





## SHORT TAKES

## AP WILL BE RULED FROM VISAKHA SOON: VIJAYASAI

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, JUNE 2

YSR Congress MP V. Vijayasai Reddy announced that the state would be administered from the executive capital of Visakhapatnam soon.

The MP along with Minister for Agriculture K. Kannababu told media persons here on Wednesday that the state government would make all requisite measures to start governance of the state from the steel city soon and added that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had a prerogative to govern the state from the place of his choice.

He ruled out any role in the pending CRDA case, with regard to relocation of administrative capital. The MP assured to develop the Steel City as slum-free and said that a six-lane road connecting Kailasigiri to Bhogapuram would be developed.

## SPECIAL PANEL, TRIBUNAL SOUGHT FOR WAKF LANDS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Andhra Pradesh Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (APASWJ) has urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to initiate measures for protection of wakf lands by appointing a state level committee headed by a special officer and establishing a wakf tribunal to resolve disputes related to wakf lands.

In a letter to the CM, APASWJ state co-convenor Altaf Ali Raza said many wakf lands in the 13 districts of AP state have been encroached. He lamented that earlier governments did not take any measures for regaining the wakf lands from encroachers.

Welcoming the decision of Deputy Chief Minister Amrath Basha on demolition of illegal structures on wakf lands, APASWJ co-convenor said 90 per cent of wakf lands are in clutches of politicians and influential persons. Altaf Ali Raza said CM Jagan should get these lands freed for the welfare of Muslim minorities, who have supported YSRC in the elections.

## DOCTOR PLEADS WITH RAJNATH TO SNUB RAJU

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

A prominent doctor in the city has addressed a letter to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, stating that the letter of MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju against the military hospital at Secunderabad has hurt the sentiments of defense families.

Dr Naga Radhakrishna Ambati said that Raju in his letter made baseless allegations against the military hospital where he was admitted for medical examination as per the Supreme Court guidelines. He said, "As a defence family member and doctor, painfully I would like to bring to your kind notice that the baseless allegations made by him against a serving officer of the military hospital have seriously hurt the sentiments of the defence families."

## CM JAGAN URGED TO PROMOTE HINDI UNDER NEP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Welcoming the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) in AP, Hindi Sevasadan Mahavidyalay (HSM) has requested Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to initiate measures for sanctioning Hindi posts in schools, junior and degree colleges for the promotion of the national language.

HSM founder and general secretary S. Gaibuvalli said that Hindi is a national language which would create employment for youth at national level and, hence, the state government should take measures for its promotion.

Gaibuvalli deplored that the earlier government neglected the Hindi language as it did not sanction Hindi teacher posts in Adarsha, Gurukul and welfare schools in the state and a similar situation prevailed in junior and degree colleges.



Cops have a tough time managing crowds at an urban primary health centre during the vaccination drive at Chinnawaltair in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. —P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

## Bifurcation blues now haunt AP's Met Centre

Officials await capital works to plan permanent facility

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Bifurcation blues still haunt Andhra Pradesh as its Meteorological Centre located at Amaravati for weather forecast lacks a permanent building. At present, it is being accommodated on a private university campus.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) set up a meteorological centre at Amaravati for Andhra Pradesh in December 2018 and the authorities paid ₹1 crore for acquiring an acre of land at Thullur to develop permanent infrastructure to accommodate it. A ground plus two storied building was planned for setting up the met centre.

The met centre authorities say that as the capital city for AP was planned to be developed at Amaravati, they were

● **THE MET** centre authorities say that as the capital city for AP was planned to be developed at Amaravati, they were eagerly waiting for its development so that they would take up the construction of their permanent office at Thullur. They say that as they require infrastructure like roads, drains and other amenities to come up at the capital city, they are not going ahead with any works.

eagerly waiting for its development so that they would take up the construction of their permanent office at Thullur. They say that as they require infrastructure like roads, drains and other amenities to come up at the capital city, they are not going ahead with any works.

But the authorities are silent on the state government's plans to relocate the administrative capital to Visakhapatnam while keeping the legislative capital at Amaravati and the judicial capital in Kurnool.

However, they say that as

letins at regular intervals in a day for the benefit of the all the stakeholders.

Fortunately, the Met Centre seems to be having no issues of shortage of manpower including technical personnel to operate it, similar on lines of some other departments in the aftermath of split of AP to form a new Telangana state on June 2, 2004 and also finances as funds get allocated from the Centre.

AP Meteorological Centre head S. Stella said, "We are operating the Met Centre sanctioned to AP to be set up at capital city Amaravati, from a private accommodation at present and as we purchased land at Thullur, we will develop permanent structure once requisite infrastructure is developed at Amaravati. We have been successfully carrying out our weather forecast with no issues."

## Special Covid care for electricity staff sought

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The electricity department employees are seeking administering of Covid-19 vaccine to all, reservation of beds in the hospitals and treatment on the lines NTPC is following, ₹50 lakh insurance facility and ₹30 lakh ex gratia in case of deaths.

The AP Electricity Engineers Association lamented that electricity employees were brought under the essential services but the government is

reluctant to give them priority for vaccination and treatment facilities on par with other frontline departments.

APEEA president G.N. Reddy general secretary P. Sridhar and adviser M. Srinivas said that the NTPC is taking several supportive measures for employees who were infected with Covid-19 and fight against the spread of the Covid-19 in an encouraging way.

They said that according to the ESMA Act-1971, power sector employees are considered as emergency service and they are making endless efforts to maintain round-the-clock power supply to hospitals, oxygen companies, water supply, diagnostic centres and other essential services amidst pandemic which is a big threat to them and their families.

They stated that the government had administered vaccine to frontline people like doctors, police, nurses, revenue and others but did not offer the same to electricity department employees who were also considered as frontline staff.

## DOCTORS RESUME WORK AS GOVT TO CONSIDER PLEAS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Following an assurance from the state government to consider their demands, senior resident doctors and junior doctors have deferred their boycott of all duties including Covid care by a week and resumed work in the

state on Wednesday.

Earlier in the day, representatives from AP Senior Resident Doctor Association and AP Junior Doctors' Association were invited for talks with the Chief Secretary Aditya Nath Das, Principal Secretary (Health) Anil Kumar Singhal and Director of

Medical Education M. Raghavendra Rao.

The doctors said that their demands were heard positively by the government officials and the Chief Secretary assured to take the issue to the notice of the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and resolve the issue in seven days.

## THREE OPTIONS GIVEN TO BENEFICIARIES

From Page 1

The government is procuring 69.7 lakh tonnes of cement, 7.44 lakh tonnes of steel, 310 lakh tonnes of sand and other materials for the initial construction.

The government will also provide 20 tonnes of sand at free of cost from nearby sand rigs for the construction works.

Further, the government has given three options to the beneficiaries, and made it clear that the beneficiary can make his own decision.

In the first option, the government will supply the quality construction materials required to build the house and will also pay for the labour charges, where the beneficiaries can build the house on their own. In the second option, the beneficiaries can bring the construction materials required for the construction of the house themselves and build a house as per their interests.

The government will make payments to the beneficiaries' bank accounts in a phased manner depending on the construction progress.

In the third option, the government shall build the house, taking the entire responsibility of the building materials needed.

## PILOT PROJECT IS ALMOST READY

From Page 1

The pilot project was almost ready and would be conducted in 4,800 villages in the first phase. They said they would complete a comprehensive land survey in those villages and purification of records would be done from December 2020 to March 2021 and then a draft would be printed.

Regarding land surveys in urban local bodies, the officials informed that they started a survey at Tadepalligudem in West Godavari district. They said surveys would be conducted in 41 towns and cities in phase 1 from June 2021 to January 2022, and phase 2 would begin in February 2022 in 42 towns and cities. It would be completed by October 2022. The phase 3 would begin in November 2022 in 41 towns and cities and would be over by April 2023.

Deputy Chief Minister (Revenue) Dharmana Krishnadas, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, Chief Minister's Principal Advisor Ajeya Kallam, Land Administration Chief Commissioner Neerab Kumar Prasad, Municipal Administration Special Chief Secretary Y. Srilakshmi, Revenue Special Chief Secretary Rajat Bhargav, Finance Principal Secretary S.S. Rawat, Panchayat Raj Principal Secretary Gopala Krishna Dwivedi, Revenue Principal Secretary V. Usha Rani and other officials were present.

## Covid-hit woman presumed dead, walks back home

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA JUNE 2

A curious situation has arisen here after a major goof-up by health officials. An aged woman presumed dead with Covid-19 walked back home alive, as her family members and local residents watched her return with a mix of emotions — shock and scare, followed by surprise and joy.

The 75-year-old Muthyala Girijamma, a resident of Christianpet at Jaggayapeta in Krishna district, had been infected with Covid19 and was undergoing treatment at the GGH here since May 12. Her husband Gaddayya used to come to the hospital repeatedly to enquire after her condition.

On May 15, when he went to the hospital, he failed to find her in the Covid ward. When he inquired with the hospital staff, he was told that it meant she had succumbed to the infection. He went to the mortuary, collected the body of an aged woman, presuming that it was his wife, and took it to his home village, Jaggayapeta. The last rites were performed as per family traditions the same day.

With curbs having been imposed on performing the last rites on the Covid-dead, neither the family nor the villagers removed the tight wrapping on the

woman's entire body before conducting the last rites.

It so happened that her son Ramesh, 35, also died due to Coronavirus while in treatment at a hospital in Khammam on May 23.

The family members and the villagers conducted a memorial service for the loss of both the family members and condoled their death at the event in the village on June 1.

A pall of gloom hung over the village. However, a day later, on Wednesday afternoon, the elderly woman reached back home, giving a huge shock to her husband and others in the surroundings.

She explained to them that she recovered from the infection and was discharged from the GGH in the morning.

She told her family members, "I was very disappointed when no family member came to the hospital to take me home after my discharge. The hospital offered me ₹3,000 for transport to return home and take further care of my health."

With this, the family members and villagers recovered from the shock and surprise and it turned out to be a joyous occasion to all.

Repeated attempts to contact government hospital medical superintendent Dr K. Sivasankar Rao to elicit his version on the issue proved futile.

## TD THREATENS LEGAL BATTLE FOR SSC EXAMS CANCELLATION

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Wednesday demanded the outright cancellation of Class 10 and Intermediate examinations in Andhra Pradesh just as the Central government scrapped the board examinations at the national level.

Lokesh threatened to launch another legal battle on behalf the students if the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime did not change its "arrogant" and

adamant attitude.

He objected to the CM not taking proactive steps for rescuing the AP students when the PM himself was reviewing and taking decisions on cancellation of examinations in view of the continuing threat from Coronavirus.

Addressing a virtual meeting with students, parents and student associations, Lokesh said the PM was finding time to hold review meetings on the students' issues but the AP CM was not caring to do so.

## SUSPENDED JUNIOR CIVIL JUDGE SHIFTED TO PILER SUB-JAIL

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

Junior Civil Judge S. Ramakrishna was on Wednesday shifted from the Chittoor sub-jail to another sub-jail in Piler for security reasons. Ramakrishna is under suspension and was arrested and remanded to the sub-jail in Chittoor on charges of making derogatory and threatening remarks against Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in April this year.

Ramakrishna, who is known for levelling accusations against panchayat raj minister P e d d i r e d d y Ramachandra Reddy was arrested by the police following a complaint filed against him by a

YSRC functionary citing his remarks during a news debate on television in April this year. He allegedly called the CM 'Narakasura', saying that he would not mind taking his life.

Soon after his comments went viral, a YSRC functionary lodged a complaint with Pileru police. Ramakrishna was booked under various acts.

Following his arrest, Ramakrishna has been lodged at the Chittoor sub-jail on remand. However, his son recently approached the Andhra Pradesh High Court with a plea to "shift his father to the sub-jail in Piler, as there was a threat to his father's life at the sub-jail in Chittoor."

## WATER | SUPPLY

Minister Anil Kumar reviews the pace of project works with senior officials

## Polavaram water for kharif 2022: Minister

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, JUNE 2

The Andhra Pradesh government has assured water supply for crops from Polavaram irrigation project for the kharif season in 2022.

Minister for water resources P. Anil Kumar Yadav reviewed the progress of Polavaram irrigation project with senior officials and the executing agency MEIL, at the project site at Polavaram in West Godavari on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, he said the government was committed to the supply of water for the kharif season in 2022 as assured by the Chief Minister Y.S.

Jagan Mohan Reddy. Works were being sped up despite the loss of five engineers at the project site and nearly 80 employees in the irrigation department to Coronavirus.

Officials informed the existing command area spread over 23 lakh acres would be stabilised besides seven lakh acres in the new command area under the Left Main Canal in time. With this, nearly 30 lakh acres will get water from Polavaram project during the kharif 2022.

At present, works are underway for diversion of Godavari water from its main course by taking up cofferdams, both upper

● **OFFICIALS INFORM** that the existing command area spread over 23 lakh acres would be stabilised besides seven lakh acres in the new command area under the Left Main Canal in time. With this, nearly 30 lakh acres will get water from Polavaram project during the kharif 2022.

and downstream, to enable construction of the main dam i.e., earth-cum-rock-fill-dam. Water will be supplied through Polavaram spillway through Dowleswaram barrage to nearly 10 lakh acres in the command area from June 15 for the kharif season as

the southwest monsoon is becoming active in the state.

The minister slammed the former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for failing to take up the construction of a diaphragm wall across the river to facilitate the construction of the main dam, as it was damaged for want of proper planning. He asked the former CM whether it should not be considered as his inefficiency and wondered how the previous TD could cover up such lapses and criticise the YSRC government which was committed to the timely completion of the project.

Irrigation authorities said that a nearly 180

metre stretch of diaphragm wall suffered partial damage on its surface following impact of high velocity water gushing out through gaps of cofferdam. They said that they thought of closure of the cofferdam gaps upstream while taking up construction of the diaphragm wall, but failed to do so for various reasons.

The minister directed the authorities to take experts' advice to go ahead with the repair works to the diaphragm wall in an expeditious manner. He also instructed the officials to expedite rehabilitation of Polavaram project affected people to their newly set-up colonies. He

said that though they thought of completing the construction of 17,000 houses in the rehabilitation centres by April, they could not do so as they were facing thousands of cases from the people in both the Godavari districts. However, he assured to complete the rehabilitation of all project-affected people in this season without fail.

The minister lauded the officials, engineers and workers who were working at the project, braving the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic. He took a dig at former CM Naidu and his son Lokesh for staying at home and holding virtual meets to secure their own lives.



## SHORT TAKES

WILD ELEPHANTS  
WREAK HAVOC IN  
CHITTOOR DISTDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

A herd of wild elephants has been creating a flutter, raiding crops and plantations in Mandapeta and Kodur villages in Palamaner mandal in Chittoor district.

According to reports, farmers and villagers are living in fear as they are frequently witnessing nearly 39 wild pachyderms crossing roads and roaming in human habitations for the past two days. The herd was first spotted near Mandapeta in the late hours of Tuesday when they were crossing a road.

Villagers said that the wild pachyderms, which ventured into the farmlands on Tuesday night, continued attacking them even on Wednesday and damaged a large extent of crops.

They alleged that despite informing the forest official several times about the elephant menace, no concrete measure was taken to ward off the animals into the forest.

The forest officials, however, maintain that they roped in drum-beaters and took measures to scare away the tuskers back into the forests. They asked villagers to move only in groups and assured to prevent any further crop damage by the elephants.

EAST GODAVARI  
STILL THE WORST  
AFFECTED

From page 1

East Godavari continues to be the worst-hit in the highest number of total Coronavirus active cases at 29,791, followed by 18,695 in Prakasam, 17,706 in Chittoor, 11,889 in Nellore, 11,665 in Visakhapatnam, 10,123 in Krishna, 10,708 in West Godavari, 10,123 in Krishna, 8,732 in Guntur, 8,248 in Srikakulam, 4,358 in Vizianagaram, 4,120 in Kadapa, 4,001 in Anantapur and 3,739 in Kurnool.

With regard to daily cases of deaths of Coronavirus infected patients, Chittoor reported the highest at 15 followed by 10 in Nellore, nine in West Godavari, eight each in Anantapur, East Godavari and Vizianagaram, seven each in Guntur, Prakasam and Srikakulam, six in Visakhapatnam, five in Krishna and four each in Kadapa and Kurnool. With this, the death toll soared to 11,132.

The state health authorities discharged 15,612 Coronavirus infected patients after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

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Relatives carrying a Covid-19 patient for treatment at New Government General Hospital in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Medical colleges face  
staff crunch in AP, TS

4 govt Ayurveda teaching hospitals in bad conditions

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ANANTAPUR, JUNE 2

Medical colleges in Telugu states face a severe staff crunch and are toiling hard to retain Medical Council of India (MCI) recognition. This, while the Andhra Pradesh government is taking steps to establish 14 new medical colleges and need arises for quality academicians to handle the classes. About nine medical colleges do not have regular principals, and 60 per cent of the existing colleges have no full-time faculty. The few doctors working in government medical colleges are acting as faculty in the nearby private medical colleges.

Several key departments are not functioning as even non-clinical subjects like bio-chemistry, anatomy, physiology and pharmacology are reportedly taught by fresh MBBS

graduates in many colleges.

The Anantapur Medical College is facing a staff crunch. The GGH has no regular dentist and several posts are lying vacant there and at the Super Specialty Hospital. During every visit of the MCI team, the authorities have to struggle to satisfy it.

The government's intention was to expand and provide quality medical services and also to concentrate on deputing faculty to proposed medical colleges, Dr. Suresh Babu of Praja Science Vedika felt.

According to MCI stipulation, there should be five in-patients per medical student. Every batch of 25 students should have one professor and two assistant professors of the reader grade. The medical college should have at least 90 junior residents and a minimum of 210

staff nurses at the hospital attached to the medical college.

Four Medical colleges in Telangana have been denied permission to admit students from the 2019-20 academic year, thus reducing the existing count of 2,200 MBBS seats in private colleges by at least 600. Following the Medical Council of India (MCI) recommendations submitted last year, the Union Health Ministry made the decision after a thorough assessment of the facilities in these institutes.

RIMS Adilabad and the government medical college in Nizamabad are in pathetic states.

Many of the machines and equipment in the medical college are rusting as they have been kept idle due to the shortage of doctors. Dialysis machines and equipment in the neurosurgery department are

lying idle due to the absence of nephrologists and neurosurgery specialists. Almost all the operation theatres remain closed.

A dearth of anatomy professors has resulted in a new crop of doctors passing out without proper knowledge, the Vedika observed. There has been no professor for this subject in most medical colleges.

This apart, four government Ayurveda teaching hospitals in AP & TS face worse conditions. The management of the Ayurvedic medical colleges struggled hard to get their UG and PG seats as the CCIM issued only 'conditional permission' to two Ayurvedic medical colleges for the academic year 2020-21.

About 122 professor posts are lying vacant in the four government homeopathy colleges.

Centre agrees to make  
changes in CoWIN

From page 1

He said that the authorities responded positively and added that, accordingly, those going abroad should feed their passport number instead of Aadhaar number on the CoWIN app once the Centre made the requisite changes.

Meanwhile, the state government took a decision to hike stipend to senior resident doctors to ₹70,000 from ₹45,000 per month. The resident doc-

tors boycotted all their duties including Covid care on Tuesday all over the state in protest against the inordinate delay in revising their stipend.

Singhal said that the state government had decided to hike the monthly stipend of senior residents to ₹70,000 from the present ₹45,000.

He added that as PG final year and MBBS students had also sought a hike in their stipend, they discussed the issue with

Chief Secretary.

He said that 350 senior resident doctors joined duty last September and 800 PG students submitted representations for hike in stipend and added that a decision on their request would be taken in a week's time.

With regard to consumption of medical oxygen in the state, the senior official stated that it had come down to 443 metric tonnes in the last 24 hours as against Centre's allocation of 590 tonnes per day.

## PUBLIC | SPAT

Seers from AP, Telangana State to speak to claimant groups

## Dispute continues over B. Matham head

NAGESWARA RAO  
BALLEDA | DC  
KADAPA, JUNE 2

Uncertainty persists over who will head Brahmangari Matham in Kadapa district.

Veerabhoga Vasantha Venkateswara Swamy, the 11th chairperson of the seventh generation, recently passed away due to illness. He had two wives. The first wife has four sons and four daughters,

and the second wife two sons. Both parties are sparring for the Matadhipathi position.

With the dispute raging for the last few days, five seers arrived from different parts of the state to hold talks and resolve it. Sri Saiva Kshetra chairperson Shivaswamy told the media that another seven seers would come from the Telangana region and that the dispute would be resolved

amicably.

Shivaswamy said talks were the only way to peaceful resolution and advised against sparring in the public. He said endowment minister Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao was asked to file a report on the controversy to the government. Therefore, the report would be made, after taking into account the views of Dharma, law, justice and people's wishes,

he said. If there are peetha dharma, then bylaws need to be examined.

The existing laws of the land also would need to be studied. However, no outsider would be appointed as the head of Matham. He said the arrival of other Swamis from Telangana was being delayed due to the e-pass issue. He hoped that the final decision would be acceptable to all

with the blessings of Veera Brahmendra Swamy.

Navashaktishatak chairperson Bhavani Sankarananda Swamy, Banaganapally Ravvalakonda chairperson Gnaneshwarananda Swamy, Rudra Peetham chairperson Yogeshwarananda Swamy and Adhiveshananda Swamy from Saiva Temple accompanied him.

All set for preparation  
of herbal concoctionPATHRI RAJASEKHAR |  
DC  
NELLORE, JUNE 2

Elaborate arrangements are being made to distribute the herbal medicine of Bonigi Anandaiah of Krishnapatnam to Covid-infected persons in Andhra Pradesh, to start with, and elsewhere later.

For those booking the medicine online, a deal was struck with the postal department and a private courier service to deliver the medicine in rural areas and urban areas respectively.

An official said on Wednesday that permission has been sought to create an E-commerce platform, with a payment gateway, to enable those booking the medicine online to pay the postal/courier charges.

The district administration has lent its support by arranging a machine and material to pack the medicine in sachets.

Anandaiah sought five days' time to procure all the ingredients to start

● CPI national secretary K. Narayana said the party would extend all cooperation to Bonigi Anandaiah for distributing the traditional herbal concoction.

● During an interaction with Anandaiah at Krishnapatnam on Wednesday, he said people have faith in his herbal medicine and the state government also gave nod for the distribution.

preparation of the concoction.

The production venue has been shifted from the garden of Anandaiah in Krishnapatnam to the premises of Security Academy located in Krishnapatnam Port as there is large space and facilities to store the raw material.

Anandaiah has plans to prepare his herbal medicine for Covid cure to 75,000 infected patients across Andhra Pradesh.

Since honey is a main ingredient in the medicine, officials have

arranged a tie-up with the Girijan Cooperative Corporation to supply large quantities of honey.

Similarly, the district forest officer has been asked to help Anandaiah secure different varieties of herbs being used in his concoction.

Officials aim to supply the medicine to 15,000 Covid positive patients in Nellore district and 5,000 infected patients in each district among the balance 12 districts of the state.

In Nellore district, the services of village and ward volunteers will be used to deliver the medicine to patients across the district after obtaining the list of patients in their areas of operation.

In case of other districts, the plan is to send the medicine to the collector for distribution in the area under his purview. The idea is to prevent people from coming to Krishnapatnam or Nellore for the medicine and avoid the spread of the disease.

NEW PRAKASAM  
COLLECTOR VOWS  
TO PUSH PROJECTSDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, JUNE 2

The new collector of Prakasam district, Pravin Kumar, said he would put all his efforts to develop the backward district and thanked the government for giving him the opportunity.

A 2006 batch IAS Officer, Pravin Kumar took charge as the 36th collector of Prakasam district at Prakasam Bhavan in Ongole on Wednesday. He replaced Pola Bhaskar who has been transferred and posted as Commissioner of Collegiate Education.

Speaking on the occasion, Pravin Kumar said his priorities include speeding up Velugonda project and land acquisition for Ramayapatnam Port besides completing all the pending projects. He said he would also take steps to implement all the welfare schemes and development works of the government without any scope for corruption.


Pravin Kumar said he would also strengthen the village and ward secretariats and ensure transparency in all the operations at the field level. Joint Collectors J. Venkata Murali, T.S. Chetan, K. Krishnaveni, and DRO Tippe Nayak were present.

OLD OFFENDER  
HACKED TO DEATHDC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, JUNE 2

A 22-year-old youth, who was an old offender, was hacked to death by unidentified assailants in Lakshmi Nagar in Madanapalle town on Wednesday.


The deceased was identified as P. Madhu, an autorickshaw driver by profession. He was involved in various offences related to land settlements and had rivalries with his many people.

On Wednesday, he was attacked by some unidentified assailants with lethal weapons and was killed on the spot in the Lakshmi Nagar area.




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## SHORT TAKES

### PLEA TO REMOVE BODIES FLOATING IN GANGA

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

The Youth Bar Association of India on Wednesday moved the Supreme Court for an immediate removal of the human bodies floating in the Ganga and other rivers and give them dignified cremation or burial. The petition claimed that these bodies were of Covid-19 victims whose families did not have the resources for their disposal.

The petitioner has sought directions to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and West Bengal, to issue guidelines or formulate a standard operating procedure for proper disposal of the bodies.

The plea filed through advocate Manju Jaitley said floating of corpses in the river would cause environmental hazards besides violation of the guidelines of the National Mission for Clean Ganga.

It has sought directions to the chief secretaries of the four states and the district magistrates to ensure no corpse is allowed to be thrown in the river on any ground and stern action be taken against the culprits. It has referred to an earlier verdict of the top court that the dignity of a dead person must be maintained and respected.

### HC ASKS MAHA TO SUBMIT INFO OF FIRs DURING COVID

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, JUNE 2

Hearing a suo motu PIL on the issue of increasing number of Covid cases, the Bombay High Court on Wednesday directed the Maharashtra government to submit details of all FIRs registered and arrests made during the pandemic and the present crime rate in the state. The direction came after the state's counsel, advocate general Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, told the HC that while orders of the state high-powered committee were being followed on granting emergency parole to eligible inmates in a bid to decongest prisons during the pandemic, jails across the state were still crowded.

On Wednesday, the bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice G.S. Kulkarni reiterated that the state must address the issue of overcrowding in prisons.

Advocate Kumbhakoni informed the court that following the HC's orders passed over the last two months on decongesting prisons and following Covid safety protocols in prisons, 2,168 inmates from seven prisons in the state had been released on interim bail as per the high-powered committee's guidelines.

He, however, said that many inmates who were eligible for the release were not applying for temporary bail.

### WHY START VAX CENTRES WITH POMP: HC TO DELHI

New Delhi, June 2: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said if the Delhi government could not ensure that people get both the doses of Covaxin within the stipulated time, then it should not have started so many vaccination centres with "much pomp and splendour".

Justice Rekha Palli issued notice to the Delhi government and sought its stand on whether it can provide the second dose of Covaxin to those who got the first jab, before expiry of the incubation period of six weeks between the two doses.

The court also issued notice to the Centre on two pleas to make the second dose of both vaccines against Covid-19—Covaxin Covishield—available in the national capital.

"Why did you (Delhi government) start it (vaccination) if you were not sure you can provide the second dose also? You should have stopped. Maharashtra stopped when it found it cannot provide second dose. You opened so many vaccination centres everywhere with so much pomp and splendour and now you say you don't know when the second dose stock would be available," the court said while hearing the two petitions.

One of the petitions has been moved by a lawyer, Ashish Virmani, who received the first dose of Covaxin on May 3 and since May 29 has been unable to book a slot for receiving the second jab which has to be taken within six weeks of the first.



An old woman sells Indian blackberry (jamun) and vegetables during lockdown at a market in Coimbatore on Wednesday.

— PTI

## Mob assaults doc, ransacks hospital in Assam; 24 held

The young doctor was kicked and thrashed with brooms, utensils

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, JUNE 2

In what has created anger in the medical fraternity as well as civil society of the state, a mob brutally assaulted Seuj Kumar Senapati, a young doctor, and other staff of a Covid Care Centre (CCC) at Udali in central Assam's Hojai district. The assault, recorded on a mobile phone, showed the young doctor being kicked and thrashed with brooms and utensils by the mob on Tuesday afternoon. The video triggered a sharp protest from doctors and others.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who was in New Delhi said, "24 culprits involved in this barbaric attack have been arrested and a charge sheet will be filed at the earliest. I am personally monitoring this investigation and I promise that justice will be served."

The incident took place after Giasuddin, a Covid-19 patient from Udali area, died at the hospital on

## 32 die of black fungus at Indore hospital in 20 days

Indore, June 2: As many as 32 patients have died of mucormycosis in the last 20 days at a government-run hospital in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, an official said on Wednesday. Of late, several cases of mucormycosis, also known as the black fungus, a serious infection, have been found in people who have recovered from Covid-19.

The Maharaja Yeshwantrao Hospital (MYH) in the state's industrial hub Indore has been treating a number of black fungus patients not only from here, but also from various other districts.

Tuesday. According to a letter issued by the Hojai unit of Indian Medical Association to the deputy commissioner of the dis-

"The first patient of black fungus was admitted in the MYH on May 13 and since then, a total of 439 patients have been admitted till now in the hospital. Out of them, 84 people were discharged after treatment, while 32 patients have died so far," MYH superintendent Pramendra Thakur said.

The present black fungus mortality rate in the hospital is 7.29 per cent, he said, claiming that the fatality rate was lower than other hospitals in the state. "We have carried out more than 200 surgeries in the last 20 days to save the lives of patients

suffering from the black fungus," he said.

At present, 323 patients are undergoing treatment for the fungal infection in the hospital, the official said. Out of them, 14 contracted the fungal infection along with Covid-19, while 301 people got mucormycosis after recovering from Covid-19, he said.

The eight other patients suffering from the black fungus have no record of contracting Covid-19, he informed. The statistics show that 93 per cent of the patients contracted the black fungus after recovering from Covid-19.

— PTI

that unless all the culprits involved in the attack are arrested by 7 am on Wednesday, all doctors of Hojai would boycott all out-patient duty services.

It also asked the government to provide all hospitals and CCCs with security cover, CCTV cameras and round the clock electricity. "Instructions have been given to superintendent of police Hojai to arrest all persons involved in the assault," the special Director General of Police G.P. Singh said.

The Indian Medical Association wrote to Union home minister Amit Shah, stating that there was a "barbaric attack yesterday...and it was an extremely inhuman attack", and requested for "immediate strict action on culprits".

Meanwhile, the Assam State Branch of the IMA on Wednesday called for all doctors in the state to abstain from outdoor patient services. The body has demanded that all culprits be booked immediately and there should be a speedy trial.

mob damaged the building and also ransacked instruments at the CCC besides "brutally assaulting" the doctor. The IMA unit said

## MP, U'Khand, Guj. cancel state exams

DC CORRESPONDENTS with agency inputs BHOPAL, JUNE 2

Taking a leaf from the Centre, Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to cancel the class 12 state board examinations in the interest of safety of the students amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan took to Twitter to announce his government's decision to not hold this year's class 12 board exam in the state.

"The class 12 board examinations (conducted by MP Board of Secondary Education) for the year 2020-21 have been cancelled. The life of students is precious for us. We can take care of their career

later. We have constituted a committee of ministers who will consult experts and decide on students' evaluation", he said.

The Gujarat government also decided to cancel the state board exams for class 12. "The state government decided to scrap the exams for class 12 of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Board after taking into consideration the Centre's decision to scrap the exams for class 12 students of the CBSE given the pandemic," state education minister Bhupendrasinh Chudasama said.

Uttarakhand intermediate board examinations were also cancelled in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation in the state.

## TN, Maha to take call on exams soon

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs CHENNAI, JUNE 2

The Tamil Nadu government will make known its decision on holding the plus two board exam in the state in two days' time, after conferring with experts, state school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi said.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin will take the final call on the issue after the views of education and medical experts and teachers among others were elicited, besides considering the stand of other states in this pandemic times, he said.

"Children's health and safety is equally important as their future, as our Chief Minister had said. Echoing this view, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced cancellation of

the CBSE exam on Tuesday," the minister said on Wednesday.

Addressing reporters here after attending a meeting with Stalin, Poyyamozhi said during a meeting convened by Union defence minister Rajnath Singh earlier, several states opined that the board exam could be conducted with precautionary measures in place.

Maharashtra school education minister Varsha Galkwad on Wednesday said a proposal has been sent to the disaster management authority regarding the state board exams for Class 12 students and a decision on the issue will be taken in a couple of days.

She said the issue was discussed at a meeting of the state cabinet here, a day after the Centre cancelled the CBSE Class 12

## Maha launches 'corona-free villages drive'

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, JUNE 2

In order to curb the spread of Coronavirus in rural areas, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday launched 'Corona-Mukta Gaon' (Corona-free Village) competition, which will reward the successful villages with handsome cash prizes. The scheme has been inspired by the feat of five villages in the state, which have managed to eradicate the virus from their jurisdiction.

The competition shall be held in all the six revenue divisions of the state with top three villages in each division getting cash prizes worth ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹15 lakh each, as incentives for various development works.

"The corona-free village competition has been launched with an aim to encourage the efforts to chase the virus away from the rural areas and make the entire state free of coronavirus at the earliest," said state rural development minister Hasan Mushrif.

The competition has been announced against the backdrop of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's appeal to people in rural areas to strive hard for making their villages corona-free. In his address, he had also praised the efforts of villages, which have attained Covid-free status in the state.

● THE COMPETITION shall be held in all the six revenue divisions of the state with top three villages in each division getting cash prizes worth ₹50 lakh, ₹25 lakh, and ₹15 lakh.

● COMPETITION HAS been announced on the backdrop of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's appeal to people in rural areas to strive hard for making their villages corona-free.

Rural areas in Maharashtra have been hit hard by the second Coronavirus wave than the urban parts of the state.

More Covid-19 cases have been recorded as villages compared to cities, prompting the state machinery to concentrate more on rural areas.

The total prize money for the corona-free competition will be ₹5.40 crore, said Mushrif. "Every village in the state will be asked to form five teams to implement various initiatives for the eradication of Coronavirus. Villages shall be judged on the basis of 22 different criteria by a special committee of experts for their work during the period June 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022," he added.

According to state officials, five villages in the state—Hivare Bazaar and Bhoyare Khurd in Ahmednagar district, Bhoi in Nanded district and Antroli and Ghatane villages in Solapur district have become Coronavirus-free by undertaking various initiatives in their areas.



People wait in a long queue to buy liquor from a wine shop after the ease in the ongoing lockdown restrictions in Jammu on Wednesday. Policemen were deployed outside wine shops to maintain order and ensure adherence of Covid-19 guidelines.

— PTI

## BOARD | EXAMS

Experts hail the decision to cancel the board exams in view of the pandemic

## Challenge to decide fair evaluation criteria: Experts

New Delhi, June 2: Education experts and stakeholders believe the bigger challenge before the CBSE now is coming up with a fair evaluation criteria for class 12 students whose exams have been cancelled and demanded that the policy is notified soon.

The experts hailed the decision to cancel the board exams which were earlier postponed in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Given the current situation, it is the right decision to cancel the CBSE Board exams.

There is no way we could have held exams without compromising the safety of children. While we welcome the decision, we hope the modalities would be worked out quickly in consultation with stakeholders, they said.

"Since class marks are important factor that affects students' career, we expect CBSE to ensure students don't get affected with the methodology of awarding marks," said Praveen Raju, Co-Chair, FICCI ARISE, a collegium of stakeholders aimed at promoting quality education.

tion.

In a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday, it was decided that the CBSE will take steps to compile the results of class 12 students as per a well-defined objective criteria in a time-bound manner.

"The next step is equally critical and crucial in terms of deciding the process and criteria based on which the children's performance will be gauged. This should be done keeping in mind that many of them make that extra effort during the last

mile and hence, should be given due advantage," said Charu Wahi, Principal, Nirmal Bhartia School.

According to Vishnu Karthik, CEO, The Heritage Schools, the decision on cancellation of board exams has provided some clarity and assuaged stress levels among students and parents but the challenge now is for the CBSE to arrive at an alternative criteria to determine grade 12 marks.

"Any delay or any confusion on the new grading criteria will lead to more confusion and stress

among students. Clear directions should also be provided to Indian universities to modify their admissions criteria so meritocracy and fairness are not compromised," he said.

Shishir Jaipuria, Chairman of Seth Anandram Jaipuria Group of Educational Institutions believes deserving students must be allocated grades or marks corresponding to their yearly performance.

"It's a challenge that will require a great deal of meticulous thinking for arriving at a just criterion

for academic assessment. I'm sure the schools and boards will rise to the challenge and deliver what's best for the students," he said.

Rajiv Bansal, Director-Operations - Global Indian International School (GIIS), said admission in undergraduate courses, across India and internationally, are dependent on class 12 results, therefore, the sooner these details are announced, the better it would be for the students, their parents, and the entire academic community.

— PTI



SHORT TAKES

23 MIGRANTS MISSING, TWO DEAD OFF TUNISIA

**Zarzis, Tunisia, June 2:** At least 23 migrants were missing and two bodies recovered from the sea off Tunisia, the Red Crescent reported Wednesday, after the military said more than 100 migrants were intercepted.

The Tunisian navy said a boat headed for Europe from Zuwara in Libya was intercepted on Tuesday near Miskar oil platform, some 67 kilometres (52 miles) off the coast.

The migrants -- 37 Eritreans, 32 Sudanese and an Egyptian, aged between 15 and 40 -- were handed over to the Red Crescent and International Organization for Migration in the southern port Of Zarzis.

POLISARIO LEADER LEAVES SPAIN, FLIES TO ALGERIA

**Madrid, June 2:** The leader of Western Sahara's independence movement, whose presence at a Spanish hospital sparked a diplomatic row with Rabat, left Spain overnight and flew to Algeria, a government source said Wednesday.

He's "in Algeria," the source told AFP.

Late on Tuesday, Spain's foreign ministry said Polisario Front leader Brahim Ghali would be leaving from Pamplona airport but did not say where he would be going.

Ghali's departure came hours after he was quizzed by a Spanish judge over allegations of torture and genocide, which he denied, in a video hearing from the hospital in northern Spain where he spent six weeks recovering from Covid-19.

REMAINS OF U.S. KU KLUX KLAN HEAD TO BE MOVED

**Washington, June 2:** A project to disinter a Ku Klux Klan leader and move his remains to a museum started Tuesday, local US media reported, adding the work would be funded by \$200,000 of anonymous donations.

Nathan Bedford Forrest was a leading pro-slavery Confederate army general during the American Civil War, and the first "Grand Wizard" of the racist Ku Klux Klan organization from 1867 to 1869.

A pedestal on top of his grave in a park in Memphis, Tennessee, will be removed first, before his remains -- along with those of his wife -- are taken to the new National Confederate Museum, WMC5 news said.

BELARUS ACTIVIST STABS SELF, RETURNED TO JAIL

**Moscow, June 2:** A Belarusian activist who was hospitalised after stabbing himself in the neck in court has been returned to prison following surgery, the Viasna rights group said Wednesday.

Stepan Latypov, 41, on Tuesday rammed a pen into his neck on the first day of his trial on several protest-related charges during a hearing seen by government critics as part of a sweeping crackdown on political opposition.

Viasna, citing Latypov's relatives, said Wednesday the activist was returned to prison and that family had been able to deliver him a parcel there.

Latypov was detained last September and went on trial in the capital Minsk on several charges including creating protest symbols and resisting law enforcement.

PAK JOURNALIST SUMMONED FOR 'DEFAMING' ARMY

**Islamabad, Jun 2:** A Pakistani journalist recently beaten by unidentified men in his apartment said Tuesday he was summoned by authorities to answer allegations he defamed a key national institution, a term often used for the military. Asad Ali Toor, who works for the Aaj News Pakistani TV channel, said he was consulting his lawyer to decide whether to appear before the Federal Investigation Agency on June 4.

The development comes a week after three armed men forcibly entered Toor's apartment in the capital Islamabad, saying they were from Inter-Services Intelligence. The assailants repeatedly slapped Toor, accusing him of criticising the agency. However, the ISI has distanced itself from the attack, saying it was not involved. Pakistan Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad has said authorities are close to arresting the assailants.

Trump Hotel for lease



The Trump Organisation is trying to lease out the The Trump International Hotel, after it failed in the 2019 presidential election before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world.

— AFP

Iran warship on fire, sinks in Gulf of Oman

Blaze began around 2.25 am, efforts to save Kharg failed

**Tehran, June 2:** The largest warship in the Iranian navy caught fire and later sank Wednesday in the Gulf of Oman under unclear circumstances, semi-official news agencies reported.

The Fars and Tasnim news agencies said efforts failed to save the support warship Kharg, named after the island that serves as the main oil terminal for Iran. The blaze began around 2:25 a.m. and firefighters tried to contain it, Fars said. The vessel sank near the Iranian port of Jask, some 1,270 kilometres (790 miles) southeast of Tehran on the Gulf of Oman near the Strait of Hormuz -- the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Photos circulated on Iranian social media of sailors wearing life jackets, evacuating the vessel as a fire burned behind them. State TV and semi-official news agencies referred to the Kharg as a "training ship." Fars published video of thick, black smoke rising from the ship early Wednesday morning. Satellite photos from Planet Labs Inc. ana-

lyzed by The Associated Press showed the Kharg off to the west of Jask on Tuesday.

Satellites from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that track fires from space detected a blaze at the site of the Jask that started just before the time of the fire reported by Fars. The Kharg serves as one of a few vessels in

from Sri Lanka and India climbed onto the vessel and extinguished a blaze that had been burning for 12 days.

"The rear end of the vessel is being submerged. This was at the same time as the rescue team got on board in order to facilitate the towing of the vessel to deeper seas for safety reasons," Sri Lanka Navy spokesman Indika de Silva said.

"The ship is under water, the water level is above the deck. The ship is going down," de Silva said.

On Wednesday morning experts were trying to tow the ship farther out to sea, some 9 nautical miles away from the Colombo port where it had been anchored since May 20, to prevent its sinking at the current position which would have caused severe pollution. —PTI

Russia adopts 'extremist' bill

Kremlin to exit overflight treaty

**Moscow, June 2:** Russia's upper house on Wednesday overwhelmingly backed legislation expected to be used to ban allies of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny from running in elections, the latest move in a crackdown on the opposition.

The bill, overwhelmingly approved by the Federation Council, would make it impossible to run in parliamentary elections for leaders, sponsors and rank-and-file members of "extremist" groups.

A Russian court is considering whether to designate Navalny's political network an extremist organisation and could make a decision as early as next week. Critics of President Vladimir Putin say Russian authorities are widening a campaign against the opposition ahead of parliamentary elections in September.

After Navalny was jailed

**Moscow, June 2:** The Russian parliament's upper house voted Wednesday to withdraw from an international treaty allowing surveillance flights over military facilities following the U.S. exit from the treaty.

The vote comes after U.S. officials told Moscow last month that President Joe Biden's administration had decided not to reenter the Open Skies Treaty, which had allowed surveillance flights over military facilities before

President Donald Trump withdrew from the pact. As a presidential candidate, Biden had criticised Trump's withdrawal as "short-sighted."

Moscow has signalled its readiness to reverse the withdrawal procedure and stay in the 1992 treaty if the United States returns to the agreement. After the Russian upper house voted to leave the treaty, it would now come to Russian President Vladimir Putin for signing. —AP

and many of his allies arrested, two more political activists, Dmitry

Gudkov and Andrei Pivovarov, were detained over the past two days.

Pivovarov, the former executive director of Open Russia, a just disbanded pro-democracy group, was pulled off his Warsaw-bound flight on Monday.

The 39-year-old faces up to six years in prison for his involvement in an "undesirable" organisation. A court was expected to decide whether to remand him later Wednesday. On Tuesday, police detained Gudkov after conducting raids on homes of his allies and relatives. The 41-year-old former opposition lawmaker faces up to five years in prison for allegedly failing to pay a debt under an old lease agreement. Gudkov is likely to be formally charged on Wednesday, said human rights association Agora whose lawyer represents him. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the detentions were a purely legal matter. —AFP

Pelosi rules out having Biden create Jan. 6 panel

**Washington, June 2:** House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is ruling out a presidential commission to study the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol, telling House Democrats on Tuesday that having President Joe Biden appoint a panel is unworkable even after the Senate blocked an independent probe last week.

Pelosi laid out possible next steps after Friday's Senate vote, in which Senate Republicans blocked legislation to create an independent, bipartisan panel to investigate the siege by former President Donald Trump's supporters. She proposed four options for an

investigation of the attack, according to a person on the private Democratic caucus call, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal conversations.

The first option, Pelosi said, is to give the Senate another chance to vote on the commission. Six Republicans voted with Democrats to move forward with the bill, and a seventh missed the vote but said he would have backed it.

That means Democrats would only need support from three additional Republicans to reach the 60 votes needed for passage. The commission would be modelled after a

highly respected panel that investigated the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The other options involve the House investigating the attack, meaning the probes would be inherently partisan. Pelosi suggested that she could appoint a new select committee to investigate the siege or give the responsibility to a single committee, like the House Homeland Security panel, which wrote the original bipartisan bill to create the commission.

Alternately, Pelosi said committees could simply push ahead with the investigations that are already underway. —AP

Cyberespionage: US seizes two domain names

WILL CONSIDER U.S. REQUEST ON CYBERATTACK, SAYS RUSSIA

**Washington, June 2:** The Justice Department said Tuesday that it has seized two domain names used in a cyberespionage campaign that targeted US and foreign government agencies, think tanks and humanitarian groups.

The campaign was disclosed last week by Microsoft, which linked it to the same group of Russian intelligence operatives responsible for the massive SolarWinds intrusion that breached federal agencies and private corporations. The company said over the weekend that it was "still not seeing evidence of any significant number of compromised organizations at this time."

The White House on Friday similarly downplayed the cyber assault as "basic phishing," in which hackers use malware-laden emails to access networks, and said US agencies had largely fended it off. Still, officials say the US government's action on Friday was aimed at preventing any further exploitation of victims, though the Justice Department also warned that the hackers may have used additional backdoor accesses to get into networks between when the hacking first began and the time that the domains were seized.

"Last week's action is a continued demonstration of the department's com-

**Moscow, June 2:** Russia said Wednesday it was open to considering any request from the United States for help in investigating the cyberattack on the US subsidiary of Brazilian meat processor JBS. "There are contacts through diplomatic channels," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"If there are requests from the Americans they will be promptly considered," Peskov said he expected the issue of cybercrime to come up during the June 16 summit in Geneva between Russian President Vladimir Putin and US counterpart Joe Biden.

"It is quite clear that criminality and challenges in the cybersphere will be on the agenda one way or another," he said. —AFP.

mitment to proactively disrupt hacking activity prior to the conclusion of a criminal investigation," Assistant Attorney General John Demers, the Justice Department's top national security official, said in a statement. —AP

Firefighter kills colleague, wounds another at fire stn.

**Santa Clarita, June 2:** An off-duty Los Angeles County firefighter fatally shot a fellow firefighter and wounded another at their small community fire station Tuesday before going to his nearby home, setting it on fire and apparently killing himself, authorities said.

A 44-year-old fire specialist died and a 54-year-old firefighter was shot when the gunman opened fire shortly before 11 am at Fire Station 81, which is about 45 miles (72 kilometres) north of Los Angeles, Fire Chief Daryl Osby told reporters. The wounded man was in critical but stable condition at a hospital. The shooter was a firefighter specialist and

engineer, authorities said. The fire chief said he could not speak to the motive for the attack and doesn't know about any disciplinary actions.

He was not scheduled to work today. He came back and confronted the on-duty personnel, a visibly shaken Osby said.

I cannot speak to the mindset of the shooter. I can say that it's very tragic and sad that that would be a decision point of one of the members of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The gunman, who was not identified, then went to his house less than 10 miles (16 kilometres) away, which authorities found engulfed in flames. —AP

ASIAN OFFICER ATTACKED IN 'HATE' CRIME

**San Francisco, June 2:** A San Francisco police officer responding to a call about a man making threats to people in Chinatown was attacked by the suspect, who was later arrested on assault and hate crime charges, authorities said.

Surveillance video showed the female officer, who is of Asian descent, approach Gerardo Contreras on Friday and tell him to turn around and put his hands on his head. —AP

RACIAL | VIOLENCE | Last June, former President Donald Trump was greeted by protests during his visit

Biden marks Tulsa Race Massacre in graphic speech

**Tulsa, June 2:** An emotional President Joe Biden marked the 100th anniversary of the massacre that destroyed a thriving PoC community in Tulsa, declaring Tuesday that he had "come to fill the silence" about one of the nation's darkest -- and long suppressed -- moments of racial violence.

"Some injustices are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous, they cannot be buried, no matter how hard people try," Biden said. "Only with truth can

come healing."

Biden's commemoration of the deaths of hundreds of PoC people killed by a white mob a century ago came amid the current national reckoning on racial justice. "Just because history is silent, it does not mean that it did not take place," Biden said.

He said that "hell was unleashed, literal hell was unleashed." And now, he said, the nation must come to grips with the following sin of denial. "We can't just choose what we want

to know, and not what we should know," said Biden.

"I come here to help fill the silence, because in silence wounds deepen." After Biden left, there was a spontaneous singing by some audience members of a famous civil rights march song, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around."

The events on Tuesday stood in stark contrast to then-President Donald Trump's trip to Tulsa last June, which was greeted by protests. Or the former

President's decision, one year ago, to clear Lafayette Square near the White House of demonstrators who gathered to protest the death of George Floyd, a PoC man, under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer.

In 1921 -- on May 31 and June 1 -- a white mob, including some people hastily deputised by authorities, looted and burned Tulsa's Greenwood district, which was referred to as Black Wall Street. On Tuesday, the President,

joined by top PoC advisers, met privately with three surviving members of the Greenwood community who lived through the violence, the White House said. Viola "Mother" Fletcher, Hughes "Uncle Red" Van Ellis and Lessie "Mother Randle" Benningfield Randle are all between the ages of 101 and 107.

Biden said their experience had been "a story seen in the mirror dimly" "But no longer," the president told the survivors. "Now your story will be known

in full view." Outside, Latasha Sanders, 33, of Tulsa, brought her five children and a nephew in hopes of spotting Biden. "It's been 100 years, and this is the first we've heard from any US President," she said. "I brought my kids here today just so they could be a part of history and not just hear about it, and so they can teach generations to come."

John Ondiek, another Tulsa in the crowd following Biden's speech on cellphones, said he was

encouraged that "There aren't just PoC people here. That tells me there's an awakening going on in this country." As many as 300 PoC Tulsans were killed, and thousands of survivors were forced for a time into internment camps overseen by the National Guard.

Burned bricks and a fragment of a church basement are about all that survive today of the more than 30-block historically PoC district. —AP









quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,849.48	-0.16
Nifty 50	15,576.20	0.01
S&P 500*	4,209.71	0.18
Dollar (₹)	73.08	-0.23
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.36	0.01
Euro (₹)	89.01	0.18
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,772.116	0.23
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	71.15	1.28
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.005	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.593	-0.022

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Assocham seeks wage support, interest subsidy

Assocham asked the government to extend relief measures such as regulatory easing, wage support, and interest subsidy for the MSMEs. As the states are in the process of easing lockdowns, the trade and industry would need support to pick up their business thread again, it said. It has suggested that the surplus funds of ESIC should be used for providing wage support measures/stimulus packages for the employees.

Ruchi Soya enters nutraceuticals; to sell 10 products



Ruchi Soya Industries said it has made a foray into the nutraceuticals and wellness segment and initially will launch 10 products under the brand 'Patanjali' and 'Nutraela'. Ruchi Soya aims to have a range of products across various categories in the next one year, it said. To start with, the firm is launching 10 products, including vitamin B12, iron complex, vitamin D, vitamin C and zinc complex, daily energy and weight gain, among others.

SMS alerts for IPO process via UPI only from next yr

Markets regulator Sebi gave time till January 1, 2022 for implementation of guidelines pertaining to SMS alerts under the UPI system for shares applied and allotted during an initial public offering. Earlier, the deadline for putting in place automated web portal with respect to IPOs through UPI system has also been extended to October 1. The framework was to come into force from May 1.

Rossari Biotech to acquire Unitop Chem for ₹420 cr

Speciality chemicals manufacturer Rossari Biotech announced the acquisition of Unitop Chemicals, a supplier of surfactants, emulsifiers, and speciality chemicals, for Rs 421 crore. Rossari will buy 100 per cent equity capital of Unitop, with 65 per cent shares acquired upon closure of the transaction, and the balance 35 per cent over the next two years. The total consideration for 100% stake is Rs 421 crore.



States will have to change rent laws Union Cabinet clears Model Tenancy Act

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 2

The Union Cabinet has on Wednesday approved the much-awaited Model Tenancy Act, which is expected to give a fillip to rental housing and property markets across the country.

The Act, the government said, will help overhaul the legal framework on rental housing, enable creation of adequate rental housing stock and enable institutionalisation of rental housing.

The states and Union territories can now adopt the law through fresh legislation or by amending existing rental laws.

As per the Act, the states can set up rent authorities in cities, and landlords and tenants will have to be present before the authority to get rent agreements registered. The Act will also enable setting up of rent courts or tribunals to address rent-related disputes. These courts will have to pass an order within 60 days of receiving a complaint.

Further, the Act has several provisions to safeguard the interests of both tenants and landlords. Tenants will be liable to pay double the rent for two months and four times the rent in the consequent months if they stay after expiry of the rental agreement.

Landlords can approach the rent court asking for eviction, if the tenants fail to pay the rent for two months in a row. Unless mentioned in the

UNLOCKING VACANT PROPERTIES

- Tenants will be liable to pay double the rent for two months and four times the rent in the consequent months if they overstay in a property
- Landlords can approach the rent court asking for eviction, if the tenants fail to pay the rent for two months
- Landlords cannot ask for more than two months of rent as security deposit
- Landlords will have to give three months' notice to the tenant before raising the rent

rent agreement, the landlord cannot hike the rent during the agreement period. The landlord will have to give three months' notice to the tenant before increasing the rent. Further, the landlord will be responsible for the structural maintenance of the property.

Landlords in states that adopt the policy will not be able to ask for more than two months of rent as security deposit.

The Act also stipulates that the tenant cannot sublet the whole or part of the accommodation without the landlord's permission.

Similarly, landlords need to give a written notice 24 hours in advance to visit the premises. They cannot make a visit before 7 am and after 8 pm.

Naredco president Niranjan Hiranandani said the new law "would make things easier for all stakeholders tenants, landlords

and investors to transact in rental housing."

The model Act will facilitate unlocking of vacant houses for rental housing. "It is expected to give a fillip to private participation in rental housing as a business model for addressing the huge housing shortage," Hiranandani said.

The new act would bring in over 11 million vacant urban houses into the rental market and help address the country's massive housing shortage, said Pankaj Bhansali, COO, Equo Guarantees, a surety solutions provider.

Samantak Das, chief economist and head-research & REIS, JLL, a global property consultant, said, "The Model Tenancy Act is going to give a guiding framework to all states to make their respective tenancy Acts contemporary. Current Acts will give way to the new ones where uniformity will prevail."

MPC begins meet, likely to hold rates

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, JUNE 2

With the second phase of the Covid-19 pandemic impacting consumption and growth, the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is likely to maintain status quo on policy rates, continue with an accommodative policy stance and ensure adequate liquidity in the system in an effort to stimulate growth. The MPC, which is the rate setting panel, began its three-day deliberations on Wednesday and would announce its decision on Friday.

The MPC has kept key policy rates unchanged in the last five bi-monthly policy meets.

The RBI's annual report 2020-2021, released last week, has already made it clear that "the conduct of monetary policy in 2021-22 would be guided by evolving macroeconomic conditions, with a bias to remain supportive of

growth till it gains traction on a durable basis while ensuring that inflation remains within the target".

The report added that the central bank would ensure that the system-level liquidity remains comfortable during 2021-22, is aligned with the stance of monetary policy, and monetary transmission continues unimpeded while maintaining financial stability. In the assessment of the RBI, the evolving CPI inflation trajectory is likely to be subjected to both upside and downside pressures. The food inflation path will critically depend on the temporal and spatial progress of the south-west monsoon in 2021.

While the country's GDP growth has sequentially improved, the near-term outlook for the economy remains clouded with extreme uncertainty and downside risks. Since the previous monetary policy review in April 2021, most of the states have

BYJU'S, GOOGLE IN TIEUP TO OFFER SCIENCE, MATHS IN SCHOOLS

New Delhi, June 2: Education technology firm Byju's on Wednesday announced a partnership with tech giant Google to offer a learning solution' for schools.

With this, the simplicity, flexibility and security of Google Workspace for Education and Byju's content pedagogy come together on the 'Vidyarthi' platform to aid effective learning at school, according to a statement.

This integration of Google Workspace for Education with Byju's would offer a collaborative and personalised digital platform for classroom organisation, available for free to participating educational institutions, the statement added.

"With a commitment to digital education, Google Workspace for Education will combine Byju's unparalleled pedagogy to empower educators in their journey towards digital transformation," the statement said.

Built on the Vidyarthi platform, this partnership will provide direct access to Byju's math and science pedagogy and visually rich learning solutions, including chapter-wise slides, readymade assignments, data banks, summary docs, handouts, tests, among others.

The acceptance of online learning in the last one year has led to the swift digitisation of the education system, Byju's noted. — PTI

Mercedes to sell cars directly to customers

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, JUNE 2

Mercedes-Benz, India's biggest luxury car maker, on Wednesday announced it will completely revamp its sales model in the country and sell its new cars directly to customers.

Through a new 'Direct To Customer' model, which the company terms as the 'Retail of the Future', the Pune-based German car-maker said it will start selling its cars directly to customers from the October-December quarter.

The dealers will remain an integral part but will not be involved in transactions with the customer or buy stock from Mercedes-Benz.

In this new circular sales model, customers will contact dealerships (now called franchise partners) to buy a Mercedes car. But the dealer's responsibility will rest on providing a suitable brand experience to the customer through showcasing Mercedes-Benz cars, offering sales consulting and test drives.

The dealer will facilitate the sale of the car as well but Mercedes-Benz India will own all the stock of its manufactured/ imported models. Customers will be invoiced directly by Mercedes-Benz and there will be no financial transactions with the dealer.

For customers, it means transparent prices, and an end to bargaining for a better price, Mercedes-Benz said, as the cars will be now sold directly to customers by the company itself.

The industry's first new retail service will be



implemented in India from Q4 2021 onwards, Mercedes-Benz said.

The Indian arm of the German carmaker will now own the entire stock of cars, sell them via appointed dealers, invoice the new cars to its customers directly, process the order and fulfill them, and offer one price and purchasing experience for customers.

The dealer, on the other hand, will handle establishing and maintaining customer contacts, developing the market, and facilitating the sale of Mercedes-Benz cars.

"A key reason for introducing 'Retail of the Future' is to create an enhanced luxury buying experience for our customers," Martin Schwenk, MD & CEO, at Mercedes-Benz India, said.

He said it also will deliver a win-win solution for both customers and our dealers, underscoring our clear vision for a future which is sustainable, empowering, and digital.

The changes to the 'Retail of the Future' strategy for the customer include one price directly offered by Mercedes-Benz, cars will be invoiced

directly by Mercedes-Benz India and not by the dealers, and a much-simplified purchase process that is hassle-free.

For the dealers, the new retail model will help them reduce inventory costs and allow them to cater to the specific needs of its customers with a single centralised system that gives access to a larger pool of stock cars.

Mercedes-Benz India will be responsible for centrally managing the selling price of all new cars, owning and managing the entire stock of new cars, and processing and fulfilling the order, reducing delivery time.

Schwenk said dealers will continue as brand representatives, maintaining their connection with customers and strive to offer the best customer experience in the market.

The dealers will continue to cater to after-sales service, remain brand representatives in the market, will be responsible for developing customer relationships, will continue to manage operational handling of customer interactions, and will continue local retail marketing activities.

Biden targets tax break on property capital gains

DAVID KOCENIEWSKI & CALEB MELBY JUNE 2

President Joe Biden is pushing to close a tax break that helped his predecessor amass a fortune.

The Democrat has proposed narrowing a tax code provision that allows real estate investors to avoid capital gains taxes when they sell property, as long as they use the gains to buy more. Former president Donald Trump's most valuable investment, which traces back to his \$95 million purchase of a west-side Manhattan development site, has benefitted from the rule.

In 2005, when Trump's partners agreed to sell the site for \$1.8 billion—a deal Trump resisted—his cut was about \$500 million. Because the partners then used the capital gains from the sale to purchase two office towers, they and Trump didn't owe any tax on their gains. Today, Trump's stake in the buildings is worth about \$1.2 billion before accounting for debt. Biden's plan would

eliminate that kind of manoeuvre for Trump and thousands of others with real estate investments.

The so-called 1031 like-kind exchange rule, named after a section of the tax code, was created a century ago to aid family farmers. It has evolved into a beloved tool of property moguls, *Fortune* 500 companies and real estate trusts that can use it to create a daisy-chain of tax avoidance.

It works like this: An investor buys a building for \$4 million and sells it later for \$10 million. By redeploying the proceeds into a new property within six months, she can defer paying taxes on her gains. She can repeat that process indefinitely. When coupled with another tax break that wipes out all capital gains at death, the 1031 provision can enable real estate investors to forgo capital gains taxes entirely, enabling family dynasties to pass on riches to heirs virtually tax-free. Some wealth managers call the strategy "swap 'til you drop." —Bloomberg

MERCHANDISE EXPORTS JUMP IN MAY



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, JUNE 2

Despite the second wave of infections, merchandise exports grew both yearly and sequentially in May. With imports declining sequentially, the trade deficit shrunk to an eight-month low of \$6.32 billion in May.

Merchandise exports in May 2021 stood at \$32.21 billion—67.39 per cent higher than the low base of \$19.24 billion in the lock-down-hit May 2020. The exports were also 7.93 per cent higher than \$29.85 billion in the pre-pandemic May 2019. Most importantly, exports continued to grow sequentially by 6.6 per cent compared to \$30.21 billion in April 2021, despite the second wave.

In the case of imports of \$38.53 billion, there has been an increase of 68.54 per cent over \$22.86 billion in May 2020, but a decline of 17.47 per cent over \$46.68 billion in May 2019. Imports were also 15 per cent down sequentially compared to \$45.45 billion in April 2021.

This helped India cut its trade deficit to \$6.32 billion compared with \$15.24 billion in April 2021 and \$16.84 billion in May 2019. However, the trade deficit was higher than \$3.62 billion in the lock-down hit May 2020.

"The merchandise trade deficit shrunk to an eight-month low \$6.3 billion in May 2021 from \$15.2 billion in April 2021 as the state-wise restrictions widened, curbing domestic demand for both gold and oil. A pre-dominant 63 per cent of the decline in the trade deficit in May 2021 relative to April 2021 was on account of the collapse in gold imports, with the balance led by a narrower oil deficit," said Aditi Nayar of Icrs.

FENDING OFF | THE VIRUS

Ginger, garlic, turmeric demand up globally

‘Halo’ crops reap pandemic profits

LIBBY GEORGE, SABRINA VALLE & NIGEL HUNT JUNE 2

In a flowing cream hijab, Karima M. Imam walks through her fields in scrubland in northern Nigeria as workers harvest a gnarled brown root that has turned gold since Covid struck: ginger. "If I had the capital, I'd plant more. People are looking for ginger now, and there is not enough," she said at her five hectare farm on the outskirts of Kaduna.

As the pandemic rages, people around the world have sought to guard against illness by turning to so-called halo foods. While scientists have dismissed many claims on social media about how superfoods can fend off



the virus, their positive role as part of a healthy diet is widely acknowledged.

As demand for halo foods surges, prices for ginger in Nigeria and acai berries in Brazil have leapt while exports of Indian turmeric and Chinese garlic have jumped in the past year.

"The demand for ginger is high because they are using it as medicine," Imam said, adding that during the lockdown she

boiled ginger with turmeric and garlic to take as a remedy.

Increasingly health conscious consumers have given an already buoyant global spice market a further boost during the pandemic, heightening investor interest in the sector.

Singapore's Olam International completed the purchase of major US spice manufacturer Olde Thompson last month while Norway's Orkla took a controlling stake in Indian spice exporter Eastern Condiments in March.

In Nigeria, a 50 kg bag of ginger, which can help the body ward off germs and is used as a cold remedy, now sells for 15,000 naira (\$39), up from 4,000 to 6,000 naira two years ago.

Thanks to the ginger

rush, Imam has been able to start building a new house in nearby Millennium City, with a small warehouse attached so she can store and sell fresh ginger.

Prices began rising last year but since January they have taken off due to pandemic-related demand, said Florence Edwards, national president of the Ginger Growers, Processors and Marketers Association of Nigeria.

She said there had been demand from all over the world, citing India, China and Europe among popular markets.

There has also been a surge in demand for acai, a fruit rich in antioxidants hyped as a superfood. The state of Para in Brazil is the world's largest producing region. —Reuters



SHORT TAKES

### Will miss Marin at Games: Sindhu

**New Delhi:** Star Indian shuttler P. V. Sindhu on Wednesday wished Spain's Carolina Marin a speedy recovery after she was forced out of the Tokyo Games due to a freak knee injury and said she will miss the reigning Olympic champion at the quadrennial event.

Marin suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee during training and pulled out of the showpiece event on Tuesday. "So sorry to hear about your injury. Hoping that you will recover soon and come back stronger," Sindhu, who had settled for the silver medal at Rio Games after losing to Marrn in the final, said in a video message posted on twitter. "I will miss you at the Olympic Games but hope we compete against each other soon, so come back fast and recover soon. Lots of love," Sindhu said. — *PTI*

### Pak departure to England delayed

**Islamabad:** The Pakistan cricket team's departure to England has been pushed back by two days after the Pakistan Super League final was rescheduled for June 24 in Abu Dhabi. The PSL was earlier scheduled to end on June 20 and the national team was due to leave for England on June 23 to play three ODIs and three Twenty20s.

However, with the PSL final pushed back by four days, the national team will leave for England on June 25. The first ODI is scheduled for July 8 in Cardiff.

Abu Dhabi will host the remaining 20 games of the PSL after Pakistan's premier domestic twenty20 league was postponed in March when several players and support staff tested positive for Covid-19. — *AP*

### Task cut out for Ind against Qatar

**Doha:** Their preparation was far from ideal but India would take inspiration from the draw against Asian champions Qatar in 2019 when they face the same opponents in the second-leg match of the joint World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers, here on Thursday.

India had held mighty Qatar 0-0 in September 2019 here, a result considered as one of the best for the side in recent times. But India are playing their home match here as the Qatari capital was chosen as the centralised venue for all the remaining Group 'E' matches after the qualifiers were halted last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. India's performance, however, has gone south since then while Qatar, the group toppers, have come into Thursday match on a high. — *PTI*

### Ancelotti back as Real Madrid coach

**Madrid:** Carlo Ancelotti has rejoined Real Madrid as coach for the next three seasons, the Spanish club said on Tuesday. "Hello Madrid!!" the 61-year-old Italian who succeeds Zinedine Zidane posted on *Twitter*.

Ancelotti, who won the Champions League for Real Madrid during his first spell at the club between 2013 and 2015, will sign his contract and be presented to the media on Wednesday, the club said in a statement. It took less than a week for Real Madrid to turn the page on Zidane criticising the lack of confidence shown in him by the club hierarchy.

Instead, Ancelotti is about to be reunited with the club president Florentino Perez who ruthlessly ousted the coach in 2015, just one year after he led the club to a 10th Champions League title. — *AFP*

### Booker leaves Lakers in lurch

**Los Angeles:** Devin Booker scored 30 points as the Phoenix Suns left LeBron James and the depleted Los Angeles Lakers facing elimination from the NBA playoffs on Tuesday with a crushing 115-85 victory. Phoenix took full advantage of the injury absence of the Lakers' Anthony Davis to dominate the Lakers from early in the first quarter before romping to a comfortable win. — *AFP*

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# NADAL MODE ON

## Rafael, Djokovic start off with a winning note in French Open

**Paris, June 2:** Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal began their bids for Grand Slam history with comfortable wins on Tuesday.

World No.1 Djokovic kicked off his bid for a 19th Grand Slam title with a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 win over Tennys Sandgren inside an empty stadium.

Nadal, the 13-time champion and chasing a record-setting 21st major, defeated Alexei Popyrin of Australia 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

The Spaniard now has 101 wins against just two losses at the tournament.

Djokovic saw off world number 66 Sandgren in straight sets for his fourth win in four meetings with the American.

Top seed Djokovic, the champion in Paris in 2016, is attempting to become the first man in more than 50 years to win all four Slams multiple times.

The Serb fired 33 winners and broke serve five times as he set up a clash with Pablo Cuevas of Uruguay for a place in the last 32. Nadal, meanwhile, has now won 26 sets in a row at the tournament.

#### NAVARRO LOSES MATCH AFTER CANCER RECOVERY

A "proud" Carla Suarez Navarro came close to winning her first match back after recovering from cancer at the French Open on Tuesday, but bowed out in the first round with defeat by Sloane Stephens.

The Spaniard was told in September 2020 that she was suffering with Hodgkin's lymphoma.

But almost nine months later, Suarez Navarro is back after recovering following eight chemotherapy and 15 radiotherapy sessions. The 32-year-old served for the match against 2018 runner-up Stephens but lost 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

#### OTHER RESULTS

**Men's singles second round:** Alexander Zverev (RUS) 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 7-6 (7/1); Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt Roberto Bautista Agut (ESP) 6-3, 2-6, 6-3, 6-2; Casper Ruud (NOR) 6-3, 6-2, 6-4; John Isner (USA) 3-1 bt Filip Krajinovic (SRB) 7-6 (8/6), 6-1, 7-6 (7/5); Reilly Opelka (USA) 6-3, 6-2, 3-6, 7-5.

**Women's singles second round:** Elena Vesnina (RUS) bt Petra Kvitova (CZE) 6-3, 6-2; Daria Kasatkina (RUS) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI) 6-2, 6-2; Polona Herczeg (SLO) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA) 7-5, 6-4; Ana Bogdan (ROM) bt Naomi Osaka (JPN) 6-2 — walkover; Victoria Azarenka (BLR) 6-3, 6-4; Clara Tauson (DEN) 7-5, 6-4.



Rafael Nadal of Spain returns the ball to Alexei Popyrin of Australia during their men's singles match at the French Open tennis tournament in Paris on Tuesday. Nadal won in stright sets at 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3).

— AFP

# Questions won't stop for Osaka

**Paris, June 2:** Unfortunately for Naomi Osaka, the questions will keep coming. There's nowhere to run and certainly no place to hide when you're a superstar travelling the world and playing on the biggest stages in tennis.

Some of the questions may be repetitive. Some may even be a bit negative, though for the most part those in the tennis media tend to treat top players with kid gloves.

Regardless, it's part of her job to answer them. That's not going to change, even with Osaka's withdrawal from the French Open after refusing to appear at the news conferences every other top player accepts as part of the job.

Only now she'll have even more questions to answer.

That's not entirely Osaka's fault, though she did herself no favors by the clumsy way she handled her mini media revolt in Paris. She blew off her first post-match news conference, after declaring earlier in a posting online that she didn't want to



Naomi Osaka reacts to losing a point in this file photo.

hear the same questions over and over and saying that reporters tend to kick players while they are down.

In other words, she didn't want to answer questions about why she didn't play better on clay.

Osaka rebounded a bit in a second statement announcing her withdrawal, and that's where it gets tricky. She revealed she had suffered long periods of depression after winning the U.S. Open in 2018 and that she suffers great anxiety when faced

with having to answer questions from journalists at news conferences.

We all can and should be sympathetic to that. Depression and anxiety can be devastating and debilitating, as anyone who has suffered from them or dealt with a family member who has them knows so well.

Nobody should begrudge Osaka's decision to withdraw from a major championship because she's having trouble coping with those issues. Indeed, we should all support her

efforts to improve her mental health.

But let's make this clear: this isn't a media problem. It isn't a news conference problem.

Frankly, until Osaka said she would not show up for her news conference and then blew off tournament organisers who wondered why, no one even knew there was a problem.

There's nothing inherently wrong with a system that requires athletes who are paid millions of dollars to perform to be asked about their play afterward. There's also nothing wrong with reporters asking an occasional question that may not fit the positive narrative Osaka wants when writing about the newest star in tennis.

It's part of the reason why tournaments like the French Open sell out expensive seats every year: It's a lot of the reason Forbes said Osaka made \$37 million in 2019, most of it in endorsements from companies that expect Osaka to generate lots of press for their products. — *AP*

# Virat charged up for WTC battle

**Mumbai, June 2:** India captain Virat Kohli is not too concerned about the limited preparation time that his team will get for the World Test Championship final against New Zealand as he believes that it has the requisite understanding of conditions from its past experience of playing in England.

India take on New Zealand in the marquee game at Southampton from June 18. Currently, New Zealand are engaged in a two-Test series against England, while India would be in quarantine after landing there, including three days of hotel quarantine.

"...look, in the past we have landed in places three days prior even in a proper schedule and have had a hell of a series and hell of competition, so it is all in the head," Kohli said in the pre-departure press conference.

Virat insisted that it was also about the mindset. "...it is not the first time we are playing in England, we all know what the conditions are like," he said. "And even if you are used to the conditions, if you don't enter the field in the right frame of mind, you are going to nick that first ball or you are going to find it tough to pick wickets," added the superstar.

According to Kohli, his side would not have any issues even if it gets just

**We don't have any issues even with four practice sessions heading into the WTC final, because we are absolutely sure of what we can do as a team and we all have played in England.**

— **VIRAT KOHLI**  
India cricket team captain

four practice sessions.

"...we don't have any issues even with four practice sessions heading into the game, because we are absolutely sure of what we can do as a team and we all have played in England.

"Whether it is with the Indian team or India A as well, for the likes of (Mohammed) Siraj...so we are not bothered by that at all and we just want to get there and make the most of the opportunity at hand," he added.

Kohli echoed coach Ravi Shastri's thoughts about the World Test Championship final holding a lot of value.

"All of us take a lot of pride in playing Test cricket, and the way, we have progressed as a side is an example of what Test cricket means to us. So, for all of us as a unit, those who have been part of the Test side for many years, this is like an accumulation of all the hard work," he said.

— *PTI*

## DOMESTIC PLAYERS PITCH FOR CENTRAL CONTRACTS

**New Delhi, June 2:** As the BCCI works out a compensation package and a formula to distribute it for the Covid-19 hit domestic cricketers, voices demanding central contracts for such players are getting louder with seasoned names like Jaydev Unadkat, Sheldon Jackson and Harpreet Singh Bhatia leading the chorus.

Last month, former India player and domestic veteran Rohan Gavaskar had also called for state associations to introduce contracts for players over and above their match fees, just like it is for the national team.

Majority of domestic players don't get to play IPL, don't have job security and rely heavily on match fees, which took a beating last season with Ranji Trophy being cancelled due to the pandemic.

Saurashtra captain and India player Jaydev Unadkat doesn't need the security of a contract but he feels it should be introduced for the top 30 cricketers of the state.

"Talks over central contracts were happening even before the pandemic. Even cricketers at the age group level should be compensated for the lack of cricket, it will keep them motivated and then hand contracts to senior players," Unadkat said.

— *PTI*

# Conway hits ton to bolster Kiwis

**London, June 2:** New Zealand's Devon Conway joined a select group of cricketers on Wednesday by marking his Test debut with a splendid hundred (136 off 240 balls) at Lord's to lead New Zealand to 246 for 3 against England at the end of first Day's play.

The South Africa-born opener found himself thrust into the action straight away after New Zealand captain Kane Williamson won the toss and batted in the first of a two-match series against England.

But while star batsman Williamson and the experienced Ross Taylor both fell cheaply, the 29-year-old Conway pressed on to a 163-ball century, reaching the landmark with a flamboyant whipped legside four, his 11th boundary off England debutant fast bowler Ollie Robinson.

Only five other batsmen had previously scored a Test debut hundred at

Lord's, with Conway the first New Zealand international to achieve the feat.

New Zealand had the better of the morning session to be 85-1 at lunch after Williamson won the toss.

But James Anderson, equalling retired former captain Alastair Cook's England record of 161 Test appearances, struck in the first over after the interval to remove star batsman Williamson for 13 as the runs dried up.

And fast bowler Robinson, who'd earlier dismissed Tom Latham, then had the 37-year-old Taylor lbw for 14.

Latham and Conway made a steady start against England new-ball greats Anderson and Stuart Broad after Black Caps skipper Williamson won the toss.

— *AFP*

**Brief scores (Day 1):** New Zealand 246/3 in 86 overs (Devon Conway 136 batting; O. Robinson 2/50) vs England.

## AUSSIE PLAYERS TO RAISE FUNDS FOR COVID-HIT INDIA

**Sydney, June 2:** Top Australian cricketers including star pacer Pat Cummins will participate in a 12-hour gaming live stream on Thursday to raise money for UNICEF Australia's India Covid Appeal.

The brainchild of pacer Josh Lalor, the initiative will let fans watch the likes of Cummins, spinner Nathan Lyon and the pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood on a live stream when they talk about cricket and showcase their gaming skills in a bid to raise AUD 100,000. The fundraiser will begin at 1:30 pm IST and will also see participation from Moises Henriques, women cricketer Alyssa Healy and South African Rilee Rossouw among others.

"Being a cricketer from Australia, we have a unique relationship with Indian people," Lalor told *cricket.com.au*.

— *PTI*

# Croatia, Armenia play 1-1 stalemate

**Paris, June 2:** World Cup runners-up Croatia were held to a 1-1 draw by Armenia on Tuesday in their first warm-up match for Euro 2020.

Inter Milan winger Ivan Perisic opened the scoring for the home side in the 24th minute, with coach Zlatko Dalic's team up against England, the Czech Republic and Scotland at the Euros.

But Armenia made the most of a rare sortie into Croat territory when Whymar Angulo equalised in the 72nd minute.

Lazio striker Vedat Muriqi hit all four goals, including one penalty, as Kosovo outclassed San Marino 4-1.

Kosovo's neighbours North Macedonia came

close to claiming the scalp of Slovenia after Napoli midfielder Elif Elmas scored the opening goal.

But home hearts were broken as Domen Crnigoj snatched an equaliser for Slovenia in the seventh minute of injury time.

North Macedonia are drawn with Austria, the Netherlands and Ukraine at the June 11-July 11 Euros.

Slovakia, in Group 'E' alongside Poland, Spain and Sweden, were held to a 1-1 draw by Bulgaria.

In the only game pitching two Euro-bound sides against each other, the Poles played out a 1-1 draw against Russia, in Group 'B' with Belgium, Denmark and Finland.

— *Agencies*

# Veda recalls Covid trauma in family

**New Delhi, June 2:** "Completely destroyed" after losing her mother and sister to Covid-19 recently, Indian women's team cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy says she is slowly learning to tune herself out of that grief and stressed on the importance of mental health assistance in crisis situations.

Nine members of Krishnamurthy's family battled the disease and her mother and sister passed away within two weeks of each other last month in Karnataka.

"I'm a big believer in

what destiny holds for you, but I really hoped that my sister would come back home. When she didn't, I was completely destroyed. All of us were broken to pieces," Krishnamurthy told *ESPNcricinfo*.

"...I still had to put up a brave face for the rest of the family. What I had to do in those testing couple of weeks was learn to tune myself out of my grief. But it keeps coming back to haunt you," she said. The middle-order batter said she was the only one in the family not to contract the virus and



Veda Krishnamurthy

ended up coordinating all the medical needs at that time. It was then that she realised how difficult it would have been for several other people to access basic care. "Going through my *Twitter* feed

at the time, I felt a lot of people were struggling with something as basic as getting a doctor to instruct them on what they should be doing — whether that was isolating at home or something else," she recalled.

Speaking about the mental aspect of dealing with a health crisis and the ensuing tragedy of such a magnitude, Krishnamurthy said her mother and sister also suffered from anxiety while battling the illness.

"Mental strength is important. My oldest sister, Vatsala, had panic

attacks before she passed away from Covid," the 28-year-old said.

Krishnamurthy also revealed that she has dealt with mental health issues of her own in the past and called for a structured support system for those in need.

"A lot of people who are playing cricket currently know what mental health is, but it is also important to accept that if the system is not doing anything to offer you mental-health assistance, you can and must find the support for yourself if you can afford it," she added.

— *PTI*