

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | FRIDAY | 14 MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 38.8°C
Min: 23.5°C
RH: 35%
Rain: Trace

Forecast: Rain likely in evening. Max/Min temp. 39/27°C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttaraayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Tadiya full day
Star: Mrigasira full day
Variyam: 12 noon to 1.48 pm
Durmuham: 8.22 am to 9.13 am; 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HILARI CALENDAR

Shawwal 1, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.38 am

Zohar: 12.22 pm

Asar: 4.41 pm

Maghrib: 6.46 pm

Isha: 7.59 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.40 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.44 AM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 7.25 AM

MOONSET TODAY 8.56 PM

COUNTER POINT



It won't affect the common man... he is standing in the queue at vaccination centres!

SHORT TAKES

UPSC prelims put off to October 10

New Delhi: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Thursday postponed the civil services preliminary examination, scheduled to be held in June, to October 10 in view of the alarming COVID situation. The commission conducts civil services examination annually in three stages — preliminary, main and interview — to select officers of Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) among others.

Centre denies SC 'bench avoidance'

New Delhi: The Centre on Thursday strongly refuted in the SC the claims of an NGO that government is engaged in "bench avoidance" in a matter related to widening of the ambitious Chardham highway project. The strategic 900-km Char Dham highway project aims to provide all-weather connectivity to four holy towns — Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath — in Uttarakhand. The claims that Centre is engaged in "bench avoidance" was raised by the NGO in the written submissions.

NHRC notice on corpses in Ganga

New Delhi: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, after receiving complaints about several bodies found floating in the Ganga river in the two states. "It (NHRC) has issued notices calling for action taken report." ■ Report on Page 4

Maha lockdown till June 1

Mumbai: The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced the extension of Covid induced restrictions till 7 am on June 1. Any person coming from anywhere in the country will have to carry a negative RT-PCR report to enter in Maharashtra by any mode of transport. Maharashtra on Thursday reported 42,582 new positive cases. ■ Report on Page 4

WORLD | 5

Oli set to become Nepal's PM again

SPORTS | 8

India remain No.1 in Test rankings

TABLOID

Female bashing is a reality

Id Mubarak



A boy tries on a new skull cap for Id-ul-Fitr on the last day of the holy month of Ramzan, at Charminar on Thursday. ■ Report on Page2
Deccan Chronicle wishes its readers Id Mubarak

15 more Covid patients die at top Goa hospital

Panaji, May 13: Fifteen more Covid-19 patients died at the Goa Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) in the early hours of Thursday, the state government told the Bombay High Court, two days after 26 coronavirus patients had succumbed at the same facility here. The Goa bench of the HC said state authorities told it some of the casualties may have taken place due to "logistical issues" related to connecting oxygen cylinders to the manifold (group of large gas cylinders) that resulted in interruption and drop in pressure in supply lines of

oxygen to patients. The HC observed that despite its order on providing medical oxygen to Covid-19 patients at the GMCH, there were 15 deaths during the dark hours of 2 am and 6 am in the government-run facility on Thursday. The bench was hearing a bunch of petitions on recent death of Covid-19 patients at the GMCH allegedly due to lack of medical oxygen. The HC said the Centre should ensure that the allotted quota of medical oxygen is made available at the earliest to Goa, which is reporting a very

high test positivity rate. The bench, consisting of Justices Nitin W. Sambre and M.S. Sonak, said despite their May 12 order, the court sadly recorded that even today (Thursday), it is reported that there were almost 40 Covid-19-related casualties in the GMCH. Out of these, around 15 took place between the dark hours of 2 am and 6 am, the court observed. On Wednesday, the HC had said the availability of medical oxygen for Covid-19 patients at the GMCH was grim, and asked the state government to take corrective steps. — PTI

50 EMPLOYEES OF BHARAT BIOTECH TEST POSITIVE

Hyderabad, May 13: Bharat Biotech's Joint Managing Director Suchitra Ella's tweet saying 50 of their employees tested positive for Covid received bouquets and ribbons from netizens with some saying Covaxin was saving lives while a few questioned as to why the staff were not vaccinated. Referring to comments by some political bosses over Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin supply issues, Ella on Wednesday tweeted "Quite disheartening to the teams to hear some states complaining about our intentions. 50 of our employees are off work due to covid, yet we continue to work under pandemic lockdowns 24x7 for U." Reacting to her tweet, a user wrote: "How come your 50 employees down with Covid? We're they not vaccinated? Also, why not hire more people on temporary basis?" Ella's tweet got 9,373 likes and was retweeted by 2,564 people (at 10.30 am on May 13). — PTI

No Tims for new Covid-19 patients

BALU PULIPAKA | DC HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Faced with a staff shortage and plagued by repeated problems with pressures in oxygen supply lines, which together have been resulting in at least three to four deaths — which doctors describe as avoidable if the management of the hospital was up to scratch — the Telangana Institute of Medical Sciences (Tims) has effectively shut the door on Covid-19 patients.

A senior hospital official confirmed on Thursday that admissions to the hospital were stopped, "Except in cases of patients with severe symptoms who might need intensive care," following instructions from the government. No other reason was provided for stopping of the admissions.

Incidentally, even as the admissions were stopped, the state health department's bed availability status website recorded at 4.30 pm on Thursday, show that as on 8 am, all

● A SENIOR hospital official confirmed on Thursday that admissions to the hospital were stopped.

● EXCEPT FOR cases of Covid patients with severe symptoms who need intensive care, no other will be allowed

137 ICU beds at Tims occupied, while 425 of its 843 oxygen beds were available, as were 207 ordinary beds out of 281.

It may be recalled that Tims lacks adequate staff, be it doctors, nurses, or patient care attenders, and that has been hampering services to patients, as reported by Deccan Chronicle on May 12 in the report '1 doc, 1 nurse, 1 patient care staff run Tims ICUs'. The hospital has also been facing repeated technical glitches in oxygen supply that has seen pressures drop for patients in ICUs on ventilators, that contributed to several of them losing their lives prematurely.

WAR | CLOUDS

10,000 people from Telangana, AP live in Israel on work visas

Telugus in Israel tense, kin worried

NARENDER PULLOOR | DC NIZAMABAD, MAY 13

Telugu people in Israel are in the grip of fear as clashes between Israel and Palestinians continued. Around 10,000 people from Telangana and Andhra Pradesh live in Israel.

Among these, around 1,000 people from undivided Nizamabad, Adilabad and Karimnagar districts are in Israel on work visas. The family members of the affected Telugus in Israel are worried over the



B. Maheshwar Goud

● EACH HOUSEHOLD has a safety bunker and people rushed in when sirens are blown by the Israeli authorities minutes before the rocket attacks

● MOST TELUGUS are working as caregivers in Israel.

safety of their beloved ones during the war-like situation. The kin of Telugus working there get in touch with them over video calls and social media apps. For the last three days, they

are constantly contacting these migrants to know of their well-being. After Gulf countries, the majority of unemployed youths from north Telangana districts have shown an interest to

work in Israel. They believe that working conditions and pay packages are more satisfactory in Israel than in the Gulf countries. As a result, for the last 10 years, youths from the two Telugu states thronged Israel for jobs. Speaking to Deccan Chronicle from Israel on Thursday night, Telangana-Israel Association working president Bommakanti Maheshwar Goud said they are safe in Israel. Each household has a safety bunker and people rushed in when sirens are

blown by the Israeli authorities minutes before the rocket attacks, he said. Maheshwar Goud said food and accommodation are available and they are doing their daily work as usual. "A rocket attack claimed the life of a Keralite nurse, Soumya, near our residence a day ago," he said.

Most Telugus there are working as caregivers. The Israel government takes utmost care for the safety and welfare of all citizens without any discrimination, he said.

CJI considering live telecast of apex court proceedings

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana said on Thursday that he was "actively considering" a proposal to allow the live telecast of Supreme Court proceedings given the court's experience of over a year of hearing cases through video conferencing.

However, he added that before going any further and initiating any "concrete steps" on this, he would seek the "general consensus" among his fellow Supreme Court judges.

"I plan to seek general consensus among my colleagues in the court on the live streaming of cases," he said.

The CJI also made it



Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana during a virtual meet to launch a mobile application to enable journalists to report virtual proceedings without visit the court. — PTI

clear that the live streaming of proceedings would be limited only to a few courts and that too on a trial basis.

Speaking at the launch of a mobile app to grant access to the media to court proceedings without having to come physically

to the Supreme Court, to help in their job of reporting, Justice Ramana said the media faces great challenges and noted its importance in the dissemination of information.

■ Page 2: CJI recalls his reporter days

KTR OFFERS TO DONATE PLASMA FOR COVID CURE

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Industries minister K.T. Rama Rao on Thursday came forward to donate his plasma for therapy for Covid patients.

Asked if he and his father, Chief Minister K. Chandrababhan Rao, both of whom had recovered from Covid-19, would donate their plasma, the minister said; "I will be doing it soon."

■ Report on Page 2

200 cr jabs by December to boost India vax drive

Internationally approved vaccines to be allowed: Centre

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Facing criticism over the shortage of vaccines in several states, the Centre tried to clarify its position saying states have been given the flexibility to buy from vaccine manufacturers directly and can also take supplies from Centre. NitiAayog member Dr V.K. Paul said that said in the coming six months more than 200 crore doses of various vaccines will be available in the country to significantly boost the vaccination drive as the Covid-19 virus has started spreading to rural areas now.

"Production of vaccines in India is being ramped up due to which more than 200 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccines will be available between August to December this year," Dr Paul said.

These would include 75 crore of AstraZeneca's vaccine produced in India by Serum Institute of India, 55 crore doses of Covaxin made by Bharat Biotech, 30 crore doses of the shot developed by India's Biological E (which is in Phase 3 of trials), 20 crore doses of Novavax from Serum Institute, 15.6 crore doses of Sputnik V, 10 crore doses of Bharat Biotech's single-dose nasal vaccine, 5 crore from Zydyus Cadila (in Phase 3 trial stage and due to apply for license soon), and 6 crore doses of Gennova vaccine.

He added that by the first quarter of the next year, the number is likely to be 300 crore. Dr Paul said a consignment of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine has arrived in India and is expected to be available in the market from next week.

"Any vaccine that is approved by FDA (US Food and Drug Administration), WHO can come to India. Import licence will be granted within one-two days. No import license is pending. We are also pursuing Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson for their vaccines at a very high diplomatic level and

Gap for Covishield extended to 16 wks

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 13

In a decision that signals the acute shortage of Covid-19 vaccinations, the Centre on Thursday increased the gap between the two doses of Covishield from existing six-eight weeks to 12-16 weeks. There is no change in the gap between the other vaccine, Covaxin. The decision comes amid a huge rush among people to get vaccinated to escape the harsh effects of Covid-19.

"This is the second time the gap between the two doses of Covishield has been increased after it was earlier permitted with four-eight weeks' of spacing. India on Thursday recorded about 3.63 lakh new cases of Covid-19 and 4,120 deaths due to it. The decision for higher spacing between two shots comes amid speculation that it has been done in

view of shortage of the vaccines. However, the Union health ministry said the decision to increase time was based on the recommendations of the Covid-19 Working Group and was a "completely science-based decision". This Working group has also said that those who test positive for Covid-19 should not go for vaccination for six months after recovery.

Adar Poonawalla, the CEO of SSI, was quoted in reports as saying that the longer gap between jabs is "beneficial both from the efficacy and the immunogenicity standpoint."

"This is a very good move because this is based on data that the government received on the basis of which they made a good scientific decision to increase the gap," Mr Poonawalla said.

■ Page 2: More data in coming days: ICMR

COVAXIN TECH TO BE TRANSFERRED TO MORE FIRMS

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Under pressure from several states to increase the production of the two vaccines available in India, the Centre on Thursday said it is ready to allow private companies to manufacture the country's indigenous vaccine, Covaxin.

Covaxin is jointly developed by ICMR and Bharat Biotech and is currently being produced by Bharat Biotech. The government has now engaged five Public Sector Undertakings to help increase the production of Covaxin. Since under this vaccine, live virus is inactivated, any company making it must have labs that meet all the requirements of Bio-Safety Lab level 3. The Covishield vaccine is developed by Oxford University and produced by AstraZenca and Serum Institute of India.

The patent for the vaccine is not with India.

"While people are welcome to make Covaxin there is only one problem with the technology platform. The company making this vaccine must have Bio-Safety Lab level 3 to ensure bio safety of the virus. We give an open invitation to companies who want to produce as per our norms."

■ Page 2: Jagan asked for tech transfer

18 JUMBOS DIE IN LIGHTNING STRIKE IN ASSAM DISTRICT

Guwahati, May 13: Eighteen elephants died in lightning strikes at a forest in Nagaon district of Assam, a senior Forest Department official said on Thursday.

The incident happened on Wednesday night at a hill in the Kundoli proposed reserve forest in the Kathiatoli range, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Amit Sahay said.

"The area is very remote and our team could reach there on Thursday afternoon. It was found that carcasses were lying in two groups. Fourteen were lying atop the hill and four were found at the bottom of the hill," he said.

The preliminary investigation found that the jumbos were killed due to electrocution caused by lightning last night, but the exact reason will be known only after post-mortem, which will be done on Friday, Sahay said. — PTI



An elephant that was stuck by lightning near Bamuni Hills in Kondoli, Nagaon district, on Thursday. — PTI

IN BRIEF

Postal dept revises timings

Hyderabad: The postal department has revised its timings for postal services during the lockdown. The senior superintendent of post offices, Hyderabad South East, stated that head post offices and bigger offices will function between 8 am and 12 noon, while all other post offices will function between 8 am and 10 am. Services like delivery of articles, Aasra pension payments will be continued as earlier. The public has been requested to avail of services accordingly duly following all Covid precautions.

IN 71K TESTS, 4,693 FOUND COVID POSITIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

The state recorded 4,693 new cases of Covid-19 and 33 deaths in the state on Thursday, taking the overall caseload to 5,16,404 and the toll to 2,867. A total of 71,221 samples were tested during the day.

The recovery rate was put at 88 per cent by the state health department bulletin, and the case fatality rate at 0.5 per cent. It said 56,917 persons are being treated in home and institutional care and isolation.

New cases in the GHMC area were 734. Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy districts recorded 296 each, Medchal Malkajgiri 285, Karimnagar 209, Khammam 198, Warangal Rural 189, Vikarabad 179, Warangal Urban 161, Nagarkurnool 156, Mancherial 130, Mahbubnagar 122, Bhadrachari Kothagudem 118 and Mahbubabad district recorded 112 cases.

The government has set up 14 micro-containment zones in Hyderabad, Komaram Bheem 13, Jogulamba Gadwal 11, Siddipet 13, Warangal Urban 14 and Nirmal nine. There are 5,629 beds available in government centres for Covid 19 care, the department said.

GOV. SUGGESTS COMMUNITY ISOLATION UNITS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan has called on residential welfare associations in colonies and apartment complexes to start their own Covid-19 isolation centres to help those from their areas who test positive.

"Community isolation centres can be of help to those who are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic," she said. She was speaking at the Raj Bhavan on Thursday after inaugurating one such facility set up by the Art of Living Foundation. She said medical professionals were under tremendous pressure and if those suffering from serious symptoms are to be provided the care they need, those who do not require hospitalization can be attended to in isolation centres.

"Such centres will also work as micro-containment zones," she said.

Prominent nephrologist and the Governor's husband, Dr P. Soundararajan said that if pressure on the healthcare system has to be reduced, then people must follow safety protocols.

TRAIN WITH O2 CONTAINERS REACHES CITY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

The first train with containerised liquid oxygen tanks carrying 160 tonnes of the life-saving gas arrived at the Sanathnagar goods complex here from Angul in Odisha on a special train on Thursday.

South Central Railway said transportation of the liquid medical oxygen in free-standing containerised cryogenic tankers helped in faster transportation, compared to the lorry-mounted tanks of similar nature.

The container tanks can be transported faster as they have better height clearance to pass more easily from under bridges.

However, as liquid medical oxygen is a cryogenic — or supercooled — cargo, transportation of the tankers by the railways is done taking into consideration limitations with regard to maximum speed at which it can be carried, maximum acceleration and deceleration.



People shop for Id-ul-Fitr on the last day of the Holy month of Ramzan before the lockdown at 10 am at Charminar on Thursday. Many felt that the lockdown time should have been extended on the eve of Id. — S. SURENDER REDDY

Id on Friday, a rare joy

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

With Id-ul-Fitr celebrations falling on Friday, the Id prayers in the morning are coinciding with the Juma prayer, another Sunnah obligatory prayer for Muslims.

The Muslims of Telangana will miss the rare chance of attending two prayers on a single day due to the ban on congregational prayers during the lockdown period to contain the spread of

Covid-19.

Juma is also considered as Id. If Id falls on Friday, there will be two sermons and two congregational prayers, one of the Id and the second of Juma.

On Juma and Id prayers, Imam delivers a sermon. On Juma, the sermon is delivered before the special prayer while on the eve of Id, the sermon is delivered after the special prayer.

What does Islam say about performing Id and Juma prayers on the same

● **THE MUSLIMS** of Telangana will miss the rare chance of attending two prayers on a single day due to the ban on congregational prayers during the lockdown period to contain the spread of Covid-19.

day? While some Islamic scholars say Muslims are not required to perform both Id and Juma prayers and "performing only Id prayer is enough", others

say both can be performed on the same day.

A large number of faithful usually perform two congregational prayers, Id and Juma, while those who opt to skip the congregational prayer of Juma on the eve of Id just perform Zuhur (noon) prayer in place of Juma.

This time, both will miss the congregational prayers and the sermons too, as the government has banned the congregational prayers in the wake of a surge in Covid-19.

MORE DATA ON COVISHIELD IN COMING DAYS: ICMR

FROM PAGE 1

"Based on the available real-life new evidences that have come from Oxford, the Covid-19 Working Group agreed to increase the dosing interval to 12-16 weeks between two doses of Covishield vaccine. No change in interval of Covaxin vaccine doses was recommended," Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) chief Dr Balram Bhargava said.

The ICMR chief further added that in the coming days more scientific data in this regard will be presented.

NitiAayog member Dr V.K. Paul underlined there was no pressure from any side to increase the gaps.

"It was done in good faith without any pressure with the sole purpose of providing protection cover to the people of India.

It was felt that otherwise breakthrough infections will increase. Reviewing the vaccine doses is a constant and dynamic process.

Several other countries are doing it. The United Kingdom and the World Health Organisation have already increased space between Covishield and other vaccines like Pfizer, but many countries did not change the vaccination pattern.

We have taken a scientific decision," Dr Paul explained giving out the details.

Sudden downpour disrupts power, lowers mercury

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Rain coupled with strong winds lashed the city through Wednesday night. It brought the temperature down while strong gales disrupted power supply, forcing many to take to their social media pages to explain the scenes via texts, pictures and videos.

Several tweets saw people tagging the Telangana state southern power distribution company Ltd (TSSPDCL).

One of them, Fouzia, said: "I am a resident of Bhagyalakshmi Colony... power cut since midnight... called electricity department several times... still electricity not restored... facing too much difficulty, no water, a day before Eid festival we are forced to go through these hassles (sic)"

There were those who said the discom showed a complete lack of empathy when people are already plagued by the pandemic. "So many people are in distress. Still these engineers have no sense of duty or urgency. Even villages in neighbouring states have better power supply than Hyderabad. Shame on this organisation. Can't even handle 10 minutes of rain. Worst infrastructure(sic)," said Tejeshwar.

Power disruption was the main grouse that people have aired. Many said

a brief shower often paralysed the power supply to the entire city. According to discom officials, there are 2,700 11-KV feeders in the GHMC area.

On Wednesday night, there was disruption in a few feeders between 12.20 am and 02.10 am.

In the discom's central circle, 27 feeders covering the areas of Indira park, Tolichowki, Gudimalkapur, Golconda, Gohnaka, Nampally and ASR Raju Nagar were damaged.

In the Banjara Hills circle, there were 14 feeders that faced problems. There were four feeders in the Secunderabad Circle, 12 feeders in the South Circle, and there were also other isolated power outage incidents in areas like Lanco hills, R a j e n d r a n a g a r, Almasguda, Mohan Nagar, and Vanastalipuram.

"By 3.40am all 11-KV feeders were charged, except for the Narayanamma College feeder, due to cable damage. This feeder was also normalised by 9am," an official from the discom said.

According to the weather office, the rain would continue for the next three days. A weather advisory has been issued. The IMD said: "Thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusty winds (30-40 KMPH) are very likely to occur at isolated places in all the districts of Telangana."

Pollution levels yet to fall this lockdown

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

While air pollution levels dropped majorly during the lockdown last year, the same has not happened during the 10-day lockdown in the state this year.

In 2020, when Covid-19 was peaking and the Central government imposed a nationwide lockdown, the city had performed well in terms of pollution reduction. Data available with the state Pollution Control Board provided a clear picture of the decline within a couple of weeks.

"Last year, there was more time for the pollutants to fall. The lockdown had ensured that there is no vehicle movement and no pollution from factories," a senior scientist from the board said.

However, this year, the

air pollution levels saw very little improvement. Experts say it is too early for the pollution to come down.

"The pollution levels in the city are normal. Because of the recent rain, the pollution levels in the city did not rise. Rain disperses the pollutants in the air. However, the drop is not very significant," he added.

Particulate matter (PM) 2.5 micrograms in thickness, which was 28.53 micrograms per metric cube in the Bolaram industrial development area on May 11, decreased to 22.41 micrograms per metric cube on Thursday, he said.

The carbon monoxide levels in ICRISAT, Patancheru were 0.27 micrograms per metric cube on May 11, but dropped to 0.18 micrograms per metric cube, he added.

Governor extends Id-ul-Fitr greetings

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan on Thursday extended warm greetings and good wishes to Muslims on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr. In her message, the Governor said, "The noble ideals of self-discipline, generosity, compassion, and univer-

sal brotherhood associated with this holy festival are in fact very essential to combat the pandemic Covid-19."

"I appeal to all to celebrate this festival in a safe and healthy manner by duly following the Covid-appropriate behaviour and adhering to all other preventive norms," she said.

MAN ARRESTED FOR SERIAL RAPE, THEFT

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

A man accused in a series of rapes in the city was arrested by a CCS LB Nagar team and Hayathnagar police on Thursday. The accused used to target victims at toddy compounds.

Officials recovered 90 grams of gold, cash and a scooter along with a phone, all worth ₹3.95 lakh, from his possession. The accused, as Hussain Khan, 46, was a vegetable vendor residing near Narapally of Ghatkesar, police said.

"He confessed to his involvement in ten cases of cheating, rape and theft in Rachakonda area from November. He was previously involved in nine cases of theft and rape in Rachakonda and Hyderabad commissionerate from 2005 till 2016, after which the Gopalapuram police detained him under the Preventive Detention Act at Cherlapally jail for one year," explained police commissioner of Rachakonda, Mahesh Bhagwat.

The official said that Khan used to go to toddy compounds, where he would sweet-talk women to have a physical relationship with him and offering money.

"He took them to isolated areas, forced the victims to leave their valuables in his scooter and allegedly raped them," Bhagwat said.

KING KOTI DOCS HIT BY COVID, NO STIPEND

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 13

Some 100-odd senior residents working at King Koti Hospital have not been paid their stipends from February. A dozen of them are now suffering from Covid 19 and not able to report to work.

A senior resident on condition of anonymity says, "How are we to work? What is the motivation? We are seeking our stipend that has not been paid. Many of us are now suffering from the disease and need to take help from family."

The senior residents say no one is listening to them despite the several representations. There are only assurances.

The Junior Doctors Association states that infected family members of healthcare workers are also not getting a bed in Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (Nims).

The JUDA has urged the government to increase the bed capacity at Nims and offer free treatment to doctors' families.

SITUATION STABILISING, STAY ALERT AGAINST COVID: TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 13

The health department on Thursday advised people not to let their guard down in the Covid19 context and stressed that the "situation is slowly stabilising" in Telangana state.

"Over the last two days of the lockdown, it is being noticed that people are crowding around during the relaxation hours and not wearing masks properly. This is seen at shops, in super markets and even at wine shops. Such behaviour might not help in controlling the spread of the disease and cases," health director Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said. The government, he said, will take strict action against those not wearing masks and also forming crowds. "There is a general trend over the past few days of a lesser number of people approaching hospitals for admission and for treatment. This is a sign that the current second wave might be coming under control," he said.

TWITTER | CHAT

Minister says government would work towards reining in private hospitals

Covid-19 warrior KTR says he will donate plasma

N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Industries minister K.T. Rama Rao on Thursday came forward to donate his plasma for therapy for Covid-19 patients.

Asked if he and his father, Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, both of whom had recovered from Covid-19, would donate their plasma, the minister said; "I will be doing it soon." He was replying to a question during #AskKTR, an interaction session he held with netizens on Twitter on Thursday.

On the question of chil-

dren who had lost both their parents to Covid, the minister assured that they would be provided help from the government.

Rama Rao said the government would work towards reining in private hospitals from charging exorbitant prices for Covid-19 treatment. It was brought to the notice of the minister that the state government had issued an order fixing the prices for treatment in private hospitals but had not been taking any action against the private hospitals violating the orders and charging patients exorbitantly. "We will certainly act," the



minister replied.

The minister was flooded with requests to include the treatment of Covid-19 under Aarogyasri and some even posted pictures of news reports of the government expressing its

intent to do so. All that the minister could say was, "I will bring it to the notice of the Chief Minister."

With regard to shortage of vaccine, the minister explained that 85 per cent of the vaccine produced in the country was procured by the Centre for re-distribution among the states, which are competing to buy the remaining stock. "We have capacity to vaccinate nine lakh people every day but the problem is shortage of supply," he said. Rama Rao welcomed a suggestion made by a netizen that the Centre should allow more companies to manufacture the

Covid-19 vaccines. On the Opposition criticising the government for its decision to invite global tenders to procure vaccine, the minister said it would not be proper to politicise the pandemic. "I leave it to their wisdom," he said. The minister also cautioned people against self-medication. Asked to give tips on coping with Covid-19 and the best practices he followed, Rama Rao told people to stick to the doctor's advice and not to follow messages shared on WhatsApp and avoid watching news channels. He stressed on staying strong, both physically

and mentally. When the overcrowding in Charminar and other places defeating the purpose of the lockdown was brought to his notice, the minister pointed out that there was a four-hour relaxation.

On his health condition after he was positive, Rama Rao said he had low to high-grade fever continuously for a week and developed lung infection. "Controlling blood sugar and hypertension was also a challenge as I am a diabetic. Just followed doctors' instructions. Though I feel weak now, I am almost back to normal."

IN BRIEF

ITC TO DELIVER O2 TO KHAMMAM HOSPITALS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, MAY 13

Problems pertaining to oxygen across hospitals in the district appear to be heading for a solution.

ITC, which produces paper boards in Sarapaka in Bhadrachalam district, has agreed to give five tonnes of medicated oxygen to the hospitals every day. Minister for transport Puvvada Ajay Kumar said that a tanker will go to Sarapaka and carry oxygen every day. He said that government and private hospitals treating Covid-19 patients would be given oxygen.

He said that the government was keeping a tab on private hospitals that are charging exorbitant amounts from patients.

"We will not hesitate to take stern action against hospitals that violate government guidelines with regard to charges. The taskforce committee working on the issues should watch the supply of remdesivir injections and other essential medicines," he said. He said that the taskforce should file cases if they found any lapses in private hospitals.

LOCKDOWN VIOLATORS TO BE PUNISHED

DC CORRESPONDENT
BHADRACHALAM, MAY 13

Dummugudem circle inspector N. Venkateswarlu said that police will take stringent action against persons, who have tested Covid-19 positive and keep moving outside without completing the 14-day quarantine period.

He said that the virus will spread fast when such people come out of their houses.

"It is unsafe to the patients and people around them," he said, adding that the second wave is spreading fast and it is the duty of every individual to follow lockdown guidelines.

He said that they had booked six cases in Dummugudem mandal against lockdown violators, including for moving after the time limit and keeping their shops open. Two cases each were in Nadikudi and Thurubaka villages and one each in Seetaramapuram and Reguballi villages.

CHENNAMNENI DONATES 15 O2 CONCENTRATORS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 13

The new area hospital in Vemulawada on Thursday received 15 German oxygen concentrators from Vemulawada legislator, Chennamneni Ramesh.

They were handed over to district collector, D. Krishna Bhaskar at the hospital.

It may be recalled that IT minister, K.T. Rama Rao during his recent visit to the temple town had urged authorities to bring the hospital for public service by arranging all required equipment and infrastructure facilities in view of the rapid spread of Covid second wave.

The MLA said in a statement that as a special Covid ward was to be established in the hospital, the 15 modern and advanced oxygen concentrators will be useful for poor corona patients.

CPM CONDEMNS CASE AGAINST PARTY LEADER

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MAY 13

CPM state secretariat member Pothineni Sudarshan Rao condemned police cases filed against the party's Two Town secretary Y. Vikram on allegations of posting pictures in social media beside the defective construction of the bus stand.

Sudarshan, who visited the bus stand, along with party district secretary Nunna Nageswara Rao, said that the police filed a case under IPC Sec. 353.

Surprise check



Karimnagar MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar inspects the government hospital in Karimnagar on Thursday.

— DC

No dearth of remdesivir, O2 in TS, says Gangula

State government is striving hard to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 13

There is no shortage of remdesivir injections and oxygen in the government hospital but it is the responsibility of officials to prevent their black-marketing, said minister for Backward Class welfare Gangula Kamalakara.

He was conducting a review meeting at the collectorate here on Thursday.

Kamalakara said that the state government is striving hard to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus by regularly monitoring the medical facilities that are being provided to corona patients in hospitals and also those in home isolation.

At present there are 11,523 active cases in the district, of which around 9,911 are confined to home isolation. So far, 2,18,463 people have been vaccinated, across the district.

Around 776 medical teams conducted a fever survey in around 2.6 lakh households and handed

over medical kits to about 60,000 people, he informed.

With an oxygen plant established within the premises of the government hospital, and a good stock of cylinders, there is no shortage of oxygen in the district, he averred.

He directed the collector to deploy special task force teams for keeping track of the number of remdesivir injections and emergency medicines that have been allotted to hospitals, and, more importantly, how they were using the stock. He wanted the entire updated information on the dashboard.

The government has taken the initiative to reduce the price of CT scan by speaking to private diagnostic centres and fixed the price to ₹2,000 in government and private hospitals and diagnostic centres.

A committee will be established soon and it will constantly supervise the functioning of the 31 private hospitals in the district, including the registration charges and cost

● Around 776 medical teams conducted a fever survey in around 2.6 lakh households and handed over medical kits to about 60,000 people

● The government has taken the initiative to reduce the price of CT scan by speaking to private diagnostic centres and fixed the price to ₹2,000 in government and private hospitals and diagnostic centres.

of medicines besides tracking down blood bank mafia and black marketers.

MLAs Rasamayi Balakrishnan, Sunke Ravi Shankar, MLCs Naradasu Laxman Rao and T. Jeevan Reddy, district collector K. Shashanka and Kamalasan Reddy, Mayor Y. Sunil Rao, DM&HO Dr Sujatha, government main hospitals superintendent Dr Rathnamala and IMA president Vasantha Rao were present on the occasion.

4 held for selling remdesivir in black

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 13

Task Force police nabbed four persons, who were allegedly selling remdesivir injections in the black market at Kisannagar here on Thursday.

They were taking advantage of the critical situation caused by the dearth of remdesivir injections that are crucial for certain categories of Coronavirus patients.

On receiving complaints that lab technicians, anaesthetists, receptionists and drivers working in various hospitals were selling remdesivir injections at exorbitant prices, police commissioner V.B. Kamalasan Reddy deployed a special task force team to keep a check on black marketing of the

injection.

Task Force inspectors Mallaiah and Srujan Reddy, Three Town inspector Damodar, ASI Narasaiiah and others conducted raids and nabbed the four persons red-handed when they were selling the injections at an apartment in Kisannagar. The accused were identified as Laudya Anjani Kumar (Saidapur mandal), Choppari Gopichand (Kothapally mandal), Gajjala Shyam (Choppadandi mandal) and local resident Gantala Ugendar. The police seized seven remdesivir injections, ₹4,500 cash and four mobile phones from their possession.

Meanwhile, Kamalasan Reddy appealed to the people to bring to their notice whenever they come across anyone selling the injection at higher prices.

GWMC PROVIDES FREE MEALS TO SANITATION STAFF

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, MAY 13

In a bid to ensure the sanitation staff, who work hard to keep the city clean, do not face difficulties while at work during the lockdown, the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) set up 20 centres where the workers are served free meals every day.

Government Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar and GWMC Mayor Gundu Sudharani launched the programme set up at the GWMC headquarters on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Mayor Sudharani said that steps were being taken to provide meals to about 200 workers at each of the 20 centres across the tricity.

"Asha workers along with sanitation staff can also utilise this opportunity. A special bus facility has also been arranged for staff attending duties from the merged villages," she said.

Chief Whip Vinay Bhaskar said the state government was working towards the welfare of the employees along with providing several public welfare programmes and it was gratifying to set up a meals facility for workers during the lockdown.

Centre extending all help to TS: Bandi

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 13

The Union government is ready to extend all help to the state government, if it submits details about the exact number of positive cases and deaths, said BJP state chief and Karimnagar MP, Bandi Sanjay Kumar.

After inspecting the government main hospital here on Thursday, Sanjay Kumar urged health officials to suitably maintain the Covid ward and ensure quality treatment to corona patients, who were undergoing treatment.

Later, he went around the PSA oxygen plant that was established recently with central funds and also enquired about the plant's functioning.

Last year, the Centre sanctioned five oxygen plants in the state, including one at Karimnagar. The Union government is supporting the state by regular supply of remdesivir injections, oxygen and other required medical equipment and medicines, he said.

Meanwhile, the hospital staff told him that due to lack of sufficient staff, their work-load had increased and they were finding it tough to discharge their duties. In a swift reaction, the BJP leader asked health officials to immediately appoint at least 20 mem-

● Seeks exact number of Covid cases, deaths

● He pointed out that staff crunch is a big issue in many hospitals. Even though the state government has issued notification for filling 50,000 vacant posts in health department on a three-month contract, the response has been less than encouraging.

bers on a temporary basis and assured three months advance salary to those willing to offer better services when hired on a temporary basis.

He pointed out that staff crunch is a big issue in many hospitals. Even though the state government has issued notification for filling 50,000 vacant posts in health department on a three-month contract, the response has been less than encouraging. He said the government must take immediate steps to fill up vacant posts on a permanent basis, given the prevailing situation.

Sanjay Kumar urged the state government to provide all facilities to frontline warriors, who are working hard while risking their own lives. He sought incentives to doctors, health staff, paramedical staff and police personnel.



Gandhi road wears a deserted look due to lockdown in Karimnagar on Thursday.

— DC

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SHORT TAKES

SALARY OF K'TAKA MINISTERS FOR COVID RELIEF FUND

Bengaluru, May 13: The Karnataka government has ordered depositing one-year salary of State Ministers in the Covid Relief Fund.

This was decided by the State Cabinet a few days ago.

The order was issued on May 11 and would come into effect retrospectively from May 1 for a year.

The order was given on the direction of Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa.

The State has been reporting 40,000-50,000 Covid infections daily resulting in about six lakh active cases.

This has led to shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, and essential drugs.

The government has imposed a lockdown-like restriction from May 10 to May 24 to contain the spread of the virus.

NAXAL COUPLE SURRENDERS FOR COVID TREATMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT RAIPUR, MAY 13

A Maoist couple, who tested positive for Coronavirus, surrendered in north Bastar district of Kanker in Chhattisgarh, police said on Thursday.

Arjun Tatti and his wife Laxmi Padda, members of Medki Local Operation Squad (LOS) functioning under north Bastar division of Maoists, surrendered before police in Kamdeta BSF camp under Koyelibeda in Kanker district late on Wednesday.

"The Naxal couple deserted their unit owing to illness and approached the police for medical treatment. Both of them tested positive for coronavirus and were admitted to Covid care hospital in Kanker for treatment", Bastar range inspector general of police Sunderraj P told this newspaper.

According to him, 40-50 Naxals in south Bastar have contracted the virus as per the inputs received by the police.

"Due to strict vigilance at interstate and inter district border areas by security forces, Naxals are not getting medicines and other logistic supply", he added.

Police intelligence suggested that several top Maoist leaders of Bastar such as Rajesh, a divisional committee member and Sujata and Savitri, members of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of Maoists have contracted the virus.

"We have received inputs that several senior Maoist leaders have contracted Coronavirus", Mr Sunderraj said.

ODISHA URGES CENTRE TO GIVE 25L VAX DOSES

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO IDC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 13

Odisha health minister Naba Kishore Das on Thursday urged the Centre to immediately provide 25 lakh doses of Covid vaccines to expedite the ongoing inoculation that has been seriously hit due to inadequate supply of the life-saving injections.

"I urge the Union government to immediately provide at least 25 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccines so as to regularise the immunisation process. As many as 22 lakh people are awaiting the second dose of vaccine. In fact, I have already formally placed the demand before Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan during a discussion on the Covid situation on Wednesday," Mr Das said.

Other than the vaccines, Mr Das also demanded oxygen cylinders, Rapid Antigen Test kits, PPE kits and masks.

"We have enough oxygen but not cylinders and hence, we need 30,000 cylinders," he said. Mr Das informed that the Union health minister has assured him to take Odisha's demand seriously.

The Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan had on Wednesday held a meeting with health ministers of seven states and one Union Territory and reviewed the progress of the Covid-19 vaccination drive.

On Thursday, Odisha again crossed 10, 000 mark in single-day Covid spike with 10, 649 people testing positive for the contagious disease and 19 deaths. The fresh positive cases took the state's cumulative count to 57, 6297. Similarly, the cumulative death count climbed to 2,251.

Of the new cases, 5,965 infections were detected from quarantines centres while 4,684 were local contacts.



A critical Covid-19 patient being shifted to the Hallet Hospital in Kanpur, on Thursday.



People buy sweets and new clothes on the eve of Id-ul-Fitr at Jama Masjid market, in Sadar Bazar during Covid-19 lockdown in Gurugram, on Thursday.

NCP ALLEGES FRENCH CITIZENS IN INDIA GIVEN MODERNA VAX

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MAY 13

Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik has sought an explanation from the Centre claiming French citizens and their relatives are being given Moderna vaccine despite only three vaccines permitted in India. Why the Centre cannot procure the vaccine for the people of India if the French Embassy can, he asked.

"Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V are the 3 Vaccines that are permitted in India by our government. According to information received by me, the French Embassy in India has procured the vaccine @moderna_tx and is inoculating their citizens and their relatives at Navi Mumbai with the help of @ApolloHosMumbai," Mr Malik tweeted on Thursday.

"Question arises, how can a non-permitted vaccine be allowed to be administered? If they can get it, why can't Indian government get it for our citizens too. The government and the Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan must clarify," he added.

"While only three companies are allowed to vaccinate in India, are the French nationals being given the Moderna vaccine as a special case? Even the Indian relatives of these nationals have also been vaccinated with Moderna," said Mr Malik, who is a minority affairs minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra.

Commenting on his allegations, senior BJP leader Pravin Darekar accused him of creating a sensation. "Nawab Malik has the habit of blaming the Centre. The companies have made a provision for the embassy employees of that respective country. They are taking care of their citizens and employees," he said.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope demanded that the Union government float a single global tender of Covid vaccines on behalf of all the states to avoid "unhealthy competition".

NHRC issues notice over bodies in Ganga

52 bodies were found in Ujiyar, Kulhadia, Bharauli ghats

New Delhi, May 13: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, after receiving complaints about several bodies found floating in the Ganga river in the two states.

"It (NHRC) has issued notices to the chief secretaries of both the states and the secretary, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, today calling for action taken report within four weeks," its statement noted.

According to residents in Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh, at least 52 bodies were seen floating at the Ujiyar, Kulhadia and Bharauli ghats in the Narahi area. Similar

● **NHRC SAID** that it seems the public authorities have failed to take concentric efforts in educating the masses and checking the immersion of half-burnt or unburnt bodies into the Ganga.

reports of bodies floating in the Ganga have come from Bihar.

In its statement, the NHRC said that it seems the public authorities have failed to take concentric efforts in educating the masses and checking the immersion of half-burnt or unburnt bodies into the Ganga.

India has been badly hit by the second wave of coronavirus infections and cremation grounds

and burial grounds across the country have been overburdened.

The NHRC's statement said, "The practice of disposal of dead bodies in our sacred river Ganga is clearly in violation of guidelines of the National Mission for Clean Ganga project of the Ministry of Jal Shakti."

It said it received a complaint dated May 11, 2021, based on several media reports, wherein apprehensions were expressed that these bodies floating in the Ganga were of Covid-19 victims.

The complaint noted that the disposal bodies in such a manner may seriously affect all those persons who are dependent on the Ganga for their day-

to-day activities, the NHRC mentioned.

"It (complaint) further stated that even if these dead bodies were not of Covid victims, then such practice/incidents are shameful to the society as a whole as that amounts to violation of human rights of even deceased persons," the NHRC added.

India added 3,62,727 new coronavirus infections in a day taking the Covid-19 tally of cases to 2,37,03,665, while the death toll rose to 2,58,317 with 4,120 daily fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday. The active cases have increased to 37,10,525 comprising 15.65 per cent of the total infections. — PTI

BIHAR EXTENDS LOCKDOWN TILL MAY 25

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MAY 13

The Bihar government has extended the lockdown till May 25 to stop the surge in Covid - 19 cases in the state.

The decision was taken during a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday.

"The impact of lockdown in the state was reviewed during a meeting with ministers and officials. The positive effect of the lockdown is visible. Therefore, it has been decided to extend the lockdown in Bihar for the next ten days from May 16 to 25", tweeted chief minister Nitish Kumar after the meeting.

The lockdown was imposed in Bihar on May 4 after the Patna High Court stepped in and slammed the state government over its handling of the Covid-19 crisis. Bihar has been witnessing a surge in Covid cases. According to reports, the death toll went up to 3,503 on Wednesday after 74 people succumbed to the viral infection.

No entry in Maharastra without negative RT-PCR

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MAY 13

The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced the extension of Covid induced restrictions till 7am on June 1. Any person coming from anywhere in the country will have to carry a negative RT-PCR report to enter in Maharashtra by any mode of transport.

Maharashtra on Thursday reported 42,582 new positive cases taking the total number of active cases 5, 33,294. While 850 new deaths were reported on Thursday raising a total fatality in state 78,857. Maharashtra is among the states that account for 82.51 per cent of the total active cases in the country, officials said.

The state government order said that the restrictions will remain in force till June 1. "Any person entering the state of Maharashtra by any mode of transport will have to carry a negative RT-PCR test report, which will have to be issued from upto a maximum of 48 hours before the time of his entering into Maharashtra," the order added.

It also said that all restrictions enforced as per earlier orders for people arriving from places of sensitive origin will be applicable to anyone arriving from any part of the country into the state.

"In the case of cargo carriers, not more than two people (driver and cleaner/helper) may be allowed to travel in the same (those vehicles). If these cargo carriers are originating from outside the state (Maharashtra), these may be allowed to enter into the state with a negative RT-PCR test which will have to be issued from upto 48 hours before the time of entry into Maharashtra and which will be valid for seven days," the government order said.

The order also allowed the personnel engaged in airport and port services to use the local trains, mono rail and metro services. It also gave some relaxations to dairy industries. "Milk collection, transport and processing may be allowed without restrictions though its retail sale be allowed subject to restrictions imposed on shops dealing with essential items or

through home delivery," the order said.

The lockdown-like restrictions have been imposed in the state from April 5. The restrictions were further tightened on April 15 with Section 144 of the CrPc, banning assembly of five or more people, imposed in the entire state. However, even after a month, the Covid cases in some parts of the state are still increasing.

The state, which has consistently reported a high number of Covid infections and remains the worst affected state in the country due to the second wave of the pandemic, added 46,781 new cases on Wednesday and 816 related deaths. On Tuesday, the state reported 40,956 cases while on Monday, 37,236 new cases were logged by the state.

State health minister Rajesh Tope cautioned that some districts in the state have still been reporting high numbers of cases and therefore are a cause of concern for the government. "We need to focus on these districts more. The positivity rate is still not below 10 per cent".

UP: 14 docs resign over harassment

Unnao (UP), May 13: Fourteen doctors working at community and primary health centres in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao have tendered their resignation alleging misbehaviour and mental harassment by administration officers.

The doctors, however, assured that they will not let their Covid-related work be affected till talks are going on with the district magistrate and the chief medical officer over the resignations.

The fourteen doctors, who are in-charge of CHCs and PHCs here, submitted their resignation letters at the CMO office on Wednesday evening.

They also forwarded a copy of their resignation letters to the additional chief secretary (Health), director general (Health) and other senior officers.

"We will not fight under the banner of Provincial Medical Services (PMS) association. This is our

fight. The DM and CMO misbehave with us even after we have been working in limited resources in rural areas for the past one year. Instead of co-operation alleging misbehaviour and mental harassment by administration officers misbehave with us," Dr Sanjiv alleged.

"Our work is being reviewed by the sub divisional magistrate (SDM) and block development officer (BDO) level officers," he added.

The agitated doctors claimed that their salaries were also withheld several times.

However, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Ashutosh Kumar refuted all the claims and said all the doctors have returned to their work.

"We don't talk like that. We all will work together," Kumar said.

Meanwhile, the doctors said they will decide on the future course of action after meeting the chief medical officer and the district magistrate in the evening. — PTI

Cong. attacks PM on Covid-19 crisis

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 13

Congress on Thursday once again lashed out at the center over the Covid related issues in the country. In a tweet in Hindi Congress leader Mr. Rahul Gandhi said, "The prime minister is also missing, along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines."

situation in Uttar Pradesh is 'inhuman and criminal' and demanded a judicial probe headed by a High Court judge into the several instances of bodies found floating in the Ganga in many parts of the State.

She tweeted, "What is happening in U.P. is inhuman and criminal. The government is busy image building while people are suffering unimagnably. There must be an immediate judicial enquiry headed by a High Court judge into these events." She also accused the governments of under-reporting of Covid cases and deaths. She added, "Bodies are floating in the Ganga in Ballia and Ghazipur. Reports are coming in of mass burials on the banks of the river in Unnao. Official numbers from cities like Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Jhansi and Kanpur appear to be grossly under-reported."

● **RAHUL** said, Modi is also missing, along with vaccines, oxygen and medicines.

GREAT | MOVE

Aims to use state's resources and manpower to manage Coronavirus pandemic

C'garh govt suspends its 'Central vista' project

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, MAY 13

Amid mounting pressure by the Congress on the Union government to suspend the Central Vista project, Chhattisgarh government on Thursday announced that it was suspending all major projects, including the construction of a new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly and the official residence of chief minister in Nava Raipur.

The tenders for two projects worth Rs 363 crore for the construction of a new state legislative Assembly building have been cancelled with immediate effect by the Congress state government led by

chief minister Bhupesh Baghel.

To focus the state's resources and manpower in managing the raging Coronavirus pandemic, the state government has also decided to take stringent austerity measures while announcing free education and scholarships for children who lost their parents due to the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"Our citizens - our priority. Foundation stone for the construction of the new Assembly building, Raj Bhavan, chief minister's residence, residence of ministers and senior officials, and a new circuit house was laid before the start of Corona. Today, all these construction works

have been stopped in these times of crisis," Mr Baghel tweeted.

Chhattisgarh has 1,22,798 active Covid-19 cases, while the cumulative number of deaths in the state stands at 11,094, according to the Union health ministry.

"In view of the circumstances arising in the state due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Chhattisgarh government has stopped construction works of all major projects with immediate effect and also decided to take even more stringent measures for austerity," a press release issued by the Chhattisgarh government said.

Accordingly, ongoing works on construction of new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly, official

residences of chief ministers, other ministers and senior officers in Nava Raipur have been suspended, the press release said.

The foundation stone-laying ceremony for these projects was performed on November 25, 2019.

"The chief engineer of the Public Works Department has issued orders to the concerned contractors to stop the construction work of the new Raj Bhavan, new CM house, new houses of ministers and officers and new circuit house in Nava Raipur," the press release said.

The state government has instructed all the departments that, like the previous year, austerity should be exercised in the

financial year 2021.

Mr Baghel also announced that his government will provide free education and scholarship to children who lost their parents due to the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"The Chhattisgarh government will now bear the entire expenditure of the education of children who have lost their parents due to coronavirus during this financial year.

Also a scholarship of ₹500 per month will be given to such children studying from standard first to eighth and ₹1,000 per month for children from standard ninth to 12th," a separate press release issued by the state government said.



Police officers patrol as security beefed up on the eve of id-ul-Fitr, during Covid-induced curfew, in Bhopal on Thursday.

SHORT TAKES

LANKA: INDIAN FAMILY HELD FOR FLOUTING LAWS

Colombo: Four members of an Indian family, including two children, have been arrested for allegedly entering Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula illegally and violating the local immigration and the quarantine laws, police said on Thursday.

The family, which consists of a 61-year-old woman, her 34-year-old daughter and her two children, said they had entered Sri Lanka on May 6 with the help of fishermen.

Aijth Rohana, the deputy inspector general of police, said the members of the family were arrested at Gurunagar area in Jaffna for their illegal stay in the country and violating the immigration and quarantine laws.

They had arrived from India on May 6 on an Indian boat halfway and had travelled the rest of the way aboard a Sri Lankan fishing boat, Rohana said.

DEATH OF STUDENT IN CHINA TRIGGERS PROTEST

Taipei: It was a call no parent wants to receive. On Mother's Day, around 9 pm, a woman in Chengdu in southwestern China was told that her son, who she had dropped off at school just hours ago, had died. Distraught, she went to Chengdu No. 49 Middle School immediately, but could not even enter the school grounds, she wrote in a series of Twitter-like Weibo posts on Monday that were shared hundreds of thousands of times this week.

Her account disputing both the police and local government's account of her 16-year-old son's death has touched a nerve, becoming one of the most discussed topics on Chinese social media this week. One related hashtag #ChengduNo.49Middle# racked up more than 1.5 billion views alone on Weibo.

People online called for justice for the mother and questioned the actions of the school, police and local authorities. On Tuesday night, videos of a protest in front of the school circulated. People clutching white flowers shouted "the truth!"

S.TAIWAN LOSES POWER AFTER PLANT FAILURE

Taipei: An equipment failure caused an outage at a power plant in southern Taiwan on Thursday, triggering rolling blackouts across the island affecting millions of people.

The outage in Kaohsiung trapped at least one person in an elevator and disrupted a daily briefing being given by government officials on the island's pandemic situation. Taipower, the government-run electric company, launched the rolling blackouts at 3 pm and said emergency repairs were underway. The outages affected 8.46 million households, Taipower said.

In Yilan county, one person was trapped in an elevator, the government-backed Central News Agency said. In Hsinchu, 150,000 households lost power. In the southern city of Tainan, 14 districts were affected. President Tsai Ing-wen issued a statement saying that "everyone can rest assured" and that the government was handling the situation. She said an investigation would be conducted into the cause of the outage.

UK: ROYAL MAIL TO ISSUE STAMPS FOR PRINCE PHILIP

London: The UK's Royal Mail will issue a set of special stamps in memory of Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II who passed away aged 99 last month.

A sheet of four black and white stamps, which are now available to pre-order, show Britain's longest serving escort to a British monarch in different stages of his life. The first design features a portrait of the duke as a young man, taken by photographer Baron. The second depicts Prince Philip at the passing out parade of his son, Prince Andrew, at Dartmouth Naval College in Devon. Another stamp shows the duke at the Royal Windsor Horse Show. The final and most recent image is a portrait snapped by photographer Terry O'Neill.

"Throughout adulthood, the Duke of Edinburgh dedicated himself to the service of this country, the Commonwealth and to the many causes he was involved with," said Simon Thompson, chief executive of Royal Mail.

The stamps, officially on sale from June 24.

US vax beat strain found in India

Observation based on latest data about variant and three major vaccines approved in the US

Washington, May 13: Covid-19 vaccines approved by the United States like Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson have effectiveness against the B1617 variant of the virus that is predominant in India, which is experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of the pandemic, a top American health official said.

The observation is based on the latest data about the variant and the three major vaccines approved by the United States, said Dr Francis Collins, Director of National Institute of Science. "The data is coming in, and it looks very encouraging that the US-approved vaccines, the Pfizer, the Moderna, the J&J, do have effectiveness against this variant called B1617," Collins told the media.

"It's a little less effective in that case than some of the others, but it looks like it ought to be good enough to make Americans protected. And that's really a good thing to hear," he said in response to a question.

Early this week, the World Health Organisation classified the B1617 SARS-CoV-2 variant, which was first detected in India, as a variant of concern. The WHO said that evidence showed B1617 was more transmissible.

— PTI

INDIAN COVID-19 STRAIN REACHES LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas (US), May 13: The Las Vegas area has been added to places in Nevada where authorities have detected cases of a potentially worrisome strain of the Coronavirus first detected in India.

The Southern Nevada Health District reported on Tuesday that a woman in her 20s who had not travelled recently and was not vaccinated against Covid-19 tested positive for the variant subtype. She didn't require hospitalisation. A district spokeswoman said on Wednesday that there were no additional cases to report. Eight other cases of the variant were previously identified in northern Nevada, including four confirmed last week in the Reno area.

— AP



Joe Biden

BIDEN TO BEEF UP FEDERAL CYBERSECURITY

Richmond, May 13: President Joe Biden has signed an executive order meant to strengthen US cybersecurity defences in response to a series of headline-grabbing hacking incidents that highlight how vulnerable the country's public and private sectors are to high-tech spies and criminals operating from half a world away.

The order signed on Wednesday will require all federal agencies to use basic cybersecurity measures, like multi-factor authentication, and require new security standards for software makers that contract with the federal government. Officials are hoping to leverage the federal government's massive spending power to improve security across all types of software.

The order comes as the administration has been grappling with its response to a massive breach by Russia of federal agencies and ransomware attacks on private corporations. Hit by a cyberattack, the operator of a major US fuel pipeline was forced to shut down service.

— AP



Worshippers stand on circles marked on the ground to help people maintain social distancing during religious ceremonies at the Catholic shrine in Fatima, Portugal on Thursday. Due to Covid-19, the shrine has limited to 7,500 pilgrims that can be present during the celebrations of May 12 and 13.

— AP

US Cong. urges to boost aid to India

Washington, May 13: Fifty-seven US Congressmen have written to President Joe Biden, urging him to bolster America's Covid-19 assistance to India.

The sharp increase in cases has overwhelmed India's healthcare system. We must do our part to quell the virus everywhere it persists, the law-

makers said in a letter to Biden on Wednesday.

We are extremely concerned with regards to India's deadly Covid-19 second wave. India is now the epicenter of the Covid-19. Today, marked India's deadliest day, with 4,205 deaths reported, carrying the total number of confirmed deaths to more than 250,000, said the letter

initiated by Congressman Brad Sherman, the Democratic Chair of the Congressional India Caucus.

In the letter, the Congressmen relayed to the administration that India remains in need of additional medical equipment, supplies and other vital resources to emerge from this crisis.

They requested the

administration to provide oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, oxygen generator plants, cryogenic oxygen tanker/container, Remdesivir, Tocilizumab and ventilators/BiPAP to India.

It is also in the US interest that everyone in India be vaccinated, the Congressmen wrote.

— PTI

Oz signs deal for 25mn Moderna vax

Canberra, May 13: Australia has reached a supply agreement for 25 million doses of Moderna Covid-19 vaccines, the US-based biotechnology company and the prime minister said on Thursday.

The deal included 10 million doses of the vaccine against the ancestral strain to be delivered in

2021 and 15 million doses of an updated variant booster to be delivered in 2022, Moderna said in a statement.

The vaccines have yet to be approved by the Australian regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Pfizer and AstraZeneca are the only other Covid vaccines approved for use

in Australia. All three vaccines require two doses.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that he expected the first Moderna vaccines to arrive in Australia in the last three months of 2021. The 15 million booster doses would deal with possible future variants of the virus, he said.

We're now well into the

phase of dealing with what's coming next because the pandemic's not going anywhere, Morrison told *Perth Radio 6PR*.

Moderna vaccines would help Australia achieve its aim of inoculating all willing Australian adults within a population of 26 million by the end of 2021.

— AP

Italy fines Google 100 million euros

Rome, May 13: Italy's anti-trust authority said Thursday it had fined Google more than 100 million euros (\$120mn) for shutting out a rival's smartphone app offering recharging of electric vehicles.

The authority said Google, whose Android operating system and Google Play app store dominate the Italian market, had abused its market position by blocking an Enel X app for users of electric vehicles.

The regulator added it would require Google to make Enel X's app avail-

able on Android Auto, which mirrors features of an Android device, such as a smartphone, on a car dashboard screen.

The fine of 102,084,433.91 euros is for a violation of article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which regulates monopolies and issues involving restriction of competition.

Italy found Google did not allow Enel X Italia to develop an Android Auto-compatible version of its JuicePass app. JuicePass offers services relating to recharging electric vehicles.

— AFP

Nepal: Oli set to reclaim PM's post

Kathmandu, May 13: K.P. Sharma Oli was set to be reappointed as Nepal Prime Minister as the Opposition alliance of Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) on Thursday failed to muster majority support to form the next government.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 PM on Thursday after Oli lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday.

However, as the deadline which ended at 9.00 pm on



K.P. Sharma Oli

Thursday, the NC-Maoist Centre alliance has its hopes crashing down as disgruntled Nepal-Khanal faction of the ruling CPN-UML did not forward their resignation, which they had been claiming to do for long as a bargaining chip with embattled former prime minister Oli.

As the time accorded by the President gradually runs out and the deadline approaches, it can well be assumed that Oli is all set to make a comeback, emerging victorious in this Game of Thrones, as the country grapples with unprecedented rise in Covid-19 cases and corresponding fatalities as the second wave of the pandemic rages on, *The Himalayan Times* newspaper commented.

Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" held a meeting on Thursday at the former's residence at Budhanilkantha in the

outskirts of Kathmandu to discuss the formation of the new government.

Similarly, Prime Minister and chairman of ruling CPN-UML Oli and dissident leader of the party Madhav Kumar Nepal held a meeting in an attempt to make the last effort to patch up their differences.

After Prime Minister Oli withdrew action taken against four dissident leaders for working against the party, 28 lawmakers close to the dissident leader withdrew their decision to resign en masse from the House of Representatives, that would pave way for Deuba to stake a claim for the prime minister's post.

— PTI

COSMOS | DRAMA

Pre-flight training to be documented by Channel One of Russia

Russia to send crew to ISS for first space movie

Japanese billionaire to travel to ISS

Moscow, May 13: Russia's space agency said on Thursday it was sending an actress and a director to the International Space Station in October to make the first feature film in space.

"Filming will take place at the International Space Station. The start of the expedition is scheduled for October 5, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome on the Soyuz MS-19 manned transport spacecraft," Roscosmos said in a statement.

Actress Yulia Peresild, 36, and director Klim Shipenko, 37, will undergo special training, including tests on a centrifuge and flights in zero gravity, starting no later than 1 June.

Their pre-flight training will be documented by one of Russia's main TV channels, Channel One, which will also be involved in producing the film.

The film's working title is "Challenge" and will be in the genre of a "space drama", Roscosmos said, without providing details about the plot of the film or Peresild's role.

Roscosmos said in September the movie will aim to "popularise Russia's space activities, as well as glorify cosmonaut profession".

The film will be co-produced by Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Russia's space agency, with the ambition of making Russia the first country to shoot a film in space.

— AFP

Moscow, May 13: Japanese billionaire entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano will be the next tourists to travel to the International Space Station (ISS), Russia's space agency Roscosmos said Thursday.

Maezawa and Hirano will travel aboard a Russian "Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft that is scheduled for launch on December 8, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome" in Kazakhstan, the agency said in a statement.

Maezawa, 45, who made his fortune in online retail, also plans to partic-



Yusaku Maezawa

ipate in a 2023 mission around the moon aboard a Starship spacecraft of SpaceX, the Roscosmos rival of US billionaire

Elon Musk.

Maezawa and film producer Hirano, who will be documenting the mission, will begin pre-flight training in June at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star City, a closed town outside of Moscow, Roscosmos added.

It said that the flight will last 12 days and the crew will be led by Cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

"I'm so curious 'what's life like in space?' So, I am planning to find out on my own and share with the world on my YouTube channel," Maezawa said,

as quoted by Roscosmos.

It will be the first time that two of the three spots on a Soyuz space rocket will be occupied by tourists.

The last time Roscosmos took a tourist to the ISS was in 2009, with the flight of Canadian Guy Laliberte, co-founder of Cirque du Soleil.

The resumption of these tourist flights comes as Roscosmos lost its monopoly for ferrying crews to the ISS after a reusable SpaceX rocket last year successfully delivered NASA astronauts to space.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

14 MAY 2021

De-escalate conflict in Gaza, US must step in

There is a burgeoning conflict between Israel and the Hamas-administered Gaza Strip that must stop immediately if the entire Middle East region is not to be embroiled in another full-scale war. The Israeli police intervention restricting the right to freedom of worship during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan outside the historic Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem was the trigger for the events which have led Israel to the brink of an invasion of Gaza, with its combat troops massing on the border and preparing for a possible incursion like in 2008-09 and later in 2014. There are two “wars” on at the moment — the unprovoked firing of rockets by Hamas into Israeli population centres and the retaliatory aerial attacks on the Gaza Strip on the one hand and, on the other, the sectarian violence in Israel between Jews and Israeli Arabs.

Amid an already grim scenario, it does not help that US President Joe Biden declares Israel has a right to defend itself, though of course every nation does have the right to defend itself against external aggression, as

The one person who might not find the situation as incommoding of his power and position is the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who could be replaced if Yair Lapid's coalition moves bear fruit

illustrated in this instance of hundreds of Hamas rockets testing Israel's fabled Iron Dome defence system with some streaking through to kill civilians, including an Indian housemaid. The Israelis are also facing a new type of challenge in people of the TikTok generation owing no loyalty except to the social media and spreading stray images of individual Arabs attacking Jews, which situation has now worsened into attacks on synagogues and citizens fighting on the streets.

World powers are calling for a cessation of hostilities, while some like Russia and Turkey are egging Hamas on though they may know who will be the likely victor in aggrandising traditional Arab territory. Of course, there can be no end to arguments about whose land it was and who was evicted 2,000 years ago. Such issues, in which 1948 and 1967 were significant dates, are being revisited now with arguments over seven Palestinian families facing eviction from the Sheikh Jarra neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and a court holding back a ruling only due to the outbreak of violence, starting with stone throwers aiming at policing of their congregating near the confluence of some of the holiest shrines of three religions and excessive police retaliation.

The one person who might not find the situation as incommoding of his power and position is Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who could be replaced if his rival Yair Lapid's coalition moves bear fruit. These moves have become complicated amid the bloodshed in the raging conflict, with at least 67 Palestinians and seven Israelis dead. If Mr Netanyahu does cling on for now as he presides over operations in tandem with his nemesis Benny Gantz, the United States would have to play a leading role in bringing about a ceasefire. It is not clear where President Biden's optimism springs from as he said “we will see this coming to a conclusion sooner than later”, but can there be a more effective peacemaker in this conflict than the US President, if he can exert America's traditional influence on the Jewish state.

Kerala Left icon's legacy

The centenarian Communist leader K.R. Gowri Amma who passed away earlier this week was a product of, and represented, the essence of the renaissance values Kerala had nurtured in the early 20th century. Her call was to use those progressive and revolutionary values to the benefit of the working class and the downtrodden, and she did it quite successfully. Kerala's land reforms are one of the legacies she has left behind.

That Gowri Amma was the first woman law graduate in her community was made possible because of the ideals of social reformer Sree Narayana Guru who emphasised the role of education in the emancipation of the subaltern classes. A successful lawyer, she later embraced the Communist ideology and there was no looking back. The fiery leader was subjected to police brutality during 1948-52 when the Communist Party was banned. She was elected to the Thiru-Kochi Assembly in 1954 and then to the first Kerala Assembly in 1957.

It was Gowri Amma as revenue minister in the first EMS ministry who moved the path-breaking Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957, which began the process of land reforms in the state. The ministry did not survive the combined assault of the reactionary forces but the ideals behind the bill did. True, it took another 13 years for Kerala to initiate land reforms but the egalitarian push that made the bill possible was too strong to be put under the carpet.

Gowri Amma was part of four more ministries in Kerala, thus actively contributing to the evolution of the state to its present form. She held on to her beliefs, political as well as personal, leading to her ouster from her party, the CPI(M), in 1994. She, along with her political outfit, later sided with the Congress-led United Democratic Front. Her spirits had returned to the Communists towards the fag end of her life, and her body has now joined those of the martyrs of Punnappra-Vayalar uprising and her husband and Communist Party leader T.V. Thomas at Valiya Chudukad, Alappuzha. Rest in the right company, comrade!

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Subhani



Why did Centre fail to act despite a surge warning?



Karan Thapar

I want to tell you about a news report that hasn't got the attention it deserves. With very few exceptions it's been ignored by our newspapers and television channels. Yet it raises deeply disturbing questions about the government's handling of the entire coronavirus crisis. Indeed, you could even say it provides “proof” of the government's irresponsibility. That's why it's a story we need to know about so each of us can decide what we make of it. In that spirit I shall proceed.

On May 1, Reuters released a story headlined “Scientists say India government ignored warnings amid coronavirus surge”. It claimed five scientists from the government-appointed consortium of national laboratories tasked with genome-sequencing, INSACOG, had “warned Indian officials in early March of a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus taking hold in the country”. The story added: “Four of the scientists said the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus”. So, in a nutshell, the government had been effectively forewarned to expect a possible exponential rise in cases but did virtually nothing.

The story carries a quotation from Shahid Jameel, the head of INSACOG, that suggests corroboration. “As scientists we provide the evidence, policymaking is the job of the government”. That seems to say INSACOG had done its duty, but the government did not.

On May 5, I interviewed a member of INSACOG. Three days earlier he had retired as director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. His name is Rakesh Mishra.

He confirmed the Reuters story. “This concern was raised”, he said. “It was a kind of warning that we are heading towards danger”. In fact, Dr Mishra went further. “It was a high concern and there's no doubt about it ... we were very, very concerned ... dreading something bad would happen”. Dr Mishra said INSACOG's concerns were conveyed directly to Sujet Kumar Singh, the director of the National Centre for Disease Control, to whom INSACOG reports. He added: “I think it went to the health secretary”. More important, he said it's impossible to believe the Prime Minister would not have been told.

This means Dr Mishra did a lot more than confirm the Reuters story. He suggested the responsibility for not responding to INSACOG's warning lay with the Prime Minister. Not surprisingly, a desperate government struggled to defend itself. Renu Swarup, biotech secretary, told a major financial daily that she wasn't aware of any warning but then, bizarrely, added: “I also don't understand the word warning at all”. If this was intended to scotch the Reuters story and rubbish Dr Mishra's confirmation, it failed miserably.

Several INSACOG members confirmed that Dr Mishra spoke the truth. Of course, they didn't do so in public. When I told them of Renu Swarup's response, they laughed. “What else could she have done?”, one asked. Meanwhile, Dr Mishra repeated his confirmation to a major newspaper.

This brings me to the government's response. Remember, the warning from INSACOG came in early March. But on March 7 health minister Harsh Vardhan told the Delhi Medical Association: “We are in the endgame of the Covid-19

pandemic in India”. That was the first sign that the government was paying no heed to INSACOG.

Thereafter, it got worse. Right through March massive political rallies, with tens or hundreds of thousands, took place in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam. In West Bengal they continued well into the second half of April. There were also *shahi snans*, with two or three million taking part, both in March and April. Ask yourself a simple question: after receiving INSACOG's warning, was it all right to continue with these gatherings?

That's not all. After INSACOG's warning, Assam's health minister (who is now the chief minister) said publicly that there was no need to wear a mask. Uttarakhand's chief minister said faith in God and the power of Mother Ganga would protect people at the *shahi snans*. In the light of what we now know, was this the right response from health ministers and CMs?

In fact, deliberate disregard, not just of INSACOG but science itself, goes all the way to the top. When questioned, the home minister said political rallies can't be held responsible for spreading Covid as Covid cases were rising in Maharashtra, where there were no rallies, not in Bengal, where he was present. If only he could see the situation today. Maharashtra is plateauing or declining, West Bengal seems to be shooting for the stars.

Perhaps the most incriminating proof of how our government disregarded science and ignored INSACOG came from the Prime Minister himself. On April 17, when cases were growing by over 260,000 a day, he

Remember, the warning from INSACOG came in early March. But on March 7 health minister Harsh Vardhan told the DMA: ‘We are in the endgame of the Covid-19 pandemic in India.’

applauded the massive turnout at his Asansol rally. Yet the tens of thousands in front of him were doing things he should never have permitted: they weren't wearing masks and they weren't maintaining “*do gaj ki doori*”.

However, when INSACOG advised the government cases could rise dramatically it was also, at one remove, telling the authorities serious illness, hospitalisation and deaths would go up sharply. This should have prompted the government to immediately increase hospital beds, ICU facilities, ventilators and, most important, oxygen. It didn't. Instead, the facilities set up to tackle the first wave were dismantled.

Now, let me ask a critical question. Doesn't this story suggest — actually prove — the government was forewarned of the looming crisis but chose to ignore scientific advice? Worse, the government did all the wrong things. Doesn't that amount to irresponsibility?

So that our political divisions don't prejudice us, I put this question to one of the world's most highly regarded experts on global health, Prof. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health. He said he has no doubt “the government failed to respond in a serious way even though the data was clear”. He also said the Kumbh Mela could end up being “the biggest superspreader in this pandemic's history”. But he went one critical step further. He said this failure must be explained by “the people in power”. India, he added, is owed “an explanation” by its government.

Now can you see why this story is so important and you should know about it? If the answer is yes, ask why the vast majority of our media kept quiet and failed to tell you? Just as the government owes us an explanation for its irresponsibility, doesn't the media owe you an explanation for keeping you in the dark?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

LOCKDOWN

Just a few days ago Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao termed the Centre's first lockdown as ill-planned (*Lockdown will cut Covid spread: KTR, DC, May 13*). Now, his son and minister K.T. Rama Rao extols the virtues of a lockdown ignoring the fact that they imposed it on unprepared citizens. No lockdown will bear fruit without repeated, effective communication to public and by taking up preventive measures.

Dr Sridevi G. Secunderabad

Though India is a top pharmaceutical producer, we failed to ramp up vaccine production. A lockdown cannot troubleshoot the problem on its own. We must also expedite the vaccination simultaneously. We must give the technology to all pharma firms in India to produce the vaccine or import it. If it is a burden on the country, they must put a price on the vaccine because many people are investing huge money for treatment.

Indarapu Naveen Gunjapadugu

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

It's Mental Health Awareness Week, and there is a dreadful pandemic leading to stressful conditions. I think it is important to educate people on mental health, as it is totally being ignored. It is equally important to bring awareness about how to maintain our mental health in such conditions as to bring how to stay safe and cautious about the virus being spread.

Naga Sandhya Poola Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Gujarat under President's rule

NEW DELHI, May 13.

The President Mr. V.V. Giri today dissolved the Gujarat Legislative Assembly and assumed to himself all the functions of the State Government following the Governor Mr. Shriman Narayan's report that the constitutional machinery in the State had broken down.

This is the first time that the 11-year-old state has been placed under direct Central rule.

Mr. Giri signed the proclamation providing for the immediate takeover of the state administration within minutes of the Union cabinet's decision to endorse the recommendation of the Governor.



Mahir Ali

Resistance to the latest bout of attempted ethnic cleansing in the Old City has fed into spiralling violence in Jerusalem in the days leading up to Eid. Sheikh Jarrah — the Old City neighbourhood where the legally sanctioned evictions of long-standing Palestinian residents at the behest of Jewish settler organisations predictably sparked a response — serves as a reminder that the Nakba is much more than a historical event.

It is an ongoing catastrophe, perhaps best exemplified by the creeping annexation of the West Bank.

Amid the confrontation centred around Al Aqsa mosque — with stones and fireworks on one side, and stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets on the other, causing hundreds of injuries — Hamas opted for its usual tactic of lobbing a bunch of missiles towards Jerusalem. They caused little damage and no casualties, whereas the Israeli response claimed the lives of at least 24 people, many of them children, in the Gaza Strip, according to reports.

That's par for the course in that part of the world. Likewise the swift Western condemnation of Hamas's futile attacks. More broadly there have been the usual calls for a “de-escalation on both sides” from the US and EU. Moral equivalence between the brutality of the oppressor and the resistance of the oppressed remains a problematic hurdle for Western “diplomacy”.

This is reflected in efforts across Europe and the US, legally or legislatively sanctioned in some cases, to effectively outlaw most criticism of Israel, and specifically the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. It's worth recalling that there was also opposition to pressure for sanctions against the South African apartheid state. It took a few decades for sufficient momentum to build up to make a difference.

It may take even longer in the case of Israel. After all, the Afrikaners who dominated South Africa lacked the leverage of a historical holocaust. Mind you, this is not to suggest that Europeans, or anyone else, ought to

overlook one of the 20th century's most atrocious crimes against humanity. On the contrary, the horrific Nazi extermination campaign against European Jews should forever serve as a particularly sordid reminder of the depths of hatred to which human beings can descend.

One can only wonder whether historical memories play any role when, for instance, German legislators effectively criminalise solidarity with Palestine amid a rising tide of neo-Nazism in their nation, when French politicians and retired generals promote Islamophobia, or when Israeli fascists mobilise to chant “death to Arabs” in Palestinian neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding bipartisan opposition to a congressional effort to legislate some leverage over how generous US subsidies to Israel, mostly in the form of military aid, are used, there are persistent reports from the US suggesting that the mood over unquestioning backing for Israel is shifting, not least among younger American Jews.

It may be so, although there's scope

for scepticism. It was nonetheless intriguing to encounter an opinion column in *The New York Times* recently in which former CIA chief John Brennan advised Joe Biden to watch Palestinian film-maker Farah Nabulsi's Academy Award-nominated short film *The Present*, which depicts the ordeals Palestinians routinely face in crossing checkpoints not between the occupied territories and Israel, but within the West Bank.

Who knows whether Mr Biden will bother, but either way chances of a substantial policy shift in the US — perhaps the only country capable of single-handedly compelling Israel to reconsider the status quo — remain infinitesimal. It won't matter that Human Rights Watch has at last acknowledged that Israel is guilty of the crimes of apartheid and persecution.

It will matter even less that Israel remains in a political mess, with its fourth election in two years predictably yielding no clear mandate, and its caretaker Prime Minister facing corruption charges and the prospect of imprisonment.

Benjamin Netanyahu was once more afforded the opportunity of forming a government after his Likud party won 30 Knesset seats in March, falling short of a majority by 31 seats. He failed, and last week Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, which won 17 seats, was invited to have a go. That effectively means either a (probably temporary) government led by Naftali Bennett (who is even nastier than Netanyahu in some respects), or a fifth election.

Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, has lamely put off indefinitely elections scheduled for this month. One could argue that under the circumstances, Palestinian elections, like the aspirations of young Palestinians who have never had a chance to vote, hardly matter. But how exactly do young Israelis see their future? Are they comfortable with the idea of living in, and fighting for, a proto-fascist state? Would they be willing to confide as much the next time they commune with their grandparents?

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48690.80	-0.96
Nifty 50	14696.50	-1.04
S&P 500*	4,112.51	1.22
Dollar (₹)	73.42	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.78	-0.12
Euro (₹)	89.10	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,468	14 0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.28	-2.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.674	-0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Builders hope for recovery in 2nd half of 2021

The demand for luxury homes has slowed down during the last one-and-a-half months due to the second wave of Covid-19 but real estate developers and consultants are hopeful that sales will pick up once the situation normalises as it happened last year. Despite Covid wave, prices of luxury residential properties are likely to remain stable and may even rise slightly due to limited supply, they said.

Airtel fixed line, enterprise users to get quick service



Airtel fixed line and enterprise subscribers will soon be migrated to Amdocs' system for more rapid delivery of new digital customer experiences, according to a statement. The telecom company said seamless migration of Airtel wireless postpaid customers to Amdocs modern digital-business system, which enables the telco to quickly create and launch new digital services for customers.

Embassy invests in Pi Labs fund for proptech cos

Realty firm Embassy Group on Thursday said it has invested in venture capital firm Pi Labs' new fund that puts money in proptech startups. Founded in 2014, Pi Labs was the first venture capital firm in Europe to exclusively invest in proptech companies. Embassy has joined Pi Labs as a limited partner in its current Fund 3, the Bengaluru-based firm said. The company did not disclose the amount it has invested in the fund.

TVS picks Robert as CEO of Norton Motorcycle

TVS Motor Company on Thursday said it has appointed Robert Hentschel as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of iconic British brand Norton Motorcycle, which it acquired last year. Hentschel replaces John Russell who steps down from his role as an interim CEO. Besides, Vittorio Urciuoli has been named as the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of the Solihull-based motorcycle brand.



Interest shows a better demand scenario for gas 14 bidders slug it out for KG-D6 gas supply

New Delhi, May 13: As many as 14 users across sectors slugged it on a third-party electronic platform for seven-and-half hours to secure natural gas supplies from the eastern offshore KG-D6 block before the oil-to-chemical (O2C) unit of Reliance Industries Ltd bagged most of the supplies, sources said.

Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc of the United Kingdom, who are bringing a second set of gas discoveries in their Bay of Bengal KG-D6 block, had offered 5.5 million standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of additional gas in the auction for a flexible tenure of between three and five years.

Gas users companies like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Reliance O2C, GAIL Gas, Adani Total Gas Ltd, Torrent Gas, Torrent Power and gas trading companies like GAIL, Shell and IGS were locked in the intense bidding war on the e-auction that happened on May 5, sources in the Reliance-BP consortium said.

At the end of the intense bidding war, Reliance O2C walked away with three mmscmd of supplies, offering better prices than competitors, they said.

India Gas Solutions (IGS) - a gas sourcing and marketing joint venture of Reliance and BP - bagged another 1 mmscmd, while IOC got a similar volume. The remaining volume was picked by Adani Gas



ONGC WAIVES MARKETING MARGIN BUT REFUSES TO LOWER GAS PRICE

New Delhi, May 13: ONGC has agreed to do away with charging users a marketing margin on the gas it plans to produce from its KG basin field but refused to lower the minimum rate, according to tender documents.

ONGC, India's top oil and gas producer, last month sought bids for the sale of initial 2 million standard cubic meters per day of gas from its KG-DWN-98/2 block (KG-D5).

The company asked bidders to quote a rate linked to prevailing Brent crude oil prices. It fixed the floor or minimum rate at 10.5 per cent of the three-month aver-

age Brent crude oil price. On top of it, the firm sought \$0.20 per million British thermal unit.

Potential bidders however opposed the levy of the marketing margin as well as the "high" floor price.

Responding to queries raised by bidders, ONGC said the floor price cannot be changed but the marketing margin is being dropped.

"Change in Reserve Gas Price (floor rate) is not agreed. However, considering requests from various bidders, the levy of marketing margin of \$0.20 per mmBtu over and above contract price is removed," the company said. — PTI

(0.15 mmscmd), IRM Energy (0.10 mmscmd), GAIL (30,000 cubic meters per day) and Torrent Gas (20,000 cubic metres per day). This is the third auc-

tion that Reliance-BP conducted on a third party independent platform approved by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). The online

DUCATI DRIVES IN NEW MODELS OF STREETFIGHTER

New Delhi, May 13: Italian superbike maker Ducati on Thursday launched new versions of Streetfighter V4 and V4 S in India priced at ₹19.99 lakh and ₹22.99 lakh, respectively (ex-showroom Delhi).

The two models now come with a BSVI compliant engine which churns out 208 HP of power.

"The Streetfighter V4 embodies the spirit of a mean beastly super naked, that is loaded with performance to back it up," Ducati India managing director Bipul Chandra said. The motorcycle was much awaited by enthusiasts and Ducati fans alike, he added.

"We are excited that it is finally available in India for everyone to experience," he noted. It said that bookings were open across all Ducati dealerships in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, and Chennai.

— PTI

web-based electronic bidding platform of CRISIL Risk and Infrastructure Solutions Ltd (CRIS) was also used for e-auction in February this year as well as in 2019.

In the three auctions, Reliance-BP has sold around 18 mmscmd of domestic gas from new fields in the KG-D6 block, which would help substantially reduce reliance on imported LNG, the sources said.

In the May 5 auction, Reliance-BP had asked bidders to quote a price linked to Platts JKM (Japan Korea marker), the liquefied natural gas (LNG) benchmark price assessment for spot physical cargoes.

The intense competition indicates a preference for domestic gas vis a vis LNG for Indian consumers.

At current prices, the discovered price translates into a price of about \$9 per mmBtu, but the buyers will be required to pay only the cap or ceiling price that the government has set for such fields.

The government sets a cap or ceiling rate at which natural gas from difficult fields like deepsea can be sold.

This cap for the period April 1, 2021, to September 30 2021 is \$3.62 per mmBtu.

With the return of demand, international rates have rebounded, which will reflect in the prices in the second revision due on October 1. — PTI

Eli Lilly allows 3 Indian cos to make Covid drug DRL, MSN Labs, Torrent to make Baricitinib

New Delhi, May 13: Drug firm Eli Lilly and Company on Thursday said it has inked voluntary licensing agreements with three Indian drug firms — Torrent Pharmaceuticals, Dr Reddy's and MSN Laboratories — to expedite the availability of Baricitinib for treatment of Covid patients in India. The company has issued additional royalty-free, non-exclusive voluntary licences to Dr Reddy's, MSN Laboratories and Torrent Pharmaceuticals, who will be collaborating

Covid fails to dampen PE, VC interest in India

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 13

The second wave of the pandemic has not been able to affect the enthusiasm of private equity and venture capital funds as investments continued to grow for four straight months of 2021.

PE/VC investments in April 2021 stood at \$7.5 billion, which were 6.5 times the value recorded in the lock-down hit April 2020 at \$1.1 billion. The April 2021 investments were also 37 per cent higher compared to \$5.5 billion in the previous month of March.

In the past four months of 2021, there has been a sequential increase in investments from \$1.6 billion in January to \$7.5 billion in April.

Technology was the top sector to grab \$3.1 billion, followed by e-commerce with \$1.5 billion. E-commerce also saw the highest monthly investment value in the past 31 months. The financial services sector received \$614 million and media and entertainment \$515 million.

"The revival in PE/VC investments has been driven by an increase in large deals valued over \$100 million. Of the 41 large deals recorded in the first four months of 2021, 32 were in the past two months. While Covid resilient sectors like pharma, healthcare, edutech, online media, SaaS, Technology and IT/ITes continue to see good traction in both value and volume of PE/VC deals, there has been a significant uptick in the value and volume of investments in the e-commerce sector,"

FPI INVESTMENT IN EQUITY RISES 7% TO \$552B IN MARCH QUARTER

New Delhi, May 13: The value of foreign portfolio investor (FPI) holdings in domestic equities reached \$552 billion in three months to March 2021, a surge of 7 per cent from the preceding quarter, according to a Morningstar report.

This was largely on the back of robust net inflows from FPIs, coupled with a strong performance of the Indian equity markets. "As of the quarter ended March 2021, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities stood at \$552 billion, which was considerably higher than the \$518 billion recorded in the previous quarter," the report noted.

As of March 2020 quarter, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities was \$281 billion.

However, the contribution of overseas investors to domestic equity market capitalisation

dropped marginally during the period under review to 19.9 per cent from 20.1 per cent in the December quarter.

Offshore mutual funds form an important component of total foreign portfolio investment, apart from other large FPIs, such as offshore insurance companies, hedge funds, and sovereign wealth funds.

During January-March 2021, FPIs invested a robust \$7.64 billion in Indian equities. In relative terms, it was much lower than the net inflows of \$19.21 billion recorded in the previous quarter, but in absolute terms, it is a significant amount, nonetheless, the report pointed out.

According to the report, positive domestic and global factors ensured that the interest of foreign investors in the Indian equity markets remains intact. — PTI

Exits also were quite active in April. April 2021 recorded 13 exits worth \$2.7 billion, almost 23 times the value of exits in April 2020 at \$117 million and 25 per cent higher than the value recorded in March 2021 at \$2.1 billion.

said Vivek Soni, Partner and National Leader, Private Equity Services, EY.

Exits also were quite active in April. April 2021 recorded 13 exits worth \$2.7 billion, almost 23 times the value of exits in April 2020 at \$117 million and 25 per cent higher than the value recorded in March 2021 at \$2.1 billion. Secondary exits in April 2021 were highest at \$2.1 billion across three deals. Exits worth \$7 billion in the first four months were 17 per cent higher than the total value recorded last year.

LABOUR FORCE SHRANK IN INDIA, SAYS CMIE



SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 13

The number of employed people fell by 7.35 million in April over March as the labour force shrank and the unemployment rate went up due to the second wave of the pandemic, finds CMIE.

The number of employed people in India fell from 398 million in March to 390.79 million in April — a decline of 7.35 million within a month.

Shrinkage of the labour force and rise in unemployment among those looking for jobs contributed to the decline. The labour force shrank by 1.1 million in April 2021 to 424.6 million compared to 425.8 million in March.

Labour Participation Rate fell for a third consecutive month in April and was the lowest since the nation-wide lockdown month of May 2020. The lockdowns imposed in some of the states to curb the second wave could have denied people from seeking employment and caused a fall in labour participation, finds Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

However, despite this smaller labour force looking for employment, a greater proportion failed to find jobs. As a result, the unemployment rate shot up from 6.5 per cent in March to 8 per cent in April. Count of the unemployed who was willing to work and was actively looking for work but unable to find any expanded by 6.2 million from 27.7 million in March to 33.9 million in April.

Most of the job losses are from the agricultural sector, which is not impacted by the lockdowns. Of the 7.35 million people who lost employment in April, six million losses were from the agricultural sector. — PTI

LUPIN JUMPS INTO BLACK WITH ₹1,216 CR PROFIT IN FY21

New Delhi, May 13: Drug maker Lupin on Thursday reported an 18 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit at ₹460 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2021, driven by robust sales across domestic and international markets.

The Mumbai-based company had reported a net profit of ₹390 crore in the

January-March quarter of 2019-20.

The company's total income from operations, however, declined to ₹3,783 crore during the fourth quarter, as compared to ₹3,846 crore in the corresponding period of FY20, Lupin Ltd said.

For the entire 2020-21 fiscal, the drugmaker posted a consolidated net profit of

₹1,216 crore. The company had reported a net loss of ₹269 crore in the 2019-20 financial year. Total income from operations for the last fiscal stood at ₹15,163 crore, as compared to ₹15,375 crore in 2019-20. The company said its board has recommended a dividend of ₹6.5 per equity share of the face value of ₹2 each. — PTI

Nasscom seeks waiver from FCRA regulations

New Delhi, May 13: IT industry body Nasscom on Thursday said that it has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a temporary relaxation in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms and further liberalisation of vaccine import to navigate through the deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Terming data as strategic ammunition available for managing the pandemic, the IT industry body said insights and analytics from Covid tracking and vaccination data could play a key role in decision making and early warning signals.

All these steps, Nasscom said, will enable the industry to "do more and act

faster to help the country navigate the second wave and be better prepared to deal with future waves".

Nasscom said while the vaccination regime has been liberalised, the availability of vaccines — particularly for the private sector — continues to be "very challenging".

"While we are attempting to source available vaccines in India, we request the government to provide emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, and others that have gone through stringent approval process globally, to ensure there is no vaccine divide in the country," the industry body said in a statement. — PTI

Member nations to begin dialogue on issue Brics moots wider social security net

New Delhi, May 13: The representatives of BricsS nations have expressed willingness to have a multilateral social security framework in order to safeguard workers' rights.

The Social Security Agreement will help the international workers to port their benefit to their home countries thereby preventing loss of their hard-earned money.

Further, they are exempted from contributing (towards social security schemes) both in home as well as host countries.

The multilateral social security framework would help international workers to avoid double contributions in a cluster of such nations.

The Social Security Agreement will help the international workers to port their benefit to their home countries and are exempted from contributing towards social security schemes both in home and host countries.

The views were expressed by member nations' representatives at the first Brics Employment Working Group (EWG) meeting held on May 11 and 12, 2021 at New Delhi in a virtual format, a statement said.

Indian labour secretary Apurva Chandra, chaired the meeting as the country has assumed the Brics

Presidency this year.

The prime agenda for the discussions were Promoting Social Security Agreements amongst Brics nations, formalisation of labour markets, participation of women in the labour force and Gig and Platform workers' role in the labour market.

Apart from representatives of member nations, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Social Security Agency (ISSA) also made valuable interventions and suggestions on the agenda issues.

"On the issue of Social Security Agreement

(SSA), the member nations resolved to enter into dialogue and discussion with each other and take it forward towards the signing of the agreements, while the ISSA and ILO on their part, expressed willingness to provide technical support in facilitating the conclusion of such agreements," it said.

The member nations also converged on devising a multilateral framework for the same (social security agreement) at a later stage, it said.

The member nations also discussed various initiatives taken by them towards the formalization of jobs and how Covid-19 has enhanced informalisation risk. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Lukaku fined for birthday party

Milan: Romelu Lukaku has been fined along with three Inter Milan teammates after a party in the early hours of Thursday morning to celebrate the Belgium forward's birthday which broke Covid-19 restrictions. Lukaku, Achraf Hakimi, Ivan Perisic and Ashley Young were among a group of 24 people celebrating his 28th birthday in a Milan hotel after the Inter's 3-1 league win over Roma, *Gazzetta Dello Sport* reported. Police were called with all present receiving fines for breaking coronavirus rules, *Gazzetta* said. According to Lukaku's entourage, the former Manchester United forward went out with friends, but had not organised the party. Lukaku scored the final goal against Roma to bring his tally to 22 in the league this season, six behind Cristiano Ronaldo. — *AFP*

Serena beaten in 1,000th match

Rome: Serena Williams' 1,000th tour-level singles match ended in defeat as she marked her return to action with a 7-6 (6), 7-5 loss to Nadia Podoroska in the second round of the Italian Open. The eighth-seeded Williams, who hadn't played since the Australian Open, rallied from a break down twice in the opening set on Wednesday and saved the first three set points she faced in the tiebreaker before Podoroska converted her fourth. "It's tough to have a first match on clay. It was definitely kind of good to go the distance and to try to be out there, but clearly I can do legions better," said Williams. Defending champion Simona Halep was forced to retire with a left calf injury in the second set of her match against fellow former No. 1 Angelique Kerber. Halep was leading 6-1, 3-3 before her injury. — *AP*

Djokovic sweeps into Italian last 8

Rome: World number one Novak Djokovic swept into the Italian Open quarter-finals on Thursday with a straight sets wins over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in front of spectators who were allowed to watch in the Foro Italico for the first time. The five-time Rome champion won through 6-2, 6-1 in 1hr 10min against the 48th-ranked Spaniard with the venue filled to 25 per cent of capacity. "It was not good, it was great. I missed the crowd," said the 33-year-old Serb. "It was nice to see them back." After losing his opening service game, Djokovic powered back with five breaks of serve, outclassing his rival, despite a late fightback, to seal the win on his sixth match point. — *AFP*

Oz players may return home soon

Male, Maldives: A group of Australian cricketers, coaches and players-turned-commentators, currently stranded in Maldives, may return home in a chartered flight on Sunday, though they are still waiting confirmation from their government, according to a report. A group of 38 Australians, including 14 players, left for Maldives on May 6 after the suspension of IPL 2021 as their government had banned flights from India till May 15 due to surge in Covid-19 cases there. "Under plans currently being thrashed out..., the group of 38 would be able to take a charter flight out of the Maldives via Malaysia to Sydney on May 16, where they would then serve their mandatory 14-day quarantine period," a report in *ESPNCricinfo* said. — *PTI*

Hockey legends kin to get ₹5 lac

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday announced financial support of ₹5 lakh each for the bereaved families of former hockey players M.K. Kaushik and Ravinder Pal Singh, who recently lost their lives to Covid-19. Both Kaushik and Singh were a part of India's 1980 Olympic gold-winning team. "We've lost two hockey greats to Covid. MK Kaushik ji & Ravinder Pal Singh ji's contribution to Indian sport will always be remembered," Rijiju wrote on his twitter handle. "As a gesture of support, the Sports Ministry is handing over ₹5 lakh each to the bereaved families. We stand with them in this hour of grief." India lost the revered stars on last Saturday. — *PTI*

Atletico on in Spain

Atletico on the cusp of La Liga glory after Sociedad win

Madrid, May 13: Atletico Madrid held their nerve to beat Real Sociedad 2-1 on Wednesday and move within touching distance of winning La Liga. Yannick Carrasco and Angel Correa made a dominant first half count for Atletico, who retreated in the second and were left hanging on after Igor Zubeldia blasted in for La Real with seven minutes left.

When the final whistle blew, Diego Simeone jogged up the tunnel at the Wanda Metropolitano, punching the air as he went, fully aware how important this result could prove.

"We were excellent in the first half but the suffering was unnecessary when we had so many chances," Simeone said.

Outside, Atleti fans had gathered to cheer and sing throughout a nervy contest and when victory was confirmed, fireworks filled the sky.

"We thank all those who are outside tonight and all those who can't come because of everything that is happening," said Atletico captain Koke. "We could hear them outside when we needed them in the last 10 minutes."

Victory puts Atletico four points clear of Barcelona in the table and five ahead of Real Madrid, with Zinedine Zidane's side playing their game in hand away at Granada on Thursday.

It also raises the possibility of Atletico winning the title in the penultimate round on Sunday when they play at home to Osasuna.

Another victory this weekend would knock Barca out of the race regardless of what the Catalans do against Celta Vigo while Real Madrid would also concede if they had not taken six points from Granada and Sunday's trip to Athletic Bilbao.

Sevilla, in fourth, had earlier edged past Valencia 1-0 but they can no longer overtake Atleti, given their six-point deficit and a losing head-to-head record with the leaders. Youssef En-Nesyri scored his 26th goal of the season at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan.

The four-horse race is reduced to three and after weeks of various twists and turns, Atletico suddenly appear to have a route to the trophy.

In terms of the table at least, this game against fifth-placed Real Sociedad was their toughest remaining fixture, although Real Valladolid could well be fighting for survival on the final day. — *AFP*



Atletico Madrid's Angel Correa (left) vies for the ball with Martin Zubimendi of Real Sociedad in their Spanish League match in Madrid on Wednesday. — *AFP*

Rowe exploits Jorginho blunder as Arsenal win

London, May 13: Thomas Tuchel admitted Chelsea's 1-0 defeat against Arsenal was a "wake-up call" after Emile Smith Rowe punished Jorginho's blunder to dent the Blues' bid to finish in the Premier League's top four. Midfielder Jorginho was guilty of a woefully misplaced back-pass that ended with Gunners youngster Smith Rowe slotting home early in the first half at Stamford Bridge.

Tuchel's side were bereft of quality in the final third as they succumbed to only a third defeat in their 26 matches in all competitions.

Chelsea remain in fourth place, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish is now on a knife edge.

They sit six points clear of fifth placed West Ham, who have a game in hand, and seven ahead of sixth placed Liverpool, who could be the biggest threat with two games in hand.

"I don't know how Arsenal would have scored if we didn't give it to them. We scored more or less an own goal, a total gift," Tuchel said.

PSG MAKE IT TO FRENCH CUP FINAL

Paris Saint-Germain squeaked past Montpellier 6-5 on penalties in Wednesday's

French Cup semi-final to keep alive their hopes of ending the season with silverware.

Spot kicks were required after the two sides were all square at 2-2 after normal time in Montpellier.

"It was a real cup tie, they're never easy," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino. — *AFP*

CL FINAL MOVED FROM TURKEY TO PORTUGAL

Paris, May 13: UEFA announced on Thursday that the Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea had been moved from Istanbul to Porto, Portugal.

The match on May 29 has been switched to the Estadio do Dragao to allow English spectators to attend as travel between the UK and Turkey is suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier, European football's governing body announced up to 6,000 supporters from each club will be able to attend.

"We accept that the decision of the British Government to place Turkey on the red list for travel was taken in good faith and in the best interests of protecting its citizens from the spread of the virus but it also presented us with a major challenge in staging a final featuring two English teams," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said.

UK citizens returning from red list countries are required to quarantine for 10 days. — *AFP*

India remain No.1 in Test rankings

Dubai, May 13: India remained the number one Test side after the annual update of the ICC team rankings, released on Thursday.

India head the table after gaining one rating point for an aggregate of 121, having accumulated 2,914 points from 24 matches.

Virat Kohli's men are closely followed by their World Test Championship final opponents, New Zealand, with a rating of 120. The Kiwis have garnered 2166 points from 18 Tests and gained two rating points.

India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.

According to an ICC statement, the latest annual update eliminates results of 2017-18.

The latest update rates all matches played since May 2020 at 100 per cent and those of the previous two years at 50 per cent.

England (109 rating) have climbed a place to third at the expense of Australia (108 rating), down to fourth now.

England's jump came

● **India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.**

after their 0-4 defeat to Australia in 2017-18 was dropped from the rankings.

Pakistan (94) have gained three points but remained at fifth spot, while West Indies (84), who beat Bangladesh 2-0 and drew 0-0 with Sri Lanka in series played this year, have jumped two places to sixth, their best position since 2013.

South Africa (80) and Sri Lanka (78) have dropped a rung each to seventh and eighth positions respectively, followed by Bangladesh (46), who have lost five points and Zimbabwe (35), who gained eight points.

India and New Zealand will square off in the inaugural World Test Championship final at Southampton's Ageas Bowl from June 18 to 22. — *PTI*

PAINE HINTS AT GIVING UP CAPTAINCY AFTER ASHES

Melbourne, May 13: Australian Test captain Tim Paine has hinted at stepping down from the position if his team manages to defeat England in the Ashes series this year and backed former skipper Steve Smith to succeed him.

The 36-year-old Paine has been under intense scrutiny after Australia were beaten 1-2 by an injury-ravaged India in a home Test series earlier this season. Paine said that debacle was partly because his team got distracted by India's "nigling".

Smith was Australia's captain before being forced to step down in 2018 owing to his role in the ball-tampering scandal. "He's probably a bit like me when I was at the start of my captaincy journey in Tasmania — he was thrown into a very big role at a very, very young age and he probably wasn't quite ready for it," Paine was quoted as saying by *news.com.au*.

"But by the time I came in he was growing into that role and getting better and better. Then obviously (in) South Africa events happened and he's not doing it anymore. But yeah I would support him getting that job again," he added.

Paine also hinted that he might step down from captaincy if Australia can beat England in the Ashes later this year. — *PTI*

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Powar replaces Raman as coach

New Delhi, May 13: Former spinner Ramesh Powar on Thursday replaced W.V. Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach, regaining the position more than two years after he was sacked following a bitter fallout with ODI captain Mithali Raj.

The 42-year-old was recommended by the Madan Lal-led Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) after interviewing eight candidates, including Raman.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announces the appointment of Mr Ramesh Powar as the Head Coach of Team India (Senior Women)," a BCCI statement read.

The others in fray were former India wicketkeeper Ajay Ratna and four female candidates.

It remains to be seen how Powar works alongside Mithali, who had accused him of bias after the Harmanpreet Kaur-led T20 team dropped the veteran batter for the all-important World Cup semifinal against England.

Mithali, in a letter to the BCCI after the event, had alleged that Powar "was out to destroy and humiliate" her. Powar had hit back asserting that Mithali "threw a lot of tantrums and created chaos in the team".

After being removed from his position in the women's team, Powar proved himself as a coach and earlier this year, led Mumbai to the Vijay Hazare Trophy. — *PTI*

SHAFALI, RADHA READY TO MAKE WBBL DEBUTS

New Delhi, May 13: Indian batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to make her Women's Big Bash League debut with two-time champions Sydney Sixers later this year.

The 17-year-old is expected to be joined by left-arm spinner Radha Yadav, who is currently in talks with the Sydney Sixers franchise.

"Shafali's deal is done, it will be announced when the Women's Big Bash schedule is released. Radha is also in talks with the Sydney Sixers," a BCCI source said.

The teenager's father was also required to sign a consent form as Shafali is still a minor.

Shafali joins the trio of T20 skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (Sydney Thunder), opener Smriti Mandhana (Brisbane Heat) and all-rounder Veda Krishnamurthy (Hobart Hurricanes), which has featured in the WBBL.

The world number one batter in ICC women's T20I rankings will also be turning up for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred — the 100-ball domestic competition of the England and Wales Cricket Board later this year. — *PTI*

Srikanth holds on to slim Oly hopes

New Delhi, May 13: Left stranded after the final three Olympic qualifiers were cancelled, Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth still harbours "some hope" of making it to the Tokyo Games, his faint optimism resting on the world body's assurance of a statement on the qualification process.

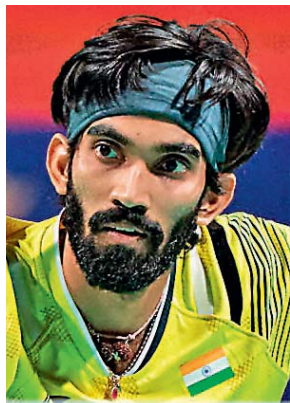
Former world No. 1 Srikanth and Saina Nehwal were all but out of contention after the Badminton World Federation on Wednesday cancelled the last qualifying event in Singapore due to the Coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

The cancellation of the Singapore event (June 1-6) was after Malaysia Open and India Open had to be shelved due to the health crisis.

The BWF, however, said it "will issue a further statement on Tokyo Olympics qualifying at a later date." "I could have qualified if I had participated in the qualifiers but there is nothing much I can do about it now. Just waiting to see what BWF says about this whole qualification things, so yeah holding on to some hope," Srikanth said.

There is no tournament scheduled till August and Telangana too has gone into a lockdown. Srikanth said he would now take a break from training.

Asked if BWF could have



Kidambi Srikanth

done anything differently, Srikanth said: "Now we can say a lot of things because the tournament is not happening but we really don't know what is happening between the organisers and BWF."

"So, I don't know what else can be done, may be BWF can communicate things better to players."

With no events lined-up, Olympic-bound shuttlers such as P. V. Sindhu, B. Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, too have decided to take some time off.

"Definitely disappointed that all the three events got cancelled. I have been training for 7 weeks but now just training without purpose makes no sense," world No. 15 Praneeth said. — *PTI*

Negative public opinion is no threat to Olympics

Geneva, May 13: The IOC has downplayed concerns over Japanese public opinion calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled, before its virtual news conference was interrupted by an activist protesting the Games.

The news conference on Wednesday followed a monthly meeting of the International Olympic Committee's executive board held amid a state of emergency in Tokyo to curb surging Covid-19 cases. Polling in Japan also persistently suggests people want the July 23-August 8 Olympics to be called off, having already been postponed by one year.

"We listen but won't be guided by public opinion," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said, adding "everything is telling us ... that the Games can go ahead and will go ahead."

Adams stood in for his boss, IOC president Thomas Bach, whose planned visit to Japan next week was called off Monday after states of emergency in Tokyo and other regions were extended through May.

The final question of the news conference, held by video call, was offered to a reporter from Yahoo Sports.

TOKYO-BOUND RACE WALKER IRFAN +VE

New Delhi, May 13: Olympic-bound race walker K. T. Irfan is among five elite track-and-field athletes who have tested positive for Covid-19 at the Sports Authority of India's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The tests were conducted last Friday and those who returned positive have been kept under quarantine.

"At least five elite athletes have tested positive for Covid-19 when tests were conducted on Friday. They have been kept isolated from others," a source at the SAI Centre said.

The source said another race walker could also have tested positive but this could



K. T. Irfan

not be confirmed. "4 male players and 1 female player and 4 support staff tested positive for Covid-19," a SAI source stated.

Irfan had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics way back in 2019 after finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan. — *PTI*

Instead, an activist appeared on the screen holding up a black and white banner opposing the Tokyo Olympics.

"No Olympics anywhere, No Olympics anywhere," he said, before using a profanity and adding "No Olympics in LA., No Olympics in

Tokyo," before the line was cut. The 2028 Olympics will be held in Los Angeles.

Adams made light of the interruption noting if Bach had been present it "probably would have made that stunt a little bit more interesting." — *AP*