The first wave numbers didn't flatten enough for even a robust optimist to turn one's back on the pandemic. It's unnecessary to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team for getting the Covid numbers for January/February wrong. The false glimmer of hope created by the receding first wave was a natural

one. Caution would have dictated that the fall in number of infections, however encouraging, wasn't good enough to believe that the trouble had ended.

For long we have believed numbers are sure indicators, that they don't deceive. Most of the time and in most contexts the belief in numbers is justified. But this turns out to be a simplistic assumption when we are dealing with biological phenomenon. It's indeed a matter of debate whether viruses are biological creatures. Though population genetics brings mathematics and biology quite close, we have seen that mathematical models for the coronavirus, especially Covid-19, has been a non-starter.

The infection rates and the fatality rates can serve in inferring some kind of mathematical modelling, but it's unlikely to help in predicting the patterns of the spread of infection or the rate of fatality in a definitive sense. This poses problems for epidemiologists and for governments to manage an epidemic. So, the Covid-19 infection rates in India and in the world which the different dashboards are displaying are signs of how things happened

but the numbers on these dashboards can't be used to predict the future behaviour of Covid-19. The fluctuating graph doesn't point to either the end of the pandemic or its unrelenting course. The infection and fatality figures might just stop blipping on these dashboards. But this cannot be taken to mean that it's all over, or if it comes back against it will be easy to predict its patterns.

The weapons at our disposal to deal with a pandemic like Covid-19 are the vaccines and therapeutic drugs, which need to be modified constantly as mutations emerge in the virus. It's a constant battle, and of course it's not all chaos. There's a certain stability which allows doctors and researchers to work with vaccines and drugs. Even if you succeed in containing Covid-19 and some other similar coronaviruses, the dangers of other pandemics are not ruled out. And with every new menace, you must fight with whatever we have on hand, including drugs that worked earlier and may not work now, and vaccines which were successful may not do the job this time around.

This uncertainty is bad news for

political leaders as they are quite keen on defeating opponents and they love to celebrate victories. The Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be a party-pooper for them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath are all hell-bent on defeating Covid-19, but their naivety in the matter is not amusing. The medical emergency gives them plenty of opportunity to prove their leadership skills like issuing orders, the one thing leaders enjoy the most. But dealing with a pandemic is a long-drawn affair. It's not just about issuing orders. All that one can succeed is either to contain and minimise its impact, and deal with reconstruction work to undo the destruction it has caused. There is no room for loud and vulgar war cries of victory. Meanwhile, the numbers will need to be tracked as meticulously as possible because they can help in a limited way to deal with the pandemic. But there will be no magical patterns and solutions in the numbers.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,637.53	-0.03
Nifty 50	15,208.50	0.07
S&P 500*	4,195.16	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	-0.04
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,025*102	0.21
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.62	0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.579	-0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Grain output to rise 2.66% to record 305.43 mt

Foodgrain production is estimated to rise 2.66 per cent to a new record of 305.43 million tonnes in the current crop year 2020-21 (July-June) from 297.5 mt last crop year, on better output of rice, wheat and pulses, the agriculture ministry said in its third advance estimates. Rice production is pegged at a record 121.46 mt against 118.87 mt last year. Wheat production is to increase to a record 108.75 mt from 107.86 million tonnes.

BB's US partner submits Covaxin Master File to FDA



Ocugen, Bharat Biotech's US partner for Covaxin, has submitted a "Master File" to the US FDA prior to seeking an emergency use authorisation in that country. The company is currently evaluating the clinical and regulatory path for Covaxin in the US, including obtaining Emergency Use Authorization from the US FDA, Ocugen said in a recent regulatory filing. Ocugen has submitted key information and data to date.

Clarios sells 10% stake in Amara Raja Batteries

Clarios ARBL Holding LP offloaded a 10 per cent stake in Amara Raja Batteries for a little over Rs 1,276.34 crore, through an open market transaction. The shares were sold at an average price of Rs 747.22. Clarios held a 24 percent stake in Amara Raja, as of March 2021. Morgan Stanley Asia, Integrated Core, and Ghisallo Master Fund LP picked up the shares. After the bulk deal, Amara Raja shares plunged 6.43 per cent.

Triumph drives in Bonneville Bobber at ₹11.75 L

British premium motorcycle brand Triumph Motorcycles has launched the updated version of Bonneville Bobber in India priced at Rs 11.75 lakh (ex-show-room). The 2021 Bonneville Bobber comes with enhanced engine performance, technology and equipment. "The Triumph Bobber has always had a demand among Indian customers and due to this we decided to bring the Bobber back after a gap of one year.

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RBI may step in as rupee outdoes peers Re makes strong comeback in May

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 25

After tumbling in April, the rupee has rebounded this month to become Asia's top-performing currency on positive global cues and fall in daily Covid cases with several states planning to ease restrictions in June, which would help revive economic activities.

The rupee has climbed 1.5 per cent against the dollar in May to beat all its regional peers as the country's daily infections declined rapidly after touching a record high. However, experts said they expect the central bank to step in to limit the rupee's gains, as a strong rupee hurts exporters at a time when the Covid pandemic has hit the economy hard.

The rupee on Tuesday appreciated 19 paise against the dollar to settle at 72.77, as the appetite for riskier assets improved after US Federal Reserve officials attempted to soothe the concern over high inflation. Foreign banks may continue to sell the US dollar on account of foreign fund inflows for MSCI's rebalancing of domestic stocks, which is expected to fetch about \$1.35 billion by the end of this week.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic unit opened at 72.85 against the dollar and registered an intraday high of 72.75. It witnessed a low of 72.87. The



rupee finally closed at 72.77 against the American currency, registering a rise of 19 paise over its previous close. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.23 per cent to 89.632.

Abhishek Goenka, founder and chief executive officer at India Forex Advisors, said, "The rupee is slightly on a stronger note but we don't expect it to appreciate a lot as the central bank and the government will not be very comfortable with a strong rupee that hurts exports."

"The RBI has not been so active on the buy dollar side because there is enough liquidity in the system and it cannot infuse more liquidity in the system to buy dollars. Also, the RBI cannot do a sell-buy swap and push the dollar purchases forward since the forward premiums are already very high at 5.4 per cent," Goenka added. "Time

and again the communication by the US Fed that the inflation will be transitory and reassurance that they will not increase the interest rate soon has also weakened the dollar globally which is also impacting the dollar-rupee. The real effective exchange rate is close to 120 which is normally seen as upper band. On the downside, we don't expect the rupee to go below 72.5 and on the upside we don't expect it to go above 74.5-75 in the next three months."

The rupee also has the benefit of offering Asia's highest carry returns. The rupee had tumbled to the lowest in nine months in April as daily coronavirus infections surged above 3 lakh, triggering the unwinding of up to \$50 billion in carry trades, according to Bloomberg.

However on Tuesday, the daily count of Covid-19 cases in the country fell below the 2-lakh mark after about 40 days, according to the government data.

E-COM PLAYERS ONCE AGAIN IN HIRING MODE

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 25

With most of the key cities going into lockdown, e-commerce players are once again in a hiring mode.

In the past three months, over March-May 2021, Flipkart has hired 23,000 people across the country in various capacities.

"The growing demand for e-commerce services across the country as people continue to remain indoors to fight the virus has necessitated a ramp-up of our supply chain, creating thousands of employment opportunities. All new hires will be covered with our healthcare and wellness initiatives," said Hemant Badri, senior vice-president, supply chain at Flipkart.

Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Teamlease Services, said, "Most of the e-commerce companies, especially e-grocers and those delivering essential products, have been hiring for the past couple of months."

This is the sector which is still fully operational during the lockdown. They do need more people for delivering, packaging and managing warehouses with increased demand. More-over, when existing staff fall ill, they need people to get the job done."

Most of the hiring has been happening for last-mile delivery and warehouses.

Centre mulls stimulus package to aid growth

SIDDHARTHA SINGH MAY 25

India the global hotspot for the pandemic and has decimated travel since the second wave picked up in March even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refused to implement a strict nationwide lockdown

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with small and medium-sized companies, the people said, asking not to be identified as the deliberations are private. The discussions are at an early stage and no timeline for an announcement has been decided, they said. A finance ministry spokesman declined to comment.

The latest wave of Covid-19 infections has made

India the global hotspot for the pandemic and has decimated travel since the second wave picked up in March even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refused to implement a strict nationwide lockdown

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with SMEs

like last year's. With nearly 200,000 cases daily many local governments - including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, India's most industrialised states - have imposed curbs against the spread of the virus.

That has prompted many economists to cut their forecasts for the financial year that began April 1, as rising unemployment and dwindling savings among consumers dim the chances for double-digit growth.

Flagging growth prospects put the onus on policy makers to support activity, especially once the virus caseload eases. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who said last month she's monitoring the economy in a "very detailed fashion," has held discussions with economists in recent days about a stimulus package, the people said.

In April, the finance ministry eased rules for capital expenditure by government departments to try to boost spending in the economy.

— Bloomberg

BPCL may sell part stake in IGL, Petronet

AMMAR ZAIDI NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) may sell a part of its stake in Petronet LNG and Indraprastha Gas (IGL) to shed its promoter status to obviate the need for its new owner to make open offers for the two gas companies, sources said.

BPCL holds 12.5 per cent stake in Petronet, India's largest LNG importer, and a 22.5 per cent stake in city gas retailer IGL. It is a promoter of both the listed companies and holds board positions.

As per the legal position evaluated by the Depart-

ment of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam), which is running the process for sale of government's entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL, the acquirer of BPCL will have to make an open offer to the minority shareholders of Petronet and IGL for acquiring 26 per cent shares, three sources said.

This is because BPCL is a promoter of the two companies and since there is a change in ownership of the promoter firm, an open offer is triggered under Sebi (Substantial Acquisition of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011.

A way out could be for BPCL to sell a part of its

shareholding in the two firms and shed the promoter status, thereby, obviating the need for open offers, sources said.

BPCL, however, is not in favour of selling the stake, as giving up the promoter status and directorships will mean substantial value erosion for the company.

But the thinking in the government is that the open offers for Petronet and IGL may deter bidders who are mostly eyeing BPCL's oil refining assets and 22 per cent share of the fuel marketing business it commands, sources said.

BPCL spokesperson refused to comment.— PTI

Commodity surge threatens earnings

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 25

Rising commodity costs could affect India Inc's earnings profile and put an end to the benign interest rate regime from early next year.

"There will be adverse impact on auto, consumer goods, consumer durables margins. However, higher commodity price could also lead to earnings uptick in the metals, cement, oil & gas sectors. The IT sector would broadly remain insulated from commodity inflation."

"Earnings in the non-

commodity basket may be adversely impacted given the weak demand backdrop in the economy due to widespread lockdowns," said a report by Motilal Oswal.

The rise in prices comes amid the Covid second wave that restricted economic activity. With uncertainty in the demand and environment, it would be challenging for companies to pass on the rising commodity costs.

"In a constrained demand environment, due to broad based lockdowns and macro uncertainty, corporates would be reluctant to pass on the higher

input prices to consumers and would first exercise other P&L levers to manage margins," the report said.

The construction sector is already feeling the pinch. The rise in prices of steel bars along with cement has added fuel to the construction budget crisis. Also the prices for plastics, man-made polymers and resins, used in everything from piping to insulation, have been rising rapidly over the past few months.

"The rise in raw material prices over the past few months is due to a combination of factors, includ-

ing unprecedented demand, multiple acts of force majeure, and the inevitable interruption of supply chains caused by the Covid-19 pandemic," said Jayesh Rathod, ED, The Guardians Real Estate Advisory.

"In the last three months the iron prices have increased by Rs 20,000 per tonne, which is almost a 50 per cent increase in the iron prices. Apart from this, copper and aluminium prices have also increased which has impacted the construction cost," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.

Jaypee Associates wants CoC to consider its offer

New Delhi, May 25: Jaiprakash Associates Ltd, the erstwhile promoter of bankrupt-Jaypee Infratech, has said its settlement proposal without any "haircuts" should be considered by the creditors' panel, which is set to take a call on two existing resolution plans for the company this week.

Currently, state-owned NBCC and Suraksha Group are in the race to acquire Jaypee Infratech

Ltd (JIL), which went into insolvency proceedings in August 2017.

In a letter to JIL's interim resolution professional (IRP) Anuj Jain, the chairman of Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) Manoj Gaur has urged him to consider JAL's settlement offer, which was submitted before the Supreme Court in 2019.

Asserting that JIL has more assets than liabilities, Gaur has also claimed

that lenders would not be entitled to exercise their rights on loan guarantors if the realty firm is sold at a "throw away price".

The committee of creditors (CoC) and homebuyers are scheduled to meet this week to discuss whether more time should be given to NBCC and Suraksha to submit their revised and final bids for JIL.

Urging that JAL's offer should be placed before the CoC, Gaur said the settle-

ment of total liability of Rs 9,783 crore to secured financial creditors is proposed to be done by way of upfront payment, land swap and long terms debentures with a total value of about Rs 12,500 crore.

For homebuyers, he said that JAL would deploy funds for home construction to the tune of Rs 1,650 crore, out of which Rs 400 crore would be upfront.

— PTI

RAISING REVENUE

Tax could cover auto, paper, cement, power & petchem sectors

Indonesia may tax the rich, top polluters

GRACE SIHOMBING & ARYS ADITYA MAY 25

Indonesia seeks to cast a wider net to tax more high-income individuals and top polluters in a bid to replenish its state coffers.

The finance ministry presented the proposals, which could be part of key reforms this year, to a parliamentary commission this week. The government needs to collect more revenue to sustain spending while keeping its vow to bring budget deficit back within the 3 per cent of GDP legal limit, from 6 per cent last year.

"The goal of this tax

reform is not just revenue collection but the sustainability of the state budget," said finance minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. "The whole world is also accelerating its revenue collection in the midst of soaring budget deficits and debt ratios. This is a response that must be done with caution."

Here are the tax changes under study:

Carbon tax: Taxing carbon emissions will help Indonesia curb greenhouse gases while raising funds for green state investments and social welfare programs, Indrawati said. The government could use existing taxes such as excise,



motor vehicle and fuel taxes to enforce it, or it could create an entirely new levy through a carbon tax.

The tax could apply to emission sources like fossil fuels, motor vehicles and factories, as well as carbon-intensive activities such as those in the pulp and paper, cement, power generation and petrochemical industries.

Income tax: Indonesia

could add a new 35 per cent income tax bracket for individuals earning more than 5 billion rupiah (\$349,000) year. Taxpayers are currently grouped into four brackets, with rates ranging from 5-30 per cent. The country is poised to see the world's fastest growth in ultra-high net worth individuals in the next five years.

Digital tax: Indonesia is finalising the formula to tax digital companies and impose levies on electronic transactions. The government has issued a law stating that taxes could be imposed on companies with significant economic presence in the country, but it hasn't set out regula-

tions for the tariff or how it would impose and calculate it.

Tax amnesty: Indonesia could take another stab at a tax amnesty programme, following a 2016 programme that uncovered 4.813 trillion rupiah (\$336 billion) in undeclared assets. Taxpayers who have undisclosed assets as of the 2019 tax year might be able to settle their past obligations at current income tax rates without any sanctions. However, those who failed to disclose their assets during the first tax amnesty period in 2016 will have to pay income tax above the highest tax amnesty rate.

— Bloomberg



Bob Chapek

Disney bets on streaming, to close 100 Intl. channels

CHRISTOPHER PALMERI MAY 25

Walt Disney Co. plans to close 100 of its international TV channels this year as it marches toward a future where streaming services such as Disney+ are front and centre.

Chief executive officer Bob Chapek, speaking on Monday at JPMorgan Chase & Co's technology and media conference, said the closures come in addition to the 30 foreign networks the company shuttered last year.

"The great majority of that content will migrate to Disney+," Chapek said. "That continues to be a core strategy for us as we pivot toward direct-to-consumer."

The company's purge of networks last year included the Disney Channel in the UK, part of Chapek's efforts to streamline and modernize the entertainment giant. This year, the company has added more content for grown-ups to its Disney+ offering in Europe, using the Star brand. Chapek said the majority of Disney+ customers in the region have begun watching the Star programming.

Disney introduced Disney+ Hotstar in India last year. That service, which features cricket matches and other local content, now accounts for 30 per cent of Disney+'s total subscriber count of 103.6 million globally. In April, meanwhile, Disney announced plans to close a number of its sports networks in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

Chapek said the closures going forward will depend on contracts the company has in individual markets.

Consumers are increasingly choosing to watch content online, and Disney wants to stay ahead of the trend, Chapek said.

"We don't want to be on the back end of that wave," he said. "We want to be on the front end of that wave." — Bloomberg

ASIRVAD FINANCE RAISES \$15 MN US LOAN

Chennai, May 25: Asirvad Microfinance Ltd, headquartered in Chennai and subsidiary of Manappuram Finance, announced the closing of a US\$15 million (Rs.111.15 crore), 7-year commercial loan from WorldBusiness Capital, Inc. based in Hartford, Connecticut (USA). WBC's loan is supported by the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the U.S. Government's developing finance institution. Proceeds from the loan availed under India's ECB norms will enable Asirvad to expand its business of providing small loans to low-income women business owners in rural areas to start and expand their income-generating business.

GOVT URGED TO SELL SUBSIDISED EDIBLE OIL THROUGH PDS

New Delhi, May 25: Trade body SEA has counselled the government to distribute edible oils at subsidised prices through the public distribution system (PDS), in a bid to give relief to the poor from the rising edible oil prices.

The Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) has also suggested the government to curb speculative trading of oilseeds and edible oils on the commodity bourses and insist on compulsory delivery contracts.

That apart, the Mumbai-based trade body said the Centre should freeze tariffs at lower levels, reduce agri-cess on imports and revisit customs duty reduction measures.

In a letter to food secretary Sudhanshu Pandey, SEA president Atul Chaturvedi said: "Last few months we have witnessed unprecedented price increase not only in edible oils but in practically all commodities across the world. Reasons for the unprecedented increase have been discussed umpteen times."

SHORT TAKES

Govt to open 143 Khelo India spots

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry has decided to set up 143 Khelo India centres across seven states with a total budget of ₹14.30 crore in its bid to nurture talent at the grassroot level. These centres will be set up in Maharashtra, Mizoram, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Each centre will be entrusted with one sports discipline. The Khelo India centres have been launched by the Sports Ministry in partnership with state governments to ensure the availability of grassroot-level infrastructure across the country. "It is our endeavour to make India one among the top 10 countries in the 2028 Olympics. To fulfil this goal we need to identify and nurture a large number of talented sportspersons from an early age," Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a statement. — PTI

Pep is England's Manager of Year

London: Manchester City's Pep Guardiola has been named manager of the year by England's League Managers' Association, it was announced on Monday. Guardiola steered City to the Premier League title and League Cup this season and this Saturday the Spaniard's side will bid to be crowned kings of Europe for the first time when they face English rivals Chelsea in the Champions League final in Porto. Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager Guardiola topped a poll where the other leading contenders were Leeds' Marcelo Bielsa, Norwich's Daniel Farke, Chelsea women's manager Emma Hayes, West Ham's David Moyes and Leicester's Brendan Rodgers. — AFP

Flick to replace Loew after Euro

Berlin: Outgoing Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick will succeed his former boss Joachim Loew in the Germany dugout after Euro 2020, the German Football Association (DFB) announced on Tuesday. "It's all gone surprisingly quickly, but I am very happy to be Germany coach from the autumn," said Flick, 56, after signing a three-year contract to succeed Loew. "I am hugely excited, because I see the class of players, and especially young players, which we have in Germany." Flick, who was assistant coach to Loew when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, has long been the favourite to take over from Loew, who will leave the job after 15 years in charge later this year. — AFP

Honda ready for Mugello challenge

Italy: The MotoGP World Championship returns to the Autodromo Internazionale del Mugello for round six of the 2021 season, Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro ready for their next challenges. With a wet and wild French GP behind them, the Repsol Honda Team have regrouped and are ready to do it all again at the Italian Grand Prix. Having been unable to race in Mugello in 2020 due to the global pandemic, 2021 marks a welcome return to the iconic Italian circuit. 2019 produced a thrilling battle with Marquez taking second by just 0.043s after an intense race with Danilo Petrucci and Andrea Dovizioso. Marquez arrives in Italy buoyed by his showing in France, leading the race and lapping faster than the leaders despite suffering a fall.

Bucks bash up Miami Heat

Los Angeles: The Milwaukee Bucks produced an exhibition of three-point shooting to crush the Miami Heat as the Denver Nuggets bounced back to level their NBA first round playoff series with victory over Portland on Monday. Bryn Forbes erupted for five threes in the first half and Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points to give the Bucks a resounding 132-98 win over last year's NBA Finals runners-up. — AFP

IPL BACK TO GULF

League likely to start on Sept. 18 with 10 double-headers in 3 weeks

New Delhi, May 25: The postponed Indian Premier League will resume tentatively on September 18 or 19 in the UAE with as many as 10 double-headers expected to be played during a three-week window, a senior BCCI official said on Tuesday.

The final might be held on October 9 or 10. The three-week window will be enough for the league to complete its remaining 31 games for the season, a win-win scenario for all the primary stakeholders including the BCCI, franchises and broadcasters. The IPL was postponed on May 4 after multiple Covid-19 cases inside its bio-bubble came to light. "The BCCI has spoken to all the stakeholders and the likely start could be between September 18th to 20th. Since September 18 is a Saturday and 19 a Sunday, it is more likely that you would want to re-start it on a weekend date," the official said on conditions of anonymity. "Similarly, October 9th or 10th will be the final as it's a weekend. We are finalising the itinerary and there will be 10 double headers and seven evening matches along with four main games (two qualifiers, one eliminator and the final), which completes the list of 31 matches," the source added.

The Indian team's last Test match against England is set to finish on September 14 at Manchester and on the next day, the whole team (save Hanuma Vihari and Abhimanyu Easwaran) will be flown to UAE in a chartered flight for a "bubble to bubble" transfer.

"The Indian team and the English players who will be available will fly in the same charter flight from Manchester to Dubai. Similarly, the West Indies players will also fly in after completing the Premier League engagements. There will be three-day quarantine for players arriving from Britain and

NASEEM OUT OF PSL FOR BREACH OF COVID RULES

Karachi, May 25: The Pakistan Cricket Board has barred fast bowler Naseem Shah from playing in the remaining matches of Pakistan Super League in Abu Dhabi for breach of Covid-19 protocols before departure from the country.

The Board has released Shah of Quetta Gladiators from isolation in Lahore after arrived at the designated hotel with a non-compliant RT-PCR test result.

"As such, the fast bowler will not be travelling to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 26 May and is now out of the competition," the PCB said in a statement.

The 19-year-old Shah has appeared in nine Tests.

The PCB had asked all the players travelling in chartered flights from Karachi and Lahore to assemble at the team hotels on May 24 with negative reports of RT-PCR tests taken not more than 48 hours prior to their arrival. — PTI



the Caribbean."

INDIA'S T20 SERIES VS S. AFRICA CANCELLED

The BCCI has decided to cancel India's T20 series against South Africa scheduled in September, which was a build-up to the side's World T20 preparations.

"The series can't be held and in any case there can't be any better preparation for the T20 World Cup than playing a high intensity tournament like IPL. Since the T20 World Cup will start within a week or 10 days after completion of the IPL, the SA series can only be held at a later date. "There is a chance that India might play extra games when they tour South Africa early next year," the source said.

The India home season also had a two Test series against New Zealand in November and the dates of which could be shifted depending upon when the T20 World Cup ends.

— PTI

Covid-recovered Seifert all praise for 'safe' IPL bubble

Auckland, May 25: New Zealand cricketer Tim Seifert's world stopped for a moment and heart sank when he tested positive for Covid-19 during the now suspended IPL but the wicket-keeper said he never felt vulnerable inside the tournament's bio-bubble.

Seifert, however, insisted that his Covid-19 ordeal will not deter him from travelling to India again for future assignments, including the T20 World Cup to be held later this year.

"I got pulled aside and told I'd tested positive and my heart sank straight away when everyone left. I was the only overseas player basically still left in India out of the whole tournament. That's when things got a little bit real," an emotional Seifert told the *New Zealand Herald*.

"The world stops a little bit, I just couldn't really think what was next and that's the scary part of it — you hear about things, and I thought that was



Tim Seifert

going to happen to me." Seifert was all praise for the IPL bubble though.

"Talking to some of the English boys that were over there before the IPL ... everything that they were saying was doing well. You only kind of heard good things, the structures, all the plans that have been put in place," Seifert added.

"That was a good point of view for a player to go over there, and to be honest the whole time while

I was over there (in India), the bubble felt good... Felt safe."

Seifert, who was part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, is presently undergoing his 14-day mandatory quarantine here following his return to New Zealand after recovering from the deadly virus. He had to stay back in India even after the suspension of the league as he contracted the virus just 24 hours before he was to fly back home — PTI

● The US State Department advisory released on Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners.

had been told the decision was "not related" to the plans of the US Olympic delegation.

Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said she "didn't think it would impact the Games", adding the

organisers would "do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security".

The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff "will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer".

A State Department spokesman said Washington understood "the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic Committee are weighing

after recovering fully from Covid-19. Mumbaikars like Virat, Rohit and coach Shastri have all now joined the bubble," a BCCI source confirmed.

It is learnt that approval for allowing the players' families is still awaited but the BCCI is hopeful that it would be done soon.

"We can't have our players being away from their families for three months and that too in a bubble. That's never great for mental health," the source said.

The negotiation on quarantine duration once the side reaches England is still on and the hard quarantine (confined to hotel rooms) could be shortened.

— PTI

MOTHER-SON IN CENTURY STAND, TAKE TEAM HOME

London, May 25: Former England women's cricketer Arran Brindle said she was as "proud as punch" of her son after the pair shared a match-winning century stand in a club game.

Brindle made 134 international appearances for England from 1999-2014, with the 39-year-old scoring unbeaten hundreds in both Test and one-day international formats.

But on Sunday, a player shortage meant she found herself playing for Owmyb Trojans — a team she coaches — in the third division of the Lincoln and District League in central England.

They dismissed their opponents, Nettleham CC's Academy XI, for 141, with Harry Brindle, Arran's 12-year-old son, taking four wickets.

The mother and son duo then combined to chase down Nettleham's score, sharing an opening stand of 143 in 32.3 overs to secure a 10-wicket win. Harry scored an unbeaten 32 while his mother finished 94 not out.

— AFP

Sushil may lose WFI contract

New Delhi, May 25: Arrested in a murder case, double Olympic-medallist Sushil Kumar is set to be dropped from the Wrestling Federation of India's annual contracts list along with Pooja Dhandra on account of non-performance when the body holds a review meeting next month.

The meeting between the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) and sponsors Tata Motors was to be held in 2020 but was put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A WFI source said the decision to drop Sushil is purely based on performance and has nothing to do with his arrest for his alleged involvement in the murder of a fellow wrestler, Sagar Dhankad, at the Chhatrasal stadium.

"It is clear that Sushil and Pooja have not done anything notable since they were offered contracts. They will not make the cut when the review meeting is held next month," a WFI source said.

The WFI had taken a leaf out of BCCI's book to offer central contracts to its players in 2019. About 150 wrestlers had got one-year contracts which are subject to review.

Sushil was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade A contract after initially being placed in Grade B that gave the

● Sushil Kumar was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade 'A' contract after initially being placed in Grade 'B' that gave the wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh.

wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh. Pooja was also placed in Grade A. Sushil could not win any medal in the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and also bowed out of the 2019 World Championship with a close first-round defeat. He has not competed since then.

The 2018 World Championship bronze-medallist Pooja too has lost her place in the 57kg category. She did not compete in 2020 and her last medal-winning performance came in July 2019 when she won a silver at the Grand Prix of Spain.

When contacted, WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar did not confirm exclusion of the two wrestlers but hinted such a step cannot be ruled out either. "All decisions will be made at the meeting only. But one thing is sure that sponsors' money will not be distributed for nothing. We have to utilise the money wisely," Tomar said. — PTI

HOCKEY STADIUM NAMED AFTER BALBIR SINGH SR

Chandigarh, May 25: The Mohali International Hockey Stadium was on Tuesday officially renamed after the legendary Balbir Singh Sr on the occasion of his first death anniversary.

The renaming was officially announced at a tribute ceremony held here to remember the three-time Olympic gold medallist, who died at the age of 96 on May 25 last year.

One of the country's most accomplished athletes, the iconic centre-forward was the only Indian among 16 legends chosen by the International Olympic Committee across modern Olympic history during the 2012 London Games.

"The Mohali International Hockey Stadium has been dedicated to the memory of Padma Shri Balbir Singh Sr in a formal ceremony at the hockey stadium on Tuesday on the first death anniversary of the legendary sportsperson," Punjab Sports Minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi said.

Sodhi said from now on the stadium would be known as "Olympian Balbir Singh Senior International Hockey Stadium." — PTI

Thapa secures 5th successive medal

ASIAN | BOXING

● Shiva Thapa prevailed in a lop-sided clash to set up a showdown with defending champion and top seed Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan.

Games bronze-winner Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg) went down to Uzbekistan's reigning world champion Mirazizbek Mirzahalilov in a fiercely-fought quarterfinal.

The Indian boxer lost 1-4 after giving the top-seeded defending champion quite a fight.

Mirzahalilov, who is also the Asian Games champion, was caught off guard by Hussamuddin's powerful counter-attacks on more than one occasion.

However, the Uzbek's assured footwork and precisely-placed straights for a majority of the bout, helped him seal it in the end. — PTI

COVID-19 POSITIVE MILKHA SINGH CLINICALLY STABLE

Chandigarh, May 25: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is "clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement" as he fights Covid pneumonia, the hospital where he is being treated said on Tuesday.

Milkha was on Monday admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of Fortis hospital in Mohali. The 91-year-old tested positive for the virus last Wednesday.

"Mr Milkha Singh is clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement," the hospital update read.

He was diagnosed with "Covid pneumonia" on Monday after his admission.

Earlier Milkha's golfer son Jeev had said that the decision to hospitalise him was a precautionary measure. Milkha is suspected to have contracted the infection from house helps who had tested positive for the virus. — PTI

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