

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
VISAKHAPATNAM | THURSDAY | 13 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 36.6°C
Min: 22.6°C
RH: 66%
Rainfall: 22.6 mm

Forecast: Mainly clear sky.
Max/Min temp.
36/22 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Vidiya
till 5.38 am (Friday)
Star: Rohini till 5.44 am (Friday)
Variyam: 8.42 pm to 10.30 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.04 am
to 10.55 am; 3.11 pm to 4.02 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 29, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
(ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.05 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.19 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.21 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.25 AM
MOONSET TODAY 7.45 PM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.22 AM

RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.25 PM (TODAY)
SEHR: 4.05 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT



Everyone in the party
should use cow dung,
which is more powerful
than a PPE Kit!

SHORT TAKES

INDIA WORRIED AS CITIZEN LOSES LIFE IN ISRAEL

Jerusalem, May 12: A 30-year-old Indian woman in Israel has been killed in a rocket attack by Palestinian militants from Gaza, according to officials. Soumya Santosh, who hailed from Kerala's Idukki district, worked as a caregiver attending to an old woman at a house in the southern Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon. Ashkelon, which borders the Gaza Strip, has come under a massive fire from the Palestinian militants. India has expressed deep concern at clashes and violence in Jerusalem's Temple Mount as well as over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods and called on both sides to avoid changing the status-quo on the ground. India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti said that India is concerned at clashes & violence in Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount.

More bodies float in river Ganga

Ballia (Uttar Pradesh): With seven more bodies seen floating in the Ganga, the count of bodies found in this Uttar Pradesh district has reached 52, an official said on Wednesday. The district administration is immediately performing the last rites of the deceased as there is a possibility that they had contracted Covid-19.

Fuel prices hiked to record high

New Delhi: Petrol and diesel prices on Wednesday were hiked by 25 paise per litre each, the third increase this week, propelling petrol price to cross ₹100 per litre mark in more cities including Bhopal and Indore. Petrol and diesel prices are now at record high across the country, price notification of state-owned fuel retailers showed.



WORLD | 5 Dr Fauci says India opened too early

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SPORTS | 6 Saina, Srikanth to miss Olympics

TABLOID

Salman hits out on eve of new film release



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Shopping in lockdown break



People turn out in large numbers at the Poorna Market area for shopping when the lockdown was relaxed for a brief while in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

‘Young’ Covaxin in Phase-III trial

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 12

India will soon start Phase 2 and 3 trials of Covaxin on children from 2 to 15 years of age.

“Recently, subject expert committee of DCGI gave permission for vaccine trials on children from 2 to 15 years of age to Bharat Biotech. We are waiting for DCGI approval. Hopefully, we will soon start phase 2 and phase 3 trials,” Dr Sanjeev Sinha, Department of Medicine, AIIMS.

The Centre has said current production capacity of Covaxin vaccine will be doubled by May-June 2021

● CITING THE unprecedented rise in Covid cases in the country, the Centre on Wednesday allowed its employees with recognised qualifications to undertake medical practice or teleconsultation. Such practice is to be undertaken during spare time

and then increased nearly 6-7 fold by July-Aug 2021. The production is expected to reach nearly 10 crore doses per month by September 2021, officials said.

Meanwhile, citing the unprecedented rise in

Covid cases in the country, the Centre on Wednesday allowed its employees with recognised qualifications to undertake medical practice or teleconsultation.

Such practice is to be undertaken during spare time and on a purely charitable basis, an order issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said.

Referring to a 57-year-old order of the Home Ministry, it said the DoPT has been receiving queries/requests from Central government servants for providing teleconsultation services during the current pandemic.

There was no let up in the number of deaths with India setting a new world record as over 4,205 people succumbed to the virus. Ten states account for 73.17 per cent of these deaths.

As per the Union health ministry, 4.79 lakh beneficiaries in the 18-44 age group received their first dose of Covid vaccine in the last 24 hours and cumulatively 30.44 lakh have been vaccinated across 30 states/UTs since the start of phase-3 drive. Maharashtra (5.96 lakh) and Delhi (4.21 lakhs) have seen the highest number of vaccinations in the 18-44 age group since May 1.

WHO finds variant spread to 44 nations

New Delhi, May 12: The B.1.617 variant of the Coronavirus first identified in India last year has been found in 44 countries, says the World Health Organization (WHO) which has classified it as a variant of concern.

The UN body routinely assesses if variants of SARS-CoV-2 result in changes in transmissibility and severity, or if they lead to changes in public health and social measures' implementation by national health authorities.

As of May 11, over 4,500 sequences have been uploaded to GISAID and assigned to B.1.617 from 44 countries in all six WHO regions, the global health body said in its latest weekly epidemiological update published on Tuesday.

GISAID is a global science initiative and primary source that provides open access to genomic data of the novel coronavirus responsible for the Covid-19 pandemic.

WHO has also characterized the lineage B.1.617 as a variant of concern (VOC). Variants of concern are those considered more dangerous than the original form of the virus first seen in China in late 2019. That danger stems from a variant's higher transmissibility, lethality and resistance to vaccines, or either of them.

B.1.617 contains three sub-lineages, which differ by few but potentially relevant mutations in the spike protein.

— PTI

CENTRE OBJECTS TO USE OF TERM ‘INDIAN VARIANT’

New Delhi, May 12: Taking umbrage at the B.1.617 mutant of the Coronavirus being termed an “Indian variant”, the Union health ministry on Wednesday said the WHO has not used the word “Indian” for this strain in its document.

The ministry dismissed as “without any basis and unfounded” media reports that have used the term “Indian variant” for the B.1.617 mutant strain, which the WHO recently said was a “variant of global concern”.

The WHO also said it does not identify viruses or variants with names of countries they are first reported from. “We refer to them by their scientific names and request all to do the same for consistency,” WHO South-East Asia said in a tweet.

“Several media reports have covered the news of World Health Organisation (WHO) classifying B.1.617 as variant of global concern. Some of these reports have termed the B.1.617 variant of the coronavirus as an ‘Indian Variant’,” the ministry said in a statement.

“These reports are without basis, and unfounded,” it said. This is to clarify that the WHO has not associated the term “Indian variant” with the B.1.617 strain of the Covid-19, it said.

— PTI

Oppn urges PM to provide free vax for all, suspend Central Vista

New Delhi, May 12: Leaders of 12 Opposition parties on Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a free mass vaccination campaign against Covid-19, and a suspension of the Central Vista project and divert the money to aid the fight against Covid-19.

Claiming that the pandemic has turned into an “apocalyptic human tragedy”, the Opposition leaders, including Congress president Sonia Gandhi and some chief ministers, also demanded the Centre provide food grains to the needy, and give ₹6,000 per month to all the jobless people.

In their letter with nine suggestions to the government, the leaders have also demanded a repeal of the three Central farm

laws which, they claimed, will help protect lakhs of ‘annadatas’ (food-growers) from becoming the victims of pandemic. A large number of farmers are sitting in protest at three borders of Delhi, seeking the farm laws passed by Parliament in September last year be scrapped.

The signatories include former prime minister and JDS leader H.D. Deve Gowda, NCP supreme Sharad Pawar, chief ministers Uddhav Thackeray (Shiv Sena), Mamata Banerjee (TMC), M.K. Stalin (DMK), and Hemant Soren (JMM). Former chief ministers Farooq Abdullah (NC) and Akhilesh Yadav (SP) also signed the letter, alongside Tejashwi Yadav, D. Raja (CPI) and Sitaram Yechury (CPM).

— PTI

CURBS | PLACED

Id prayers are not allowed for common people even in masjids

Moon not sighted, Id-ul-Fitr on Friday

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 12

As Shawwal crescent was not sighted in Hyderabad and other parts of the country on Wednesday evening, Thursday will be the last day of Ramzan and Id-ul-Fitr will be observed on Friday, according to the Ruyat Hilaal Committee of Sadar Majlis Ulema-e-Deccan, responsible for the announcement of sighting on moon. However, Id

prayers are not allowed for common people even in masjids.

Secretary of Sadar Majlis Ulema-e-Deccan, Moulana Qubool Badsha Quadri said the sky was cloudy in Hyderabad and even in other parts of the country where the sky was clear, the crescent was not sighted. He announced that in the light of Sharia the Id-ul-Fitr would fall on Friday.

Earlier in the day, a webi-

● THE GOVERNMENT has imposed restrictions on congregational prayers in places of worship. Only four persons will perform Id prayers in masjids so that they are not deserted.

nar was held with home minister Mohammed Mahmood Ali, Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi, Commissioner of Police Anjani Kumar and reputed Ulemas to discuss conduct-

they had signed to procure raw materials for preparing the jabs.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said 1.07 crore vaccine doses sent abroad were India's aid to different countries and noted that of those, 78.5 lakh were dispatched to seven neighbouring countries. “A safer neighbourhood is good for India too,” said the BJP leader and also informed that more than two lakh doses were given to the UN peace-keeping force, in which over 6,600 Indian soldiers are deployed.

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■ Pg 2: System developed for soldiers at high altitude

ing of Id prayers as the lockdown is in effect in the state. The government has imposed restrictions on congregational prayers in places of worship. In the meeting, it was decided to allow only four persons to perform Id prayers in masjids to avoid them from becoming deserted.

Anjani Kumar, while addressing the meeting, said the government had imposed a complete lockdown for 10 days and

issued a GO framing various guidelines. The government ordered that all religious places shall be closed for public worship and congregations shall not be permitted. “Even the High Court is keeping watch on us. We attended the court yesterday. However, only four people will be allowed to perform prayers,” he said.

■ Page 3: Devotees urged not to come out for prayers

No public prayers for Id-ul-Fitr

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

For the second year in a row, there will be no mass namaz for Id-ul-Fitr at Idgahs and in open places in the state.

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued orders, imposing a ban on mass prayers at Idgahs and in open places, restricting gatherings to 50 only to offer Ramzan prayers at mosques, duly following Covid protocols such as physical distance.

Such prayers would be allowed twice at mosques.

Principal Secretary (Minorities Welfare) Dr Mohammed Ilyas Rizvi issued GORT: 51, placing restrictions on Eid prayers.

Earlier the Chief Executive Officer of Andhra Pradesh State Waqf Board asked the government for necessary instructions to district administrations to ensure precautionary measures, especially at Masjids in respect of Id-ul-

Fitr prayers.

The state government has made it clear that in view of the curfew restrictions in force 12 noon to 6 am till May 18, masjid committees should abide by the curfew regulations and follow all Covid-19 safety guidelines.

Muslims are urged to prefer Id-ul-Fitr prayers at home to those at Idgahs or in open spaces to ward off the raging pandemic.

■ Page 3: Id prayers may be performed in Jamat

PMCARES FUNDS 1.5 LAKH OXYCARE SYSTEMS OF DRDO

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 12

In a noteworthy development, the PMCARES fund has sanctioned procurement of 1,50,000 units of ‘Oxycare’ system developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at a cost of ₹322.5 crore.

The Oxycare system delivers supplemental oxygen and prevents the patient from sinking into a state of hypoxia which can be fatal.

It is an SpO2 based oxygen supply system which regulates the oxygen being administered to patients. (SpO2 is the saturation of arterial blood with oxygen measured by pulse oximetry).

■ Pg 2: System developed for soldiers at high altitude

IN BRIEF

ONLY E-PASS HOLDERS
GET TS ENTRY DURING
LOCKDOWN HOURSDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 12

Restrictions on the movement of vehicles at Pullur toll plaza near the Telangana-Andhra Pradesh state border continue to be in force as the Telangana police are allowing only those vehicles having e-passes. They are checking every vehicle coming from AP side and allowing those vehicles after producing e-passes issued by the government. A policeman said there was, however, no restriction on the movement of vehicles between 6 am and 10 am.

The Superintendent of Police, Dr Kagineelli Fakkeerappa, inspected the border post and told the TS police not to stop medical emergency cases. Three lorries carrying paddy to Telangana were stopped at the toll plaza and sent back as the drivers could not produce e-passes. The paddy was being transported from Nandyal to TS districts where it could fetch higher prices.

PANEL RECOMMENDS
CLOSURE OF WHITE
BARYTES QUARRYDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 12

Midde Gowthami, chairperson of the government-appointed five-member committee and joint collector, said she would recommend the government to forthwith ban White Barytes Quarry, where a massive explosion had killed 10 people.

The committee members inspected the explosion spot near Kalasapadu mandal Mamillapalli village on Wednesday.

Later speaking to the media, Gowthami told reporters that they would insist that the quarry, which was operating in complete violation of regulations, be done away with, once and for all.

She said that the committee would look into the functioning of all quarries in the district where mining is underway. She said they would recommend action against those carrying out excavations contrary to regulations.

She said police have already arrested three people in connection with the incident. They include operator Chilekampalli Nageswarareddy, Raghunath Reddy and Y.S. Pratapa Reddy, who supplied explosives from Pulivendula.

The committee includes revenue, mining, mining safety and explosives experts.

Meanwhile, local farmers told the joint-collector that when they come to graze cattle in the 90-acre area, mine operators prevent them from entering.

CPI SAYS GOVT LYING
ON DEATH TOLL AT
RUIA HOSPITALDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 12

The national secretary of Communist Party of India, K. Narayana, on Wednesday came down heavily on the government for fudging the figures of dead at SVR Ruia Government General Hospital. He claimed that 23 people died because of a dip in oxygen pressure on Monday night.

Releasing the names of the deceased, the CPI leader vouched for the authenticity of the figures during an interaction with mediapersons at Nagari in Chittoor district on Wednesday.

Demanding an explanation from the government for lying on the number of deaths, Narayana said he was ready to prove that 23 Covid patients died in the incident.

Taking a dig at the state and the central governments for their failure in offering timely treatment or containing the spread of virus, he slammed them for their inability to provide at least oxygen to the people. He castigated the state medical and health department for stating that no one died because of oxygen shortage in the state. He asked why the deaths occurred at Hindupur, Visakhapatnam, Anantapur, Tirupati and Ongole hospitals.

Narayana warned that they would not keep quiet if the state government continued to make people the scapegoats instead of bringing pressure on the Centre for oxygen. He flayed the state government for expressing its inability to supply oxygen and vaccines.

He advised the state and central governments to open their eyes and take measures on a war-footing to procure oxygen, medicines and ventilator beds in sizeable quantities to save the lives of people.



Nursing staff of King George Hospital display placards during a protest, demanding a hike in their salaries, on the KGH premises in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Jagan, Naidu laud role
of nurses in Covid time

Both leaders extend International Nurses' Day greetings

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday hailed the role of nurses across the state and their pivotal role in treating Covid-19 patients.

On the occasion of International Nurses' Day, Jagan Mohan Reddy thanked nurses on his Twitter handle and lauded them for selflessly serving the world with their relentless efforts, especially since the outbreak of Covid-19.

"My heartfelt congratulations and praises to all the nursing sisters, who are selflessly serving people around the world, especially in the face of the coronavirus pandemic," he tweeted.

Naidu lauded the services being rendered by nurses with courage and dedication to save lives of people in the battle against coronavirus. He recalled how nurses were risking their lives to save virus-infected patients all over the world.

The former chief minister said that even as the second wave has caused unimaginable danger, nurses were continuing their work as frontline warriors.

He opined that nurses were making supreme sacrifices, which remain matchless, and embody the age-old saying 'service to mankind is service to God'.

TEACHERS WANT
SPECIAL VAX
SESSIONDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 12

The founder president of Andhra Pradesh SC, ST Upadhyaya Sangham has demanded that the state government organise special vaccination camps for the teachers across the state as the Covid has taken a heavy toll on the teachers in the second wave. He also demanded reservation of beds for teachers at hospitals. In a letter to the Chief Secretary on Wednesday, Sangham president Samala Simhachalam requested setting up of vaccination camps in all the 13 districts to prevent further loss of life.

He said that around 180 teachers succumbed to the virus during the second wave, and of them 80 died in north coastal AP. "Three teachers died in north coastal Andhra even as a letter was being addressed to the Chief Secretary," Simhachalam said.

He also demanded that a compensation of ₹50 lakh be paid in case of death, government job for the next of the kin.

● Founder president of Andhra Pradesh SC, ST Upadhyaya Sangham Samala Simhachalam has demanded that a compensation of ₹50 lakh be paid in case of death, government job for the next of the kin and reservation of beds in hospitals.



Oxygen cylinders are arranged at the Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. The cylinders will be supplied to the Covid patients who have oxygen levels between 90 per cent and 94 per cent.

Nurses are goddesses in
human form, says TulasiDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 12

Pradesh Congress Committee working president Dr N. Tulasi Reddy said that the nurses are goddesses in human form.

The Congress celebrated the 47th International Nurses' Day at Vempalle.

Nurses working at Vempalle village secretariat, Kalamala Tulasi, Sunke-

shula Swapna, Sungalur Sirisha, Gotur Lakshmi-devi and Peddashettipalli, were felicitated on the occasion.

Addressing the gathering, Tulasi Reddy said that International Nurses' Day was being celebrated on May 12 every year since 1974 on the occasion of Florence Nightingale's birth anniversary.

The services of nurses

were invaluable and they were providing unparalleled services courageously risking their lives during the Corona epidemic, he said.

Even when the family members of the infected were afraid to come forward to take care of them, the nurses were rendering yeoman service to them, thus praised the Congress leader.

System developed for
soldiers at high altitude

From page 1

According to an official press release issued here on Wednesday, this system was developed by Defence Bio-Engineering & Electromedical Laboratory (DEBEL), Bengaluru of DRDO for soldiers posted at extreme high-altitude areas. The system is indigenously developed for operation in field conditions and is robust. It can be effectively used to treat Covid-19 patients.

With the sanction of PM CARES funds, 1,00,000 manual and 50,000 automatic Oxycare systems along with non-rebreather masks are being procured. Two variants of the system have been configured. The basic version consists of a 10-litre oxygen cylinder, a pressure regulator-cum-flow controller, a

humidifier and a nasal cannula.

The oxygen flow is regulated manually based on the SpO2 readings. In the second configuration, the oxygen cylinder is equipped with electronic controls which automatically regulates the oxygen flow through a low-pressure regulator and a SpO2 probe.

The system optimises the consumption of oxygen based on the SpO2 reading of the patient and effectively increases the endurance of portable oxygen cylinders. The threshold SpO2 value for initiating flow from the system can be adjusted by the health staff. A display is provided for continuously monitoring the SpO2 levels.

Workload and exposure of healthcare providers is considerably reduced by

eliminating the need for routine measurements and manual adjustments of oxygen flow. The automatic system also provides suitable audio warning for various failure scenarios including low SpO2 values and probe disconnections.

The non-rebreather masks are integrated with the Oxycare systems for efficient use of oxygen which results in saving of oxygen by 30-40%. The non-rebreather masks need to be changed for every patient. These Oxycare systems can be used at homes, quarantine centres, covid care centres and hospitals.

The DRDO has transferred the technology to multiple industries in India which will be producing the Oxycare systems.

Airport has taken precautionary steps to control the spread of the virus

Covid chokes flights from Kadapa; Passengers drop plans

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 12

Air travel has seen a drastic fall in the number of passengers, as rising Covid-19 cases has forced people to drop their plans and stay at home. While there was an increase in bookings in March, these numbers have fallen once again, in April.

Domestic flights continue to be cancelled in many parts of the country. Flights between Kadapa — Vijayawada and Kadapa — Chennai have been suspended from April 26.

Authorities are taking special measures to ensure safety and hygiene at Kadapa airport to curb the virus outbreak.

Pusarla Sivaprasad, the

airport director, said, "The management has taken precautionary steps to control the spread of the virus. We are following the guidelines issued by the Airports Authority of India and are screening passengers, along with enforcing social distancing norms and sanitisation of baggage, trolley and seating chairs after

Govt decides to set up 10k
more oxygen beds in stateDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

Asserting that incidents such as those at Ruia Hospital will not be repeated, minister for health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas alias Nani said that the government was taking all measures right from setting up oxygen monitoring cell in every hospital to appointing three senior officials to overlook the supply of oxygen from neighbouring states. He stated that although the state is equipped with 27,500 oxygen beds, the government has decided to set up 10,000 more beds across the state on a war-footing to serve Covid-19 patients.

A Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by Nani, held a press conference here on Wednesday after a review meeting and briefed on the Covid-19 preventive measures being implemented by the state government.

Nani said the committee discussed key issues such as oxygen supply, testing, vaccination, beds as well as steps to be taken to bring down the number of infections.

He said that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had given clear instructions to all the district collectors to monitor oxygen pipelines and complete repair works immediately to avoid recurrence of tragic incidents like the one at Ruia hospital. He stated 49 mini oxygen plants were also being set up at teaching hospitals, district and area hospitals.

Nani said the need for oxygen in the second wave was very high as the num-



Workers prepare 30 beds extension Triage Centre at Siddhartha Medical College in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

ber of oxygen-requiring cases almost doubled.

Senior IAS officers were coordinating oxygen supplies from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Odisha. He mentioned that during the first wave, the state hardly used 240 MT of oxygen on a daily basis, and only 50 per cent of designated oxygen beds were occupied but in the current scenario, the daily requirement crossed 590 MT. The allotments by the Centre were not enough, he noted.

The minister informed that the Chief Minister had already requested the Prime Minister for 910 tonnes of oxygen. Besides, all steps were being taken to ensure that oxygen was not wasted, by setting up oxygen monitoring cells at each hospital. Also, the storage capacity was being increased to 600 MT from the existing 517 MT.

On the vaccination drive, the minister said that the government was

trying to speed up the process and the CM sought 6 crore doses from the Centre. He stated that the government had a capacity to administer over six lakh doses in a single day and was ready to spend ₹1,600 crore for getting vaccines.

Deputy CM Alla Nani slammed opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu for making irresponsible remarks against the state government and creating panic among the public.

He made it clear that they had no objection to purchasing vaccines from the manufacturers but the allotment of vaccines was to be done by the Centre.

He said that Naidu can secure vaccines to the state by using his kinship with Bharat Biotech owners.

Ministers Mekathoti Sucharita, Kurasala Kannababu, Buggana Rajendranath Reddy and Botsa Satyanarayana were present at the meeting.

Goutham to urge TN,
Karnataka for oxygenDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 12

Minister for IT, Industries and Skill Development Mekapati Goutham Reddy said he had already spoken to the industries minister of Tamil Nadu

Thangam Thennarasu to provide 6 MT of oxygen to Nellore district.

He was reacting to a plea from SPSR Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu during a review here on Wednesday to help mobilise oxygen in view of delays getting replenishments to meet the daily demand of 36.5 MT. The collector said that the oxygen consumption was going up in the district in view of rapidly growing needs of patients.

The minister said he had already spoken to the industries minister of Tamil Nadu Thangam Thennarasu to provide 6 MT of oxygen to Nellore district. He advised the officials to devise an action plan to deal with medical emergencies and ensure availability of life-saving drugs, oxygen equipped beds and ventilators among others.

Goutham Reddy observed that there was a huge difference between the first and the second waves of Coronavirus in terms of numbers and virulence, and asked the officials to continuously monitor the demand and supply of oxygen to address any situation on a war-footing.

He reminded that the Chief Minister, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, already took to the notice of Prime Minister Narendra Modi the shortage of oxygen. The state government also deputed Special Chief Secretary (Industries & Commerce)

Karikal Valaven to monitor the oxygen supplies to prevent any shortage.

Goutham Reddy suggested to the administration to make efforts to raise the bed strength at big hospitals which have manpower and equipment instead of at small hospitals operating with a limited number of beds.

Expressing satisfaction over the availability of remdesivir injections and other important drugs, he praised the district administration for striving hard to save the lives of the infected.

Collector Chakradhar Babu explained that there were 38 Covid notified hospitals with a total strength of 332 ICU beds, 1,343 oxygen beds and 1,076 non-oxygen beds in the district. He said they were securing oxygen from Visakhapatnam, Isro and Karnataka to meet emergency needs.

District SP Bhaskar Bhushan said two police personnel succumbed to Covid during the first wave and the virus claimed 7 policemen so far during the second wave. He urged good treatment to the police personnel along with other frontline workers.

Water Resources minister P. Anilkumar Yadav, Rural MLA K. Sridhar Reddy, joint-collectors M.N. Hanandhira Prasad and N. Prabhakar Reddy, task force officials and others were present.



IN BRIEF

ID PRAYERS MAY BE PERFORMED IN JAMAT

FROM PAGE 1

The Id prayers may, however, be performed in Jamat with a maximum of 50 Musallis (members) in Masjid in accordance with the capacity of the namaz area of the respective Masjids, duly wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing (6 ft) and other precautionary health norms. If necessary, one or two spells of Jamats within specified number could be performed during the curfew relaxation window i.e., 6 am to 12 noon.

Every devotee going to Masjid to offer prayers is advised to perform Wadhu (ablution) at home and carry his own prayer mat or Jaye-Namaz (Janimaz). The masjid managements shall keep a sufficient number of sanitisers at entry points. Before entry/exit of the Masjid, devotees should clean hands with sanitisers or soap.

Imams and Khateeb are requested to make the Id Khutbah/sermons short. Senior citizens, children and people with cough, cold or fever are called upon to perform the Id prayers at their homes. Those suffering from diabetes, high BP, coronary heart ailments etc., are also advised to offer prayers at home.

The government advised devotees against handshaking, meeting relatives, attending Id-Milap programmes, hugging (Musafa) etc., in order to delink the spread of the Coronavirus. All District Collectors, Commissioners of Police, SPs are instructed to ensure that the government instructions are scrupulously followed at all the Masjids and Waqf institutions in the state.

MUSLIMS URGED TO SHUN SHOPPING

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

Sufi preacher Altaf Ali Raza has called upon the Muslim community to keep off the pandemic and help the needy people in the society in this hour of need, by shunning Ramzan festival celebrations.

Accompanied by Krishna district government Khazi Syed Habibulla Hussein, Altaf Ali Raza distributed essential commodities as Ramzan Tohfa to the poor people. He deplored that Covid-19 surge was claiming so many lives and devastating families.

A majority of working class and poor people were facing financial hardships due to the Corona-induced curfew. He lamented that many were losing their jobs and starving due to loss of work. Even conducting last rites for near and dear had become difficult and this catastrophic situation had never been seen.

Altaf Ali Raza stated that human survival itself become questionable and many people were finding it difficult to breathe and were suffocating due to shortage of oxygen supplies at hospitals. In such heartbreaking times, it was not advisable for Muslims to spend money on shopping during Ramzan.

People should come out of the illusion that they cannot celebrate the festival if they did not put on new clothes.

Follow rules, please!



Traffic police urge the public to ensure that the lockdown is not violated, at the Police Control Room Junction in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

State continues recording over 20,000 cases per day

With 89 new fatalities, the overall death toll has reached 8,988

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

Andhra Pradesh is continuing to register more than 20,000 new Coronavirus cases per day by recording 21,452 new Covid-19 infections on Wednesday, apart from registering 89 new deaths during the past 24 hours.

State health authorities tested 90,750 samples of which 21,452 have been found positive, taking total number of Corona cases recorded so far to 13,44,386. 1,97,370 of these are active cases while 11,38,028 have been discharged after recovery. The number of recoveries in the past 24 hours is

14,502. With 89 new fatalities, the overall death toll has reached 8,988.

The single-day highest 2,927 new Corona positive cases have been registered in East Godavari district, followed by Visakhapatnam 2,238; Anantapur 2,185; Chittoor 1,908; Guntur 1,836; Kadapa 1,746; Nellore 1,689; Kurnool 1,524; Srikakulam 1,285; West Godavari 1,232; Prakasam 1,192; and Krishna 997. The day's least number of 693 cases has been reported from Vizianagaram district.

As many as 11 Covid deaths have been recorded in Visakhapatnam district, followed by nine

each in East Godavari, Krishna and Vizianagaram; eight each in Chittoor, Guntur, and Nellore; seven in Srikakulam, six in Anantapur, five in Kurnool, four in Prakasam, three in West Godavari and two in Kadapa district.

East Godavari district is on top with total of 1,69,999 Corona cases so far, followed by Chittoor 1,45,814; Guntur 1,25,852; West Godavari 1,13,592; Visakhapatnam 1,04,046; Anantapur 1,03,593; Nellore 97,691; Kurnool 95,877; Srikakulam 89,396; Prakasam 85,929; Kadapa 76,786; Krishna 72,569; and Vizianagaram district 60,247 cases.

Kurnool collector tests Covid positive

DC CORRESPONDENT KURNOOL, MAY 12

Kurnool district collector G. Veera Pandian tested positive for Coronavirus on Wednesday, sending shock waves among the officials who had interacted with him during the past week. He had been moving from place to place, visiting Covid care centres, government hospitals at Nandyal, Adoni and Kurnool. The top officials in the district

from the police and the revenue department, who had come in touch with them, are at risk and have been asked to go for testing.

District Medical and Health Officer Dr Rama Giddaiah, who had been spending accompanying the collector on his visits, said his RT-PCR came negative and he heaved a sigh of relief. Other officials are undergoing Covid tests to confirm their status, it is learnt.

Devotees urged not to come out for prayers

FROM PAGE 1

Home minister Mahmood Ali and AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi appealed to the common Muslims not to come out of their houses to perform Id prayers at masjids as the government had not permitted congregational prayers. They appealed to the Muslims to perform prayers at their houses. Meanwhile, CEO of Wakf Board Shahnawaz Qasim issued a circular directing all Mutawallis and managing committees to strictly follow the instructions given in the GO. Any deviation in the matter will be viewed seriously and action will be initiated against the concerned. Moulana Anwaar Ahmed of Jamia Nizamia clarified that performing the Id prayers at homes were not permissible in

the Sharia, so people can perform the Chasht or Ishraq prayers (special morning prayers) at their residence instead of Id prayers.

There is infurcation among common Muslims over not allowing them to perform Id prayers even in local masjids. Many people have expressed their dissent over the decision of the government to ban Id prayers in masjids. Many religious scholars have also expressed their displeasure and said performing Id prayers at homes was not permissible by the Sharia.

Moulana Abdur Raheem Khurram said during the relaxation period, Id prayers can be performed complying with the SOPs of Covid-19. Ulemas had allowed performing Id prayers in more than one session.

Woman, boyfriend held for murder of mother

DC CORRESPONDENT VIZIANAGARAM, MAY 12

A 22-year-old woman and her boyfriend were arrested by the police on charges of murdering former's mother in Bhogapuram under Vizianagaram district. The woman resorted to this heinous crime after her mother admonished her for having an affair and refused marriage with her boyfriend.

The arrested were identified as Savaravalli Rupasri, 22, a B-Pharmacy student and her boyfriend Karrothu Varun Sai, 22, BBM student. Both are residents of Savaravalli village under Bhogapuram police station limits in Vizianagaram district.

DSP of Vizianagaram, P. Anil said that 40-year-old woman Savaravalli

Lakshmi was found dead under suspicious circumstances on May 6 at Savaravalli village. The local doctors, who examined the body of the woman, said that it was a suspicious death and she died of suffocation.

The DSP said that Bhogapuram police initially registered a case under Section 174 of CrPC (Suspicious death) and began investigation to reveal the mystery behind the death.

Lakshmi has two daughters and her younger daughter married to her boyfriend against the wishes of elders around a year ago. The marriage has dented the image of Lakshmi.

Recently, Lakshmi came to know that her elder daughter Rupasri was also in love with one

Varun Sai and she admonished Rupasri. She also refused Rupasri's marriage plans with her boyfriend.

Fearing her mother would not allow her to marry the man of her choice, Rupasri with the support of her boyfriend decided to eliminate her mother and to depict it as a natural death.

On May 6 night, Rupasri along with her boyfriend killed Lakshmi in her home and they thought that Lakshmi lost her final breath. Later, Rupasri alerted the neighbors that her mother died.

The neighbours rushed to Lakshmi's house and they observed that Lakshmi is still alive and they shifted her to a private hospital at Tagarapuvalasa.

Study says Corona infections will ease by July 15

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 12

In the current pandemic situation, a pertinent question is an estimate of the time by which virus spread could be contained and normalcy would return. In this context, Prof D. Narayana Rao, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, SRM University-AP, initiated a study. Dr Soumyajyoti Biswas of SRMU-AP along with B.Tech students, carried out a study to predict the end time of Covid-19 spread in the state of Andhra Pradesh. According to the results, the infections would show a declining trend by July 15 in AP.

Prof. Narayana Rao said that the study employed Susceptible-Infected-Recovered (SIR) Model, making use of the information on the Covid-affected

people and the recovered number of people, which the Government of AP made it available through the control command centre.

He said that the SRM team made use of the data, employed the SIR Model and applied the methods of Machine Learning. He stated that the study revealed that by July 15, 2021, the rate of infection in AP would be below 100 per day. He explained that with the assumption that the decay rate of infection is the same as the growth rate, the model predicts that the number of infected people could be 10,000 on May 21, 15,000 on May 30, 1,000 on June 14, 500 on June 23 and 100 on July 15. The report has been submitted to the Special Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister.

Gas trouble



A customer carries an LPG cylinder after directly purchasing it from a distributor at Tathichetlapalem in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. Four of the gas delivery boys employed by the agency got infected with Covid and all of them have boycotted their duties. — DC

No devotees for Chandanotsavam

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 12

The annual Chandanotsavam of Varaha Lakshmi Nrusimha Swamy at Simhachalam will be performed without devotees on May 14, according to temple officials. It is going to be a low-key

affair due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Devotees and even VIPs will not be allowed to witness the festival.

As per the tradition of the temple, the hereditary trustee and chairman Sanchaita Gajapatiraju will have the first darshan of the deity in 'Nijarupam.'

SPEAKER, WIFE DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 12

AP Assembly Speaker Tammineni Sitaram and his wife Vanisree, who have been undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Srikakulam since last fortnight for Covid-19 infection, were discharged on Wednesday.

Both of them were greeted by the local leaders and officials.

EAST COAST RAILWAY	
Tender No. SANDT.CAMC.CGDB.SLTIB.VBL	
Name of the Work: COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR COACH GUIDANCE DISPLAY BOARDS, SINGLE LINE TIB AND MULTI LINE TIB AT BOBBILI STATION OF WALTAIR DIVISION FOR 05(FIVE) YEARS.	
Advised Value	₹ 8,25,460.00, Tender Document Cost (₹): 2360.00, Bidding Start Date: 25.05.2021, Validity of Offer (Days): 45, Period of Completion: 60 Months.
Tender Closing Date & Time: at 1500 hrs. of 08.06.2021.	
Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.	
Complete details & tender documents will be available at website www.reps.gov.in	
Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer/PR-90/M/21-22	Waltair

GREATER VISAKHAPATNAM MUNICIPAL CORPORATION	
'e' Procurement Tender Notice No.03/2021-22/DB/EE-A/A/SE(W)/ Dt.11-05-2021	
01. Number of Works	: 3 Nos
02. Value of Works (ECV)	: Rs.205.77 Lakhs
03. Down Loading Starting Date	: 12-05-2021 @ 11.00 PM
04. Down Loading Ending Date	: 26-05-2021 @ 3.00 PM
05. Last date of Bid submission	: 26-05-2021 @ 3.30 PM
06. Date of Opening of Tender	: 26-05-2021 @ 4.00 PM
Note: For any other details required in respect of above tender notice, please contact EE-IV(A)/V before applying for tender schedules and visit vsp @ www.aeprocurement.gov.in . SE(Works)-III	

VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)		
'E' Procurement Notice No.07/VMC/AE/2021-22, Dt.12-05-2021		
Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimate Amount Rs. in Lakhs
1	Construction of Urban Primary Health Center at Chuttugunta-02, Karmika nagar in Circle-2 & 3 areas in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (Total-2 works)	160.00
Contact: Superintending Engineer (Works), VMC, Vijayawada-520 001 Further details can be seen @ 'e' procurement market place @ www.tender.aeprocurement.gov.in		
Download of bid documents starts from		- 13-05-2021 @ 04.00 P.M.
Last date / time for receipt of tender from		- 20-05-2021 up to 04.30 P.M.
Sd/- For COMMISSIONER		

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DEMAND | SUPPLY

Anantapur General hospital being stretched beyond limit

Demand for beds, O2 outstrips supply

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, MAY 12

Since it was turned into a full Covid-19 treatment hospital last month, Government General Hospital (GGH) here is under intense pressure to cater to the needs of patients arriving from far-away places. The personnel as well as the medical infrastructure are being stretched thin.

The super specialty hospital and the cancer hospital are allowing patients based on availability of beds in oxygen and ICU wards. Further,

private hospitals are reportedly turning away patients in critical conditions to the GGH. As such, the GGH is under increasing pressure to treat more patients than in normal days where all specialised and general wards used to function and offer treatment for more than 1,800 people including out-patients every day.

At present, there is OP facility at GGH. Only those Covid cases needing in-patient care are being admitted. A senior doctor said all types of beds—oxygen, ventilators

Medical infrastructure, personnel come under intense pressure to save lives

Vigilance teams raided GGH and super specialty hospitals

and normal—were full with Covid patients in all the wards. Around 1,300 patients were undergoing treatment at GGH which had to set up temporary blocks to meet the rush. The two-wheeler parking place was also turned into a temporary ward and more than 20 oxygen

concentrators were set up.

At the hospital, one comes across the patients lying in pitiable conditions due to lack of infra and amenities. Many are lying on the ground and attached with oxygen concentrators. A donor gave about 10 oxygen concentrators. Many patients were shifted to temporary sheds.

The attendants of patients should be cleared from all wards which would benefit patients, AGS organisation secretary A.G. Anilkumar Reddy

opined. Local organisations demand that the government convert function halls into Covid care centres which would reduce the burden on GGH and other hospitals where two to three patients were accommodated on a bed.

Meanwhile, vigilance teams raided GGH and super specialty hospitals following alleged sale of medicines, including remdesivir injections, in the black market by the staff. As many as 11 persons were arrested by Anantapur police. Investigations are on.

SHORT TAKES

J&K OFFICIAL BEATS UP PEOPLE, INVITES PUBLIC IRE

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR MAY 12

A video of a senior government official thrashing citizens in an attempt to enforce the lockdown necessitated by the current wave of the Covid-19 in north-western Baramulla district has shocked people of Jammu and Kashmir and beyond and sparked anger among netizens, many of whom demanded his sacking or, at least, stripping him of the present assignment.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) Baramulla, Muhammad Ahsan Mir, can be seen in the video which went viral beating up an elderly woman and man with a stick and even kicking the latter and also threatening another woman resident in the main town of Baramulla for defying the 'Corona curfew'.

Many people soon took to social media platforms to condemn the ADC's behaviour and demand action against him. Senior journalist Mufti Islah tweeted "He should get a sack immediately. This is an unruly behaviour. His way of dealing with people will rub on to his subordinates and they are likely to unleash terror on people. He is a very bad example to be a J&K government interface. Isolate him. A bad apple can spoil a basket."

ODISHA TO GIVE JAB TO NON-ID PROOF HOLDERS

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 12

The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to administer Covid-19 vaccine to vulnerable people who don't possess any identity proofs.

In a letter to all the collectors and Municipal Corporation Commissioners, additional chief secretary to the government, P. K. Mohapatra, asked to immediately identify such persons and bring them under the inoculation process.

"In all the phases of Covid-19 vaccination drive, it has been prescribed that the beneficiary must register in the COWIN portal. The beneficiary has to register in the portal with one of the seven prescribed ID proofs. However, some vulnerable groups of citizens may not possess any of the seven prescribed identity cards. Such vulnerable persons may not be denied for Covid-19 vaccination for absence of identity proof. Hence, there is a need to provide special consideration for Covid-19 vaccination of the vulnerable population, as these beneficiaries are also at risk of exposure to Covid-19 infection," Mr Mohapatra wrote in the letter.

"Such groups of people include nomads (including sadhu/saints from various religions), prison inmates, inmates in mental health Institutions, citizens in old age homes, roadside beggars, people residing in rehabilitation centers/camps and any other identified eligible persons, aged 18 years or more, and not having any of above prescribed individual photo ID cards", the official said.

103-YEAR-OLD GANDHIAN FIGHTS COVID BATTLE

Bengaluru, May 12: Eminent Gandhian and freedom fighter H. S. Dorewamy has won the Covid-19 battle at the ripe old age of 103 and is returning home.

"I developed symptoms five days ago but there were no complications as such. Yet, I decided to get admitted because I have respiratory problems. Now, I am getting discharged," the centenarian told PTI on Wednesday.

According to him, he got admitted to Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research (SJIC-SR), a government-owned autonomous hospital.

Sources close to him said the director of the Jayadeva Institute Dr C. N. Manjunath, an eminent cardiologist and the son-in-law of former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda, personally monitored the treatment for Dorewamy.

Born on April 10, 1918, Harohalli Srinivasiah Dorewamy took a plunge into the freedom struggle by taking part in the Quit India movement and was jailed for 14 months from 1943 to 1944. The Gandhian had also participated in the Mysuru Chalo movement to compel the Mysuru Maharaja to accede to the Indian State post-independence.

Delhi blames Bharat Bio for vax shortage

Sisodia says pharma firm refused to supply required doses after reserve stock of vaccines exhausted

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Wednesday alleged that Bharat Biotech has refused to supply the required doses of its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin to Delhi.

Addressing a press conference, Sisodia said that Delhi had asked for total 1.34 crore doses of two Covid vaccines - 67 lakhs each of Covaxin and Covishield. However, Bharat Biotech informed the Delhi government of its inability to supply the said doses as it is "making dispatches as per directives of concerned government officials".

Sisodia claimed that it was obvious that Bharat Biotech was talking about central government officials.

"They further wrote, 'We sincerely regret that we cannot make any additional supplies as required by you'. I do not know how much is being supplied to other states but they have written to us that they cannot provide to Delhi because they have to supply as per the central government order," the deputy CM said.

Manish Sisodia said that Delhi has run out of its reserve stock of vaccines.

Our reserve stock has been exhausted. The centres administering Covishield vaccines are functioning but we have had to close the centres administering Covaxin. So, we have had to close down more than 100 centres across 17 schools," Sisodia said.

The deputy chief minister and AAP leader urged the Centre to stop all vaccine-related exports and allow more companies to produce the doses.

"The Centre should act as the government of a country. They should carry out their responsibility and stop all exports," he said. Sisodia also said that the Centre must import vaccine doses from across the globe and make them available to state governments.

ASSAM SHUTS ALL OFFICES IN URBAN AREAS

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MAY 12

A day after the approval of the state cabinet, the Assam government on Wednesday announced strict containment measures by shutting down of all offices, religious places and weekly markets for 15 days in urban and semi-urban areas of the state, besides imposing curfew from 2 pm to 5 am as Covid-19 cases in the state continue to surge ahead dangerously.

On Tuesday, 6,258 new cases and 85 fatalities were reported, both of which are biggest single-day spikes so far since the first wave of the pandemic struck. The test positivity percentage on Tuesday shot above 9 percent. On the other hand, 4,409 patients were discharged from hospitals on Tuesday. The total number of cases reported in the current month till Tuesday stood at 51,306 while 531 patients have lost their lives in these first 11 days of the month.

Issuing a new set of guidelines for the urban and semi-urban places in the periphery of 5 km of municipal areas, Assam chief secretary Jishnu Barua told reporters, "Complete lockdown is an option, but we are going gradually in a phased manner. We hope these measures will work in the next two-three days." As per the restrictions notified by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), weekly haats, bazaars, educational institutions and all government and private offices have been ordered to shut for the next 15 days.



Nurses pose for a picture on the occasion of International Nurses Day, at NMMC Covid-19 care centre, Navi Mumbai, on Wednesday.

— PTI



New Delhi workers install an oxygen plant for a temporary Covid Care Centre at Ramlila Ground, near LNJP Hospital in Delhi on Wednesday.



Family members mourn the death of a Covid-19 victim, at Patna Medical College and Hospital in Patna, on Wednesday.

— PTI

Cong. slams Centre over lack of vaccines

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI MAY 12

The Congress on Wednesday hit out at the Centre over the lack of vaccines. Taking to twitter, Party General Secretary Ms. Priyanka Gandhi said, "India is the largest vaccine-producing country.

The BJP government marked 'Tika Utsav' on April 12, but did not make arrangements for providing vaccines and in 30 days there was an 82 per

cent decline in our vaccinations." The central government had marked 'Tika Utsav', a vaccination drive between April 11 and 14, with an aim to vaccinate the maximum number of eligible people against coronavirus amid a surge in cases. She also shared a graph showing that India was behind countries like the US, the UK, Turkey and France in terms of vaccinating citizens. She further said, "Modi ji went to vaccine factories, also got photo-

graphs clicked, but why did his government place its first order for vaccine doses only in January 2021? The United States and other countries placed orders with Indian vaccine companies long ago. Who will take responsibility for this?"

Several state governments have had to reschedule their vaccination plans due to slow availability of vaccines. In states like Maharashtra the emphasis has been to provide the second dose to

people who have already taken the first dose. While several other states delayed the vaccination for the population in the age bracket of 18 to 44 years so that the second doses of 45 years and above could be completed. Meanwhile some states like Uttar Pradesh have already rolled out a global tender for vaccines while others are contemplating doing so.

The Congress has also attacked the Centre for levying high GST on products crucial in the fight

against Covid-19 and sought an exemption for vaccines, Remdesivir and oxygen concentrators. The party also demanded that the government should provide exemption not only on the final product but also on the raw material being used. The Congress along with several other opposition parties have demanded an immediate convening of the GST Council meeting to rationalize taxation on the products essential to combating Covid 19.

Inoculation drive in hosps on hold

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 12

Paucity of vaccines in the national capital has forced several government and private hospitals to stall the inoculation drive. While some hospitals as a last resort had to discontinue the vaccination drive last week, with the shortage of vaccines availability, it has become a herculean task for several hospitals management to deal with the crisis.

According to officials, though there has been a shortage of vaccine in the city, the city hospitals

have the capacity to vaccinate more people. On Wednesday, the Delhi Government received 2,67,790 doses of Covishield vaccine for people in the 18 to 44 years age group. It has become a concern for hospitals like Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, Fortis Health Care and others to continue the inoculation drive. As per an official from Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital, the Covid vaccination drive can't be expanded as it is getting only 200 doses of Covishield every day.

Didi: Import more foreign vaccine

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 12

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to "speedily import vaccines" to match the massive demand in the country. She also urged the Prime Minister to allow reputed global Covid-19 vaccine producers to open their franchise operations in the country to tackle the scarcity of antidotes."

The Trinamul Congress supremo also informed Mr Modi that her government would provide the international giants land and support for their fran-

chise operations, even by the national players in the case, for bulk production of the vaccines. Ms Banerjee told the PM, "It seems, however, that the production (and hence, the supply and distribution) of vaccines in the country is extremely inadequate and insignificant in the context of the

massive needs of the people at large. About 10 crore people in West Bengal and 140 crore people in the country need vaccination, here and now, but only a microscopic percentage has been covered."

Ms Banerjee underlined that vaccination, according to experts, is the "real antidote" as the country battles an aggressive second wave of infections.

"With the aid of scientists and experts it is possible to identify the reputed and authentic manufacturers... and it is possible for us in this country to speedily import vaccines from those ends across the different parts of the world. I urge you to embark upon this endeavor

our without any further delay," Ms Banerjee wrote. Liberal, proactive and discerning import of vaccines is the paramount need today, she stressed.

Ms Banerjee added, "Also, it may kindly be considered if we could encourage the world players to open up franchise operations in our country. Even the national players could be inspired to go for the franchise mode for bulk production of vaccines. We, in West Bengal, are ready to provide land and support for any manufacturing/ franchisee operation for authentic vaccine manufacturing. I would request you to kindly consider the proposition."

— PTI

JAB | SAFETY

Pregnant women make antibodies after vaccination and transfer them to babies

Vaccines don't damage placenta: Study

New Delhi, May 12: Covid-19 vaccines may be safe during pregnancy, suggests a study that found no evidence of injury to the placenta in pregnant women who received the preventive.

The first-of-its-kind study, published on Tuesday in the journal Obstetrics & Gynecology, adds to the growing literature that Covid-19 vaccines are safe in pregnancy.

"The placenta is like the

black box in an airplane. If something goes wrong with a pregnancy, we usually see changes in the placenta that can help us figure out what happened," said Jeffery Goldstein, assistant professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in the US.

"From what we can tell, the Covid vaccine does not damage the placenta," Goldstein said.

The researchers noted that there is a lot of vac-

cine hesitancy, especially among pregnant people.

"Our team hopes these data, albeit preliminary, can reduce concerns about the risk of the vaccine to the pregnancy," said study co-author Emily Miller, assistant professor at Northwestern University.

The study authors examined the placentas from 84 vaccinated patients and 116 unvaccinated patients who delivered at a hospital in Chicago, US.

Most patients received

either Moderna or Pfizer — during their third trimester.

Last year, the same team published a study that found placentas of women who tested positive for the Covid-19 virus while pregnant showed abnormal blood flow between mother and baby in utero.

Pregnant patients who want to get vaccinated to avoid contracting the disease should feel safe doing so, Miller said.

"We are beginning to

move to a framework of protecting foetuses through vaccination, rather than from vaccination," Miller said.

In April, the scientists published a study showing pregnant women make Covid antibodies after vaccination and successfully transfer them to their foetuses. "Until infants can get vaccinated, the only way for them to get Covid antibodies is from their mother," Goldstein said.

The placenta is the first

organ that forms during pregnancy. It performs duties for most of the foetus' organs while they are still forming, such as providing oxygen while the lungs develop and nutrition while the gut is forming. According to the researchers, the placenta manages hormones and the immune system, and tells the mother's body to welcome and nurture the foetus rather than reject it as a foreign intruder.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

IRAN CLASH KILLS
2 GUARD TROOPS,
7 MILITANTS

Tehran: Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard forces on Tuesday killed seven militants and dismantled their cell in the country's northwest near the border with Turkey, Iran's state-run *IRNA news agency* reported. Two Guard members were also killed in the shootout.

IRNA said the "group of terrorists" had snuck into Iran illegally from Turkey. The clash took place around noon in the city of Salmas in Iran's West Azerbaijan province, according to the report.

The city is located about 650 kilometers (400 miles) northwest of the capital, Tehran. The area has seen occasional fighting between Iranian forces and Kurdish separatists as well as militants linked to the extremist Islamic State group.

In November, unknown gunmen killed three and wounded two Iranian border guards in the province.

SUDAN FORCES
DISPERSE PROTEST;
TWO KILLED

Cairo: Two protesters were killed when Sudanese security forces dispersed a demonstration late Tuesday in the capital of Khartoum, a local medical group said.

The violence broke out when dozens of protesters made their way late in the day to the sealed-off area outside the military's headquarters to commemorate a deadly break-up of a protester camp two years ago. The protesters have demanded justice for those killed in the 2019 violence. Security forces closed off major roads and streets leading to the government and military headquarters in Khartoum ahead of the protests.

The Sudanese doctors' committee said security forces fired live bullets and tear gas to disperse the protesters, killing at least two people and wounding more than 15 others, some of them in critical condition. The committee is the medical arm of the Sudanese Professionals' Association, which spearheaded the popular uprising that led to the military's ouster of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019.

CHANCELLOR
PROBED OVER LYING
TO MPs IN AUSTRIA

Vienna: Austria's Sebastian Kurz said on Wednesday that he was being investigated over possible false statements to a parliamentary committee probing corruption, in the latest headache for the conservative chancellor.

"I wish to inform you that... prosecutors have opened an investigation against the head of my office," Bernhard Bonelli, "and against me", Kurz told reporters before a cabinet meeting.

Kurz denied any wrongdoing, saying: "I always answered all (the committee's) questions truthfully." Prosecutors confirmed in an email that the investigation had been opened after several complaints were made to them.

The offence of lying under oath carries a prison term of up to three years.

The investigation comes after the opposition Social Democrats (SPOe) and NEOS parties accused Kurz of not telling truth in front of the committee of MPs, who are investigating the fallout from the so-called "Ibizaagate" scandal that brought down Kurz's previous government in 2019.

KREMLIN IMPOSES
CUTS AT
U.S. EMBASSY

Moscow: Under Kremlin orders, the U.S. Embassy has stopped employing Russians, forcing the embassy to cut its consular staff by 75 per cent and limit many of its services.

The order went into effect on Wednesday, bringing the sharply deteriorating U.S.-Russia relationship to an intensely personal level. Because of the cuts, the embassy can offer only very limited services, such as considering "life-and-death" visa applications. That leaves Russian businessmen, exchange students and romantic partners adrift because they won't be able to obtain visas. Even Americans will be unable to register their newborns or renew their passports.

For Anastasia Kuznetsova, a 20-year-old engaged to marry a Californian, it's a crushing blow. She had already spent about two years seeking a fiancée's visa. The notoriously laborious process for Russians to get US visas had already been slowed by Covid. "I felt destroyed, much more depressed than I was before," said Kuznetsova.

Israel PM declares emergency in Lod

Netanyahu visits Tel Aviv suburbs as cops accuse Arab residents of causing riots

Jerusalem, May 12: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday declared a state of emergency in the central city of Lod as police accused Arab residents of waging "wide-scale riots".

Netanyahu's statement came after an Israeli Arab was killed in Lod the previous night as violence soars between Israel and the Palestinian territories.

According to a photographer, Netanyahu himself went to the city, which is in the suburbs of economic hub Tel Aviv near the Ben Gurion airport, to call for calm.

The city of 77,000 people, including 47,000 Jewish Israelis and 23,000 Arab Israelis, had been the scene of violent clashes on Monday, the local police confirmed.

But on Tuesday evening, as protests multiplied across East Jerusalem, the occupied West Bank and also Israeli Arab cities, the situation degenerated in Lod, police said.

"Wide-scale riots erupted by some of the Arab residents and endangering communities," the police said in a statement.

"Vehicle were burnt and damage caused to property." The government said reinforcements had been deployed after Israeli media reported that three synagogues and several businesses were set on fire in Lod.

"Sixteen border police platoons (have been) mobilised in areas in order to deal with the violence," the police added.

There were also violent scenes in Israeli Arab areas including Acre, Wadi Ara and Jisr A-Zarqa, where eight people were arrested, police said.

Weeks of tensions boiled over when Israeli riot police clashed with crowds of Palestinians at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque, on the last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Nightly clashes since then at the compound, which is holy to both Muslims and Jews, and elsewhere in east Jerusalem have left at least 700 Palestinians injured.

On Tuesday Palestinian militants Hamas and the Israeli army traded their heaviest fire for several years, with rockets fired at Tel Aviv after an Israeli strike destroyed a tower block in Gaza.

● Weeks of tensions boiled over when Israeli riot police clashed with crowds of Palestinians at Al Aqsa mosque.

Taliban seizes
Afghan district
before ceasefire

Kabul, May 12: The Taliban have seized a district from Afghan government forces on the outskirts of Kabul, ahead of a three-day ceasefire agreed between the warring sides, officials said.

Nerki district is around 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the Afghan capital in neighbouring Wardak province, which has long been used by militants as a gateway to reach Kabul and launch deadly attacks.

Violence has soared since May 1 when the US military began formally withdrawing its last remaining troops, as peace efforts between the Taliban and the Afghan government have stalled.

"Security and defence forces made a tactical retreat from the police headquarters of Nerki district," Interior Ministry spokesman Tareq Arian said.

Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban, said the insurgents had captured the area on Tuesday, adding that their fighters had seized the police headquarters and an army base.

The Defence Ministry on Wednesday said it would launch an offensive to win back the district, home to more than 60,000



Palestinians wave the Hamas flag during the funeral of Rashid Abu Ara, 16, who was killed during clashes with Israeli troops in village of Aqaba near Nablus, in the north of the occupied West Bank, on Wednesday. — AFP

Fear of 'war' looms over Israel

Tel Aviv, May 12: Relentless rocket fire and rioting in mixed Jewish-Arab towns fuelled growing fears on Wednesday that deadly violence between Israel and Palestinians could spiral into "full-scale war".

Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz vowed more attacks on Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups in Gaza to bring

"total, long-term quiet" before considering a ceasefire.

Gaza militants have launched more than 1,000 rockets since Monday, said Israel's army, which has carried out hundreds of air strikes on Islamist groups in the crowded coastal enclave of Gaza.

The most intense hostilities in seven years have

killed at least 53 people in Gaza, including 14 children, and six in Israel, including an Israeli soldier and one Indian national, since Monday.

Three Palestinians were killed in West Bank clashes. And at least 230 Palestinians and 100 Israelis have been wounded.

The bloodshed was triggered by weekend unrest

at Jerusalem's Al Aqsa mosque compound, which is sacred to both Muslims and Jews.

As world powers voiced growing alarm and the UN Security Council readied for another emergency meeting on the bloody crisis, the UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland warned that "we're escalating towards a full-scale war". — AFP

Hamas: Gaza City
commander killed

Gaza City (Gaza Strip), May 12: Militant group Hamas confirms that its Gaza City commander was killed in an Israeli airstrike, the highest-ranking militant killed since the 2014 war in the Palestinian territory.

Earlier, Israel's internal security agency said that a series of airstrikes had killed Bassem Issa and several other senior Hamas militants.

The army released a statement on Wednesday, saying that it carried out a complex and first-of-its-kind operation. Those targeted, it said, were a key part of the Hamas General Staff and considered close

to the head of the group's military wing.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel will use an iron fist if needed to stop widespread protests by Arab citizens that have resulted in injuries, arrests, and property damage.

Netanyahu said on Wednesday that Israel will stop the anarchy after deploying Border Police forces to calm unrest in recent days in the cities of Lod and Acre.

The mounting unrest comes after weeks of violence in Jerusalem and heavy fighting between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. — AP

India expresses concern
over Palestine violence

United Nations, May 12: Amid escalating tensions between Israel and Palestinian militants, India has expressed deep concern at clashes and violence in Jerusalem's Temple Mount as well as over evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods.

India also condemned rocket fire from Gaza, Tirumurti tweeted. India also urged restraint of all parties and to adhere to Security Council resolution 2334, which reaffirms that the

establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The resolution also reiterates its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard. — PTI

China, Russia using digital
tech to sabotage, steal: UK

London, May 12: It is important to win the "hearts and minds" of like-minded countries such as India to prevent countries like China and Russia from filling the multilateral vacuum and misusing digital technology to steal and sabotage.

UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab warned on Wednesday.

In a keynote speech at the CyberUK Conference 2021 organised by the UK's National Cyber Security

● WE HAVE got to win hearts and minds across the world for our positive vision of cyberspace as a free space, said Raab.

Centre (NCSC), the Cabinet minister issued a stark warning of all too real attacks on democracy as he announced GBP 22 million in new funding to support cyber capacity building in vulnerable

countries in Africa and the Indo-Pacific.

We invited ministers to join the (G7) meeting from India, Australia, South Korea, South Africa and Brunei, the current ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) chair; because we wanted to broaden the group of like-minded countries cooperating on cyber, Raab said.

We have got to win hearts and minds across the world for our positive vision of cyberspace as a

free space, open to all responsible users and there for the benefit of the whole world. And frankly, we've got to prevent China, Russia and others from filling the multilateral vacuum, he said.

The minister made reference to a clash between authoritarian and democratic states playing out in cyberspace at the moment, with malicious cyber-actors the "industrial-scale vandals of the 21st century". — PTI

RISKY | LIVING

Urban areas are always exposed to climate change disasters

Cities fail to adapt to climate change: Report

Paris, May 12: Hundreds of cities have no climate adaptation plans in place despite rising threats like floods, heatwaves and pollution, according to a report on Wednesday that said this could put 400 million people at risk across the world.

Fast-expanding urban areas are home to more than half the population of the planet and are increasingly exposed to climate-fuelled disasters, economic shocks and health crises as the world warms, with fears that vulnerable communities

will be hardest hit. CDP, a global non-profit that collects data disclosed by companies, cities, states and regions on environmental impact, analysed over 800 global cities and found that 43 percent do not yet have a plan to adapt to the challenges of climate change.

With more and more people drawn to live in urban areas, CDP estimated that by 2030 around 400 million people will be living in poorly prepared cities.

"The urgent need to act and have adaptation measures in place to keep the

● WITH MORE and more people drawn to live in urban areas, CDP estimated that by 2030 around 400 million people will be living in poorly prepared cities.

citizens safe, is increasing together with (the growing urban population)," said Mirjam Wolfrum, CDP's Policy Director for Europe.

She said that 93 per cent of the cities included in

the report were facing "significant threats", while 60 percent highlighted "substantive" water security issues.

The top five hazards are flash and surface flooding — including from rising sea levels — heat waves, rainstorms, extreme hot days and droughts, she said, adding that air pollution is also a major health concern.

Ongoing adaptation strategies in the municipalities that reported to CDP include tree planting (20 percent), flood mapping (18 percent) and

FAUCI SAYS
INDIA OPENED
UP TOO SOON

Washington, May 12: India made the "incorrect assumption" that it was finished with the Covid-19 pandemic and opened up prematurely that has left the country in such "dire straits", America's top infectious disease expert Dr Anthony Fauci has told senators.

India has been severely affected by the unprecedented second wave of the Coronavirus and hospitals in several states are reeling under the shortage of health workers, vaccines, oxygen, drugs and beds.

"The reason that India is in such dire straits now is that they had an original surge and made the incorrect assumption that they were finished with it, and what happened, they opened up prematurely and wind up having a surge right now that we're all very well aware of is extremely devastating," Fauci told the Senate Health, Education, Labour and Pensions Committee during a hearing on Tuesday on the Covid-19 response.

Dr Fauci, who is the Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is also the chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden.

Chairing the hearing, Senator Patty Murray said that the surge of Covid-19 that is devastating India is a painful reminder really that the US can't end the pandemic here until it ends it everywhere. "I'm glad the Biden administration is leading that global fight by rejoining the WHO and funding global vaccine efforts and committing to donate 60 million AstraZeneca vaccines to other countries by July 4," she said. — PTI



Boris Johnson

DESPITE COURT
ORDER, UK PM
IGNORES DEBTS

London, May 12: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose personal finances are under scrutiny after several scandals, has failed to pay a small debt nearly seven months after a court order, documents showed Wednesday.

An online database of civil county court judgments in England and Wales showed Johnson has yet to settle the debt of 535 (£757, 624 euros) following a ruling on October 26 last year.

The judgment, confirmed and first reported by the fortnightly satirical and news magazine Private Eye, does not reveal details about the nature of the debt or the creditor. Johnson is named as the debtor and lists his address as 10 Downing Street — the home of prime ministers since 1735 and one of the country's best-known residences.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

NZ 'keeper Watling to retire after WTC

Wellington: New Zealand wicket-keeper batsman BJ Watling on Wednesday announced that he will end his over-decade-long career in all forms of cricket after the World Test Championship final against India next month. New Zealand will also play two Tests against hosts England before the WTC final against India in Southampton from June 18. The 35-year-old has been a stalwart of the Test side since debuting in 2009 as an opener, going on to establish himself as a world-class keeper-batsman and claiming numerous records in his 73 Tests to date. The Northern Districts gloveman had been pondering his options for a while. "It's the right time," said Watling. The announcement of Watling's retirement was also expedited by his expected omission from the player contracts list. — PTI

Perera appointed Sri Lanka skipper

Colombo: Wicketkeeper-batsman Kusal Perera was on Wednesday named Sri Lanka's ODI captain with Kusal Mendis as his deputy for the away series against Bangladesh this month. Perera, who has represented Sri Lanka in 101 ODIs, 22 Tests and 47 T20Is, takes over the reins from Dimuth Karunaratne who has been dropped along with Angelo Mathews and Lahiru Thirimanne. — PTI

Squad: Kusal Perera (capt), Kusal Mendis (vice-capt), Danushka Gunathilaka, Dhananjaya Silva, Pathum Nissanka, Dasun Shanaka, Ashen Bandara, Wanindu Hasaranga, Isuru Udana, Akila Dananjaya, Niroshan Dickwella, Dushmantha Chameera, Ramesh Mendis, Asitha Fernando, Lakshan Sandakan, Chamika Karunaratne, Binura Fernando, Shiran Fernando.

Need competitions before Oly: Neeraj

Mumbai: The training has gone along just fine but Olympic-bound star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Wednesday said he is desperate for some competition ahead of the Tokyo Games given that two years have simply been "wasted" because of injury and the Covid-19 pandemic. The 23-year-old, who is being seen as a strong medal hope in Tokyo, said he has been coordinating with the Sports Authority of India to get some competition exposure. "I am trying to give my 100 per cent in training and have been training as I used to do before. The focus on training is good and it is happening well. But I am in need of competitions and we are trying for it," he said. "It has been over two years that I haven't played international competitions," added Neeraj. — PTI

RP Singh loses his father to Covid-19

New Delhi: Former India cricketer Rudra Pratap Singh lost his father to Covid-19 on Wednesday. The 35-year-old left-arm pacer from Uttar Pradesh informed about the death of his father Shiv Prasad Singh on twitter. "It is with deepest grief and sadness we inform the passing away of my father, Mr Shiv Prasad Singh. He left for his heavenly abode on 12th May after suffering from Covid. We request you to keep my beloved father in your thoughts and prayers. RIP Papa," he tweeted. RP Singh represented India in 14 Tests, 58 ODIs and 10 T20 Internationals before hanging his boots in September 2018. — PTI

Semenya held for reckless driving

Cape Town: Olympic champion Caster Semenya was sentenced to 50 hours of community service for speeding while driving in South Africa, prosecutors said on Wednesday. The runner was arrested last Thursday and released on \$35 bail, the National Prosecuting Authority said in a statement. Semenya appeared in court in the capital, Pretoria, on Friday and pleaded guilty to the offense, the NPA said. She faces a second court hearing in August when authorities will report back on whether she completed her community service. The 30-year-old Semenya is a two-time Olympic and three-time world champion over 800 meters whose career has been halted by contentious rules regulating the natural level of testosterone in female runners. — AP

ALL-ROUND VALUE

Bowling coach says Shardul has proven himself with the bat too

New Delhi, May 12: India bowling coach Bharat Arun on Wednesday said Shardul Thakur has what it takes to be the fast-bowling all-rounder that the team has needed ever since Hardik Pandya's back injury restricted his role with the ball. Pandya was not included in the Test team for the tour of England as he "was not in a position to bowl", according to the BCCI.

Arun said that while the selectors will have the last word on finding the next set of options, Thakur has certainly made a case for himself.

"It is more of a selectors' job to find them and then we can develop those all-rounders. Shardul has proved he can be an all-rounder. What he did in Australia was fabulous," Arun said.

Pandya last played Test cricket for India in 2018, during the tour of England. He has been battling a back injury since 2019 and recently, during the IPL, also picked up a shoulder niggle.

Arun agreed that finding someone as good as Pandya would be a very tough job.

"I wish you could just wish and develop bowlers like that. Hardik is an outstanding talent, but unfortunately, he had to undergo a back operation and then it's not very easy to come back after that," he said.

"He bowled against England, I thought he did a really good job. But, to sustain that we need to manage him well and build on his strength," he added.

The two-Test old Thakur was mighty impressive in the only longest format game he played in the away series against Australia.

— PTI



A file photo of India bowling coach Bharat Arun (left) with Shardul Thakur.

Dravid picked Aussie brains: Greg

Sydney, May 12: Rahul Dravid picked Australian brains to create a talent identification system better than Australia in India, the legendary Greg Chappell has said, lamenting the current lack of a similar structure in his own country that was "one of the best at developing young players."

"Chappell said that both India and England have

overtaken Australia as the best in recognising young talent and providing them a platform to succeed.

"India have got their act together and that's largely because Rahul Dravid has picked our brains, seen what we're doing and replicated it in India and with their much larger (population) base," Chappell told cricket.com.au.

Dravid is the Director of Cricket Operations at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru. He was the head coach of India A and India under-19 cricket teams between 2016 and 2019.

Chappell, one of the finest batsmen to have played the game, cautioned that talented Australian cricketers might find their careers at

KP SAYS ECB MAY CHANGE IPL STANCE

London, May 12: Kevin Pietersen believes that England's cricket board will relent if country's top players unanimously decide to participate in the currently-suspended Indian Premier League in case it resumes in September this year.

ECB's Director of Cricket Ashley Giles has indicated that their centrally contracted cricketers might not be available for the second phase of the IPL as they have international commitments which they need to honour.

"It's going to be interesting to watch how the ECB handle this issue around not allowing its best players to play IPL if it's rescheduled," Pietersen tweeted.

"When I went up against ENG, I was alone. This time, it's all their best branded players! If they stand together, they'll play IPL," said the former England captain.

— PTI

crossroads because of the domestic structure.

"Historically, we've been one of the best at developing young players and keeping them in the system, but I think that's changed in the last couple of years. I'm seeing a bunch of young players with great potential who are in limbo. That's unacceptable. We cannot afford to lose one player." — PTI

BARCA TITLE HOPES HANG BY A THREAD

Madrid, May 12: Lionel Messi scored a brilliant volley but Barcelona's title hopes could be over, with a 3-3 draw away at Levante on Tuesday giving Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid the chance to pull away at the top of La Liga.

Another slip could prove decisive given Atletico will move four points clear of Barca with two games left if they can win away at Real Sociedad on Wednesday. Real Madrid will edge two points ahead of Ronald Koeman's side if they win away on Thursday at Granada. There are certainly no guarantees in what has been a frenetic and thrilling title race in recent weeks, with all of Spain's four contenders stumbling down the final stretch. — AFP

UEFA BEGINS LEGAL BATTLE WITH REBELS

Lausanne, May 12: UEFA on Wednesday initiated disciplinary proceedings against Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus, the three clubs yet to renounce the aborted European Super League project.

European football's governing body has appointed disciplinary inspectors to conduct an investigation regarding a potential violation of UEFA rules by the clubs "in connection with the so-called 'Super League' project", it announced.

"Further information regarding this matter will be made available in due course." UEFA last week said it would take "appropriate action" against the three clubs who still support the proposed Super League, a competition that would guarantee its founding members involvement every season, instead of having to qualify. — AFP



A file photo of Saina Nehwal.

Saina, Srikanth to miss Games

New Delhi, May 12: Star Indian shuttlers Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth's chances of booking berths for Tokyo Olympics are all but over after the world body on Wednesday cancelled the last qualifying event in Singapore due to the coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

The tournament organisers Singapore Badminton Association (SBA) and Badminton World Federation (BWF) jointly agreed to cancel the Singapore Open scheduled for June 1-6.

The Singapore Open, a Super 500 event on the BWF World Tour, was the last tournament offering Race To Tokyo ranking points inside the Olympic qualifying window.

"In the interests of all players, tournament personnel and the local community's health and safety, the event has been cancelled. BWF can confirm the tournament will not be rescheduled," the BWF said in a statement.

"All attempts were made by the organisers and BWF to provide a safe tourna-

ment environment for all participants. However, rising Covid-19 cases globally led to complex challenges in managing inbound travel."

The BWF said it will issue a further statement. The chances of London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina and Srikanth qualifying for the Olympics had hinged on the Singapore Open after the Malaysian Open (May 25 to 30) was postponed on May 7.

After the postponement of the Malaysian Open, Badminton Association of India (BAI) had reached out to the world body, seeking clarity on the qualification scenario for its shuttlers. With Singapore suspending all flights from Covid-ravaged India, it was always going to be a difficult task for the Indian players, to travel to the country for the last qualifying event.

Indian shuttlers who have already made the cut for the Olympics include P. V. Sindhu, B. Sai Praneeth and the men's doubles pairing of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy. — PTI

OLYMPICS CANCELLATION DEMANDS GROW LOUDER

Tokyo, May 12: A full-page newspaper ad says Japanese will be "killed by politics" because the government is forcing them to endure the pandemic without vaccines. More than 300,000 people have signed a petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled. And a swimming star has faced pressure to drop out of the games. Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, meanwhile, has caused anger and confusion by repeatedly vowing to skeptical lawmakers that the Olympics will be safe, even as some hospitals struggle to find beds for the sick and dying and a state of emergency was extended on Wednesday to more places in Japan.

Public frustration has even targeted Japanese swimming star Rikako Ikee who tweeted recently that she has received messages that "pained her heart" by urging her to oppose the Olympics and not attend.

Meanwhile, Japan plans to vaccinate its Olympic athletes before the Games, a move that would place them ahead of the general population as the government faces pressure over a slow rollout. — AP

TT loses a legend and brave fighter

NEHA SURANA | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 12

The Indian table tennis fraternity on Wednesday expressed shock and sorrow at the demise of Arjuna awardee V. Chandrasekhar. Chandra, as he was fondly called, passed away due to Covid-19-related complications here on Wednesday. He was 63 and is survived by his wife and son.

A three-time national champion, Chandra was a stylish player with a huge fan following during his playing days. As a coach, Chandra played a key role in grooming champions such as S. Raman and G. Sathiyam. His academy in Chennai has produced many a quality player.

Sathiyam, who trained under Chandra for 14 years, said his demise felt like a personal loss. "My family was pretty close to him. I have a lot of memories which I will cherish forever. When I found out he was hospitalised, I kept calling to check on his health. He was fine for a few days but I think things went out of control in the past two days," said Sathiyam.

Veteran paddler Sharath Kamal said the sport had lost a legend. "It's a very



V. Chandrasekhar

tough loss for the fraternity. Had he continued playing, he would have brought more laurels to the country. But what happened to him was really unfortunate," said Sharath. Chandra's life turned upside down in 1984 after he underwent a botched knee surgery at a private hospital. His brain suffered damage, he lost control over his limbs and spent more than a month in a near-coma state. His valiant legal fight against the hospital made the headlines and he won the lawsuit later.

Raman hailed Chandra as a "fighter". "A multi-talented person before medical negligence reduced him to fight for survival. As a player he fought against the system. Remained a fighter till the very end, battling tooth and nail with Covid," said Raman, who coaches Sathiyam now.

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