

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | MONDAY | 17 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 37.0°C
Min: 16°C
RH: 56%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 37/16 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Panchami till 11.31 am
Star: Punarvasu till 1.17 pm
Varjyam: 9.48 pm to 11.30 pm
Durmuhurtam: 12.38 pm to 1.29 pm; 3.12 pm to 4.03 pm
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am

HIJRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 4, 1442 AH
PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 06.08 AM
SUNSET TODAY 06.33 PM
MOONSET 10.30 PM
MOONRISE 9.53 AM

COUNTER POINT



14 days quarantine for those who criticise our minister over vaccination!

SHORT TAKES

More lockdown in Delhi, Haryana

New Delhi: Lockdown was extended on Sunday in the national capital and adjoining Haryana till May 24. The Punjab government also decided to continue with all existing Covid restrictions in the state till May 31, amid a high positivity and fatality rate due to the disease. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced the extension of the lockdown imposed on April 19 for the fourth time.

Truck rentals drop 15 per cent

New Delhi: The slump in factory output due to lockdowns in states has resulted in decline in truck rentals on key trunk routes by 5-7 per cent in the past 15 days, according to the freight rate data released by Indian Foundation of Transport Research and Training (IFTRT). The think-tank said that truck rentals could have fallen more if arrival of summer fruits, vegetables, wheat and other crops in APMC mandis not gone up by 10-15 per cent.

VAX | HESITANCY

People rush to quacks, fear hospitalisation for virus

Fear of test puts villagers in peril

SANJAY BASAK | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 16

With Covid-19 cases and deaths raging across India, testing hesitancy among the rural population and small towns has emerged as a major obstacle. A considerable number of people living in villages and small towns are rushing to “jhola chap” doctors (quacks) to get treated for their fever, cough and cold rather than going in for Covid tests. The fear that is stalking these sections is that “those testing positive would be shifted to Covid hospitals, from where no one comes out alive”.

Sandeep Sharma, a resident of a small village, Milak Khandera, in Uttar Pradesh, got himself tested only after a team of health workers reached the village on May 12. Speaking to this corre-



A health worker collects swab sample of a passenger at a Covid-19 testing counter at Patna railway station. — PTI

spondent, he said: “We are not going for tests. It’s not safe to go to the hospitals for tests.” Sharma claimed that most of the villagers believed that “test karane gaye toh woh pakar lenge

aur hospital mein dal denge” (If we go for tests, we will be forcibly admitted to the hospitals). Of the 500 villagers living in Milak Khandera, the team of health workers managed to

test only 75 of them. Sharma was among those tested. They are still waiting for the reports.

Sharma virtually boasted that there had been “no Covid-19 cases” in his village. When asked how he would know since no one had got tested, he only said: “*Koi toh abhi tak mara nahi*” (No one has died so far).

A similar problem continues to plague Chausa, the village in Bihar which hit the headlines as several bloated and decomposed bodies were flushed out from the river in this particular region. Ashwini Varma, a social activist, lawyer and president of the Mahararishi Chausa Thermal Power Mazdoor Sangh, claimed that “*log darke maare test nahi kara rahe hain*” (People are not getting tested as they are scared).

MP Raju sent to jail after medical tests at GGH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

The AP High Court on Sunday directed the CID to shift YSR Congress rebel MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju to a private hospital (Ramesh Hospitals) for treatment following a CID special court order. The MP is currently lodged in the Guntur district jail. The CID special court had directed the CID to shift the MP to Ramesh Hospitals for treatment after the completion of medical tests at the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Guntur. He was shifted to the jail after completion of the tests that held amidst high security. Reports said a team of specialists at GGH conducted 15 to 18 tests on him. The MP and his supporters expected to secure bail after submission of the medical report in the High Court by the CID, but the tests took a long time and, by evening, he was shifted to the district prison at Guntur.

Sources said the injuries on the feet of the MP were not due to police third degree action but due to an illness Raju is suffering

● **SOURCES SAID** the injuries on the feet of the MP were not due to police third degree action but due to an illness Raju is suffering from.

● **HE LAWYERS** objected to shifting the MP to the jail saying the court had clearly ordered to shift the MP to Ramesh Hospital for treatment

from. His lawyers objected to shifting the MP to the jail. Advocate Adinarayana said that the court clearly ordered to shift MP to Ramesh Hospitals for treatment after completion of medical tests at GGH but the CID did not honour the orders and instead shifted him to the jail with an ulterior motive. The lawyers then informed the High Court about the issue of shifting Raju to the jail and skipping treatment at Ramesh Hospitals, thus violating the court orders. The High Court judges read the report submitted by the GGH medical committee on the health of the MP.

■ **Page 2: Report said the MP was in perfect health**

Jagan thanks PM for additional O2

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Sunday thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for increasing oxygen allotment, enabling AP to resolve the oxygen crisis. In a letter to the PM, he also sought an allocation of 910 MT of oxygen to AP to save the lives of Corona patients in these critical times.

The Chief Minister wrote, “I place on record my gratitude for supporting Andhra Pradesh in fighting the COVID Second wave by increasing the allotment of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) from 480 MT as on 24th April to 590 MT on 6th May and also allotting 7 ISO containers. I also profusely express my thanks for running a special train from Reliance plant, Jamnagar, yesterday with 80 MT of LMO to AP. I wish to bring to your kind notice that the AP Government had taken

action to add 30,000 more ICU and oxygen beds in view of Covid pandemic. The present level of case-load and hospital admissions itself requires 910 MT of LMO every day.”

The letter further said: “It is to bring to your notice that due to reduced storage at RINL, Visakhapatnam, we are able to draw daily production of 100 MT LMO only in place of 170 MT allotted.”

The CM urged that similarly, the government is facing problems in getting the allocated quantity from Tamil Nadu, which is creating serious emergency situations in various big hospitals in Rayalaseema region. He informed the PM that on May 10, the LMO supplies from Chennai and Karnataka were delayed by a few hours, which led to the unfortunate incident of 11 deaths due to lack of oxygen in Tirupati.

■ **Page 2: CM urges oxygen express be continued**

Cyclone rips into many states

4 killed in Karnataka, 2 in Goa; landfall expected in Gujarat tomorrow

DC CORRESPONDENTS
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, MAY 16

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday chaired a high-level meeting to discuss preparedness for Cyclone Tauktae, that is likely to hit states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala and Goa, among others. Gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tidal waves swept the coastal belt of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa as Cyclone Tauktae hurtled northwards towards Gujarat on Sunday, leaving four people dead in Karnataka, two others in Goa, and damaging hundreds of houses, uprooting electricity poles and trees and forcing evacuation.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Tauktae which has taken the form of a “very severe cyclonic storm” is likely to intensify further during the next 24 hours and reach the Gujarat coast on Monday evening.

An estimated 1.5 lakh people are being shifted from low-lying coastal areas in Gujarat while 54 teams of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) have been deployed in the



High sea waves due to cyclone Tauktae hit Bhagavathi Prem Sinken Dredger, at Surathkal Beach near Mangaluru on Sunday. — PTI

state. Maharashtra too was bracing for impact as the Met department predicted heavy to very heavy rains at isolated places in north Konkan, Mumbai, Thane and Palghar and extremely heavy rainfall in Raigad on Monday. Four deaths have been reported from Karnataka’s

Uttara Kannada, Udupi, Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga districts in cyclone-related incidents.

Two persons died in Goa on Sunday in separate incidents caused due to gusty winds triggered by cyclone Tauktae, which also damaged hundreds of houses and blocked some

highways in parts of the state as trees fell at several points, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said.

The major impact of the cyclonic winds was felt in Bardez taluka in North Goa district and Mormugao in South Goa, he said.

Gusty winds and heavy

rains lashed several parts of the state on Sunday due to the cyclonic storm, uprooting electricity poles and affecting power supply in many parts of the coastal state, officials said.

The water level in many dams across Kerala showed a rising trend on Sunday.

Total lockdown imminent as Covid cases continue to rise

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

The chances of total lockdown are likely in AP with the surge in daily Covid-19 positive cases remaining above 20,000 and in view of more than 20 per cent positivity rate in the second wave.

The state government had imposed a curfew for 18 hours per day from 12 noon to 6 am till May 18 towards containment of Covid-19, but the situation continues to worsen in the state.

The Group of Ministers would take up the issue of the need for complete lockdown at a meeting on Monday. The Chief Minister will also conduct a review on the day to decide on the tightening of the curfew norms, either by reducing relaxation hours or imposing full lockdown to contain the surge of Covid-19.

According to sources, earlier the Coronavirus infections were found to be higher in urban areas, but cur-

rently, the Covid-19 is swiftly spreading to rural areas. It would be a daunting task for the government to contain the pandemic in rural areas as the medical infrastructure is poor and inadequate. The sources said that the government is considering imposing a full lockdown, allowing only medical, health, essential commodities and emergency services. Curfew may begin at 9 am or 10 am, reducing the hours of relaxation.

As many as 24,171 new Coronavirus cases were registered on Sunday, which is all-time record since the outbreak of Covid-19 in AP 14 months ago. Around 20,000 to 22,000 new Corona infections are being registered daily for the past few days, which has become a big worry for the government. The AP government imposed the curfew to control the spread of Coronavirus but the surge in cases is continuing every day, as huge crowds are mingling without following any Covid protocols such as

wearing face masks or maintaining physical distance, during the relaxation window from 6 am to 12 noon.

The swift increase in Coronavirus cases is worryingly accompanied by a constant positivity rate of over 20 per cent. The apex medical research body Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recommends a lockdown is compulsory if the positivity rate exceeds 10 per cent. In 11 districts in AP, the average positivity rate remains above 20 per cent, with Visakhapatnam, East Godavari and Anantapur districts facing more alarming conditions.

Further, adding to government worries are reports of the ongoing house-to-house fever survey. Alarming, 39,000 people have been found to be suffering from fever so far during the survey. Barring two to three districts, the remaining districts are facing pathetic conditions as new infections continue to surge.

BLACK FUNGUS CLAIMS TWO IN KURNOOL

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 16

Black fungus has claimed lives of two Coronavirus positive patients undergoing treatment at Kurnool Government General Hospital (KGGH) on Sunday.

One is aged 35 years from Guntur and the other is a 66 years’ old resident of Anantapur, hospital superintendent Dr G. Narendranath Reddy said.

Explaining the condition of patients who died of black fungus, Dr Narendranath Reddy said their eyes had got swollen and they were in bad condition.

He underlined that blood glucose levels in such patients must be monitored frequently and kept within the range specified by protocols.

■ **Page 3: Black fungus is not new disease: Doctor**

AP RECORDS 24,171 NEW CASES, AN ALL-TIME HIGH

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

Andhra Pradesh registered an all-time record of single day Coronavirus infections on Sunday with 24,171 new cases. This is the highest daily number of cases since the spread of Covid-19 in the state on March 24 last year.

The state tested 94,550 samples in which 24,171 were found positive. With this, the total Corona cases has reached 14,35,491 in which 2,10,436 are active cases and the rest of 12,15,683 have been recovered. The total Covid-19 deaths are 9,372. As many as 21,101 patients have recovered in the past 24 hours.

The single day highest number of 3,356 new Corona cases was reported in Anantapur district followed by Chittoor with 2,885.

■ **Full report on Page 2**

2 doctors suspended for neglecting APMIP head

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 16

Two doctors including a Resident Medical Officer of Government Super Speciality Hospital were suspended and show cause notices were served on the Superintendent and two head nurses of the super-specialty hospital here, for their alleged negligence in providing timely treatment to APMIP district project director who died at hospital. The official was a special officer on Covid duty.

Collector Gandham Chandrudu reacted seriously as APMIP project director M. Subbarayudu could not get even a stretcher to reach the second floor of hospital. The reception staff was found to be negligent in

DC | IMPACT

responding quickly to save the official.

Deccan Chronicle highlighted the issue as the district officer’s son-in-law and son had to carry the patient to the second floor hospital after the reception staff dithered in coming to their help quickly.

The official breathed his last later in the ICU.

On Sunday, the Collector, taking a serious note of lapses on the part of hospital staff, issued orders, suspending Resident Medical Officer Dr Sridhar and help desk medical officer Dr Sudhakar for their negligence even after they were informed about the critical condition of

Subbarayudu. The Collector also expressed anger at the hospital authorities for not replacing oxygen flow meters.

“It took more than 25 minutes to rush the patient to the ICU ward from the ambulance and the staff ignored to arrange oxygen flow metres for APMIP project director,” he reportedly observed.

He also issued show-cause notices to the Superintendent Dr K. Vijaya Bhaskar and two head nurses Mahalakshmi and Rajeswari to reply within 24 hours on the delay in fixing oxygen flow meters at the super-specialty hospital.

■ **Page 3: Hospital staff were alerted in advance**

SHORT TAKES

CM URGES
OXYGEN EXPRESS
BE CONTINUED

FROM PAGE 1

Pointing out the dire situation in Rayalaseema region, and its dependence on the supplies from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the CM lamented that AP's request to DPIIT to increase allocations from the two states was not considered.

The Chief Minister stated, "With such a situation in Rayalaseema region, the Oxygen Express from Jamnagar, Reliance plant carrying 80 MT of LMO served us as a life saviour, in its true sense. It will stabilise the LMO supplies to the Rayalaseema region hospitals for the next 2 days. We are trying our best to lift the stocks from Odisha using the ISO Containers, but we are not able to meet the demand from Rayalaseema region of AP."

The CM pleaded that in order to meet the LMO demand from Rayalaseema region the Centre should continue the Oxygen Express from Jamnagar every day with at least 80 MT of LMO. He said this would help stabilise the situation in Rayalaseema in view of increasing caseload.

The Chief Minister appealed to the PM thus, "I request you to direct the concerned authorities to continue the Oxygen Express from Jamnagar Reliance plant till the caseload comes to manageable levels and also request allocation of 910 MT of LMO to our State to tide over the crisis."

MONSOON SET TO
TOUCH ANDAMAN
ON MAY 21DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 16

Conditions are favorable for the onset of the Southwest Monsoon over Andaman and Nicobar Islands, an IMD report said on Sunday. It said the monsoon would enter the Indian mainland at Kerala on May 31. However, the private website Skymet predicted that the monsoons would set in over Kerala on May 30 with a model error of plus or minus two days.

Skymet further stated that the onset of monsoon over Kerala is largely influenced by the oceanic conditions, both in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal.

Likely cyclone formation in the Arabian Sea will be consequential for advance of monsoon stream over Indian waters. However, tropical storm Tauktae will vacate the Indian region by May 22, following which the westerly winds and cross equatorial flow will strengthen over Arabian Sea.

DECENTRALISE
VAX STRATEGY,
SAYS KIRANDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 16

A highly decentralised approach is needed where local governments can decide how to vaccinate people by taking appropriate precautionary measures, said Biocon Biologics Executive Chairperson Kiran Mazumdar Shaw.

Participating as a guest speaker in a national webinar on 'Change Makers,' organised by GITAM Deemed to be University on Sunday, she observed that there is a lot of confusion and mismanagement in the present vaccination programme in the country. She noted that migration of industrial labour and elections were the main factors behind the present situation.

"We need to focus more on cab drivers, construction workers, food delivery boys for vaccination, otherwise they may turn super spreaders," she cautioned. On the intellectual property rights (IPR) issue of vaccines, she commented that instead of IPR there was a need to focus on technology transfer. She said that vaccine making was not simple and it involved a technology that would take 8 to 9 months to establish. The country needs effective supply chain management, a token system for successful vaccination. She further said that instead of child vaccination, parents must be given vaccines to protect the family.

She observed that patients with co-morbidities are more vulnerable to infections. One must practise physical exercise, follow healthy food habits, and do pranayama to remain safe during the second wave of the pandemic.

Change in timings, not habits



People purchase liquor during relaxation hours at Gandhinagar centre in Vijayawada on Sunday

— C. NARAYANA RAO

AP records 24,171 new
cases, an all-time high

As many as 101 deaths were reported, 14 in Anantapur

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

Andhra Pradesh registered an all-time record of single day Coronavirus infections on Sunday with 24,171 new cases. This is the highest daily number of cases since the spread of Covid-19 in the state on March 24 last year.

The state tested 94,550 samples in which 24,171 were found positive. With this, the total Corona cases has reached 14,35,491 in which 2,10,436 are active cases and the rest of 12,15,683 have been recovered. The total Covid-19 deaths are 9,372. As many as 21,101 patients have recovered in the past 24 hours.

The single day highest number of 3,356 new Corona cases was reported in Anantapur district followed by Chittoor with 2,885, East Godavari 2,876, West Godavari 2,426, Visakhapatnam 2,041, Guntur 1,787, Kadapa 1,638, Prakasam 1,628, Nellore 1,593 and Srikakulam registered 1,509 new Covid-19 infections. Vizianagaram district reported 997 new infections, Kurnool 730 and Krishna 705.

As many as 101 deaths were reported on Sunday in the state out of which

2nd Oxygen Exp brings
76.39 MT O2 to stateDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

Second Oxygen Express with 76.39 MT reached Guntur, carrying four containers with a total of 76.39 MT liquid medical oxygen (LMO) on Sunday. State Covid Control Room Special Officer M.T. Krishna Babu, Arja Srikanth, another Special Officer, Ram Babu, Senior Divisional Operations Manager, Narendra Varma, Senior Commercial Manager, and other officials monitored the decanting of liquid oxygen.

Krishna Babu said that in view of the rapid rise in Covid-19 cases and a significant surge in the

14 Covid deaths were reported in Anantapur district followed by Visakhapatnam 11 and Chittoor 10 deaths. Nine new deaths each registered in East Godavari, Guntur and Krishna districts. Vizianagaram reported seven and

● In view of the rapid rise in Covid-19 cases and a significant surge in the demand for LMO in all parts of the country, the Railways created a signal-free green corridor to provide safe, secure, hassle-free and fast transportation of oxygen to different parts of the country.

demand for LMO in all parts of the country, the Railways created a signal-free green corridor to provide safe, secure, hassle-free and fast transportation of oxygen to different parts of the country. He said that the second Oxygen Express for

Kurnool, Prakasam and Srikakulam reported six deaths each. West Godavari reported three and Kadapa reported two deaths.

East Godavari district is on top with a total of 1,83,062 Coronavirus infections, Chittoor 1,56,937,

Andhra Pradesh loaded with 4 containers carrying 76.39 MT of LMO reached CONCOR Siding, Guntur, at 04.12 am on Sunday. It set off from Reliance Rail Terminal at Kanalus in Gujarat at 8:31 pm on May 14 and travelled a distance of 1,854 km at an average speed of 58.85 kmph and took 31.30 hours to reach Guntur.

The official said that the oxygen trains were bringing relief to Covid-19 patients of Andhra Pradesh to strengthen the collective efforts to contain the pandemic. Guntur Joint Collector A.S. Dinesh Kumar said that 30 MT oxygen was allotted to Guntur, 20 MT to Vijayawada.

Guntur 1,33,263 and West Godavari 1,20,246, Anantapur 1,14,217, Visakhapatnam 1,12,335, Nellore 1,03,591, Kurnool 1,00,287, Srikakulam 93,664, Prakasam 91,616, Kadapa 82,978, Krishna 76,269 and Vizianagaram 64,131 Covid-19 cases.

Green Corridor for O2
tankers to reach SVIMSDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 16

The efforts of Tirupati Urban district police in creating a green corridor ensured trouble-free passage for two cryogenic tankers carrying liquid medical oxygen to Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences (SVIMS) bringing relief to hundreds of Covid-19 patients undergoing treatment at the state Covid hospital.

Oxygen was loaded into the two tankers at the Kolar district unit of Air Water Company. Carrying nearly 16 tonnes of liquid

oxygen each, the vehicles left the unit late Saturday night and covered a distance of nearly 250 km in nine and 10 hours, respectively.

The urban police ensured that the vehicles did not stop anywhere and maintained adequate speed by clearing traffic in advance — saving more than two hours of journey — on the busy Bengaluru-Tirupati highway. This initiative by the urban police has earned applause from various circles, including from the hospital, which is facing shortage of oxygen.

ADHRUSHTA
DEEPAK PASSES
AWAYDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 16

Noted Telugu litterateur Adrushta Deepak, known more as a cine lyric writer, died of Covid-19 in a private hospital on Sunday. He is survived wife, a son and a daughter.

Hailing from Ravulapalem village, he resided at Machavaram and later settled down in Ramachandrapuram. Deepak was a post-graduate and worked as lecturer in a junior college at Draskharama. He wrote lyrics like Yuvatarang Kadilindi for *Asayala Pandiri* movie and for other movies like *Erra Mallelu*, *Navodayam* and *Netibharatam*.

His lyric Manavathwam Parimalinchina Manchi Manishiki Swagatham has won him the Kala Sagar Puraskar from Chennai. Deepak was winner of Best Teacher award and he played a key role in the Drasharama Kala Parishad as also the Mayura Nataka Kala Parishad.

He wrote and published books like Kokilamma Padalu, Agni, Samara Sankham and Pranam.

Those who were close to him recollect that Adrushta Deepak was strait in his approach and he used to call a spade a spade.

MP's wife alleges
plot to finish himDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

The family members and the wife of rebel YSR Congress MP, K. Raghurama Krishnam Raju, on Sunday alleged that the government was hatching a conspiracy to eliminate the MP by shifting him to the jail.

The CID officers shifted Raju to the local jail at Guntur after completion of medical tests at the Government General Hospital. His lawyers objected to this, saying that he should be taken to the Ramesh Hospital for conducting another round of tests. But the CID officials asserted that there were no such orders from the High Court or the lower court.

Following this, the family members of Raju went into a panic. His wife Rama Devi said she had strong fears that the government was trying to eliminate her husband in Guntur jail on Sunday night.

She lamented that the police had already beaten him up badly. She alleged that the officials were not at all respecting the

orders of courts or the democratic rights of people. She alleged that they were going to kill her husband.

Earlier, a high drama was witnessed at GGH as Raju's lawyers repeatedly demanded that the tests be conducted as per court orders and a report be submitted by 12 noon. The GGH doctors led by the medical board comprising Dr Narasimham, Dr Varaprasad and Dr Subba Rao conducted a series of tests and submitted the report in a sealed cover to the court. According to the reports, the medical tests proved that there were no injuries on Raju and that he was in perfect health.

Raju's lawyers alleged that the government influenced the medical laboratory to give reports in favour of the CID, stating that no injuries were caused to the MP. They claimed that the officials threatened the laboratory of stopping pending bills worth crores of rupees if the lab failed to give reports in their favour. They said they would take the issue to the notice of court for justice.

Report said MP
in perfect health

FROM PAGE 1

The report clearly stated there were no injuries on the body of the MP and added that he was in perfect health. The High Court then ordered the CID to implement the orders of CID court and shift him to Ramesh Hospitals for treatment.

Additional Advocate General (AAG) P. Sudhakar Reddy said that the High Court had issued orders at 6.40 pm on Saturday, rejecting examination by private doctors and the presence of CRPF security and family members during the tests.

He informed the court that he himself had arranged the GGH medical team. He said that the CID court ordered to send Raju to Ramesh Hospitals at 8.30 pm, which meant

its orders came after the orders of High Court. He said that he took the issue to the notice of the CID court. The AAG informed the High Court that the CID court would amend the judgment once the High Court order copy was submitted. He stated that the CID court ordered to upload the judgment copy of the High Court online and said it would be done by the night.

The AAG objected to sending Raju to Ramesh Hospitals, stating it was sending him to Telugu Desam office. He said that it was not good to send Raju there as the report was submitted by GGH doctors after a careful examination. The High Court ordered him to file an affidavit in this regard.

Raju invited trouble:
YSRC spokespersonDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 16

YSR Congress MLA and party spokesperson Ambati Rambabu has said Raghurama Krishnam Raju invited trouble for himself and there is no need for the YSRC government to ill-treat any MP. With the hospital report making clear how injuries were caused to the arrested MP, it was clear that "anti-social elements are supporting him," he said.

Rambabu told the media here on Sunday that law will take its course. "Even an MP can be arrested if he acts against the Constitution. Raju was trying to defame the government and enacted a drama by saying he was

assaulted by the police. What he aimed at was to avoid jail."

The YSRC spokesman said TD leaders Atchannaidu and Dhulipalla Narendra had also been arrested but none has complained of them being assaulted by the police. "Raju is a big actor and he complained he was beaten up by police immediately after his bail application was rejected at the AP high court."

Rambabu said that everyone knew that the injuries of Raju were due to psoriasis. "Chandrababu Naidu is behind Raju's drama, but both will not be able to gain political mileage. Nor will they be able to hurt the YSRC government's image," he said.

STORIES | OF HOPE

Four friends come forward to conduct funerals at their cost as kin back off

Abandoned Covid bodies get dignity in death

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 16

Three persons, despite reeling under financial distress triggered by the pandemic-induced lockdown, along with a doctor friend, are looking beyond their pain and grief to provide succour to others in need. They are reaching out to the people — convulsed by helplessness or indifference — who are unable to bid proper farewell to their departed dear ones claimed by Corona, and carry out last rites.

This group of four friends conducts funerals for those that died of the corona free of cost. It all

started last year. Dr Syed Ahmed, an ophthalmologist from Kadapa, the district headquarters, runs a clinic in Railway Koduru. He observed last year itself that people seized by fear were not coming forward to claim the bodies of their kin if they died of Covid-19 at hospitals.

While those who can financially afford were arranging funerals by others, the poor people were simply abandoning the bodies and leaving for their native places. It was then that Dr Ahmed decided to do something and roped in Arshad, Mohammed and Imran to perform last rites for the Covid victims. Among the

● Dr Syed Ahmed told the DC it would be more helpful if they had a vehicle of their own. A person offered up to ₹1 lakh for the cause, and a few others were also willing to help financially. He observed if they had an ambulance, it would cut their costs and enable them to attend to more calls

three, one works in a shop and the other two eke out a living by selling chicken pakodas.

So far, the four Good Samaritans conducted funerals for a total of 27 orphaned bodies. Dr

Ahmed said it costs them up to ₹4,000 just to provide PPE kits for each body evacuation, as well as vehicle rentals for the transport. He was thankful that some people were coming forward to help their cause.

Dr Syed Ahmed told the *Deccan Chronicle* it would be more helpful if they had a vehicle of their own. A person offered up to ₹1 lakh for the cause, and a few others were also willing to help financially. He observed if they had an ambulance, it would cut their costs and enable them to attend to more calls from the people to perform funerals for their dead and near.



Ahmed, Arshad, Mohammed and Imran

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 PATIENTS
THRONG VILLAGE FOR
'MIRACLE MEDICINE'DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 16

Krishnapatnam, a small and quiet village located close to Sea Coast and Krishnapatnam Port, is abuzz with activity for the last one month with hundreds of people thronging the habitation for locally made medicines for Covid-19 prevention and cure.

Though they are not aware of the composition of the medicines and their authenticity, distressed kin of hapless Covid patients have been rushing to the village for the medicine, hoping that it will save the victim's life.

A resident and self-made ayurveda doctor Bonigi Anandaiah is preparing the medicines and distributing them free of cost. He claims that he uses locally available leaves besides honey, pepper, green camphor, nutmeg (Jajikaya), black cumin, and cinnamon to produce the medicine.

A railway contractor with roots tracing to Mallam village near Naidupeta, and now living in Chennai, Duvvuru Rama Raghava Reddy said his village is almost free from the deadly virus after his relatives and friends distributed the medicine to the residents, including some Covid patients.

He said they have provided 40 kgs of honey and ayurveda ingredients worth ₹1 lakh to help Anandaiah prepare the medicine and serve more people.

A resident of Mallam and contract worker in APSPDCL, B. Srikanth said his 70-year-old grandmother, who was on an oxygen support till Wednesday, is back home and is doing well without oxygen support after they applied some eye drops given by Anandaiah.

A construction engineer, B. Mohan Rao Chaitanya of Nellore, said, "The medicine saved a couple living next door. While the woman was discharged in two days, the saturation level of her husband increased to 98 from 70 two days back."

Meanwhile, Anandaiah said he is not expecting any trouble from authorities since he is using natural ingredients. He has distributed his wonder medicine to nearly 50,000 people.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Anandaiah said he is preparing four kinds of ayurveda medicines and eye drops to help Covid patients recover.

He gave code names such as P (meant for clearing infection in lungs), F (to clear poisonous substances from the body), L (to activate the liver) and K (for critical cases) apart from the eye drops.

He said that the eye drops will activate the brain which is affected by poor oxygen supply and reduces the patient's dependence on oxygen. An ardent devotee of Guravaiya Swamy and a disciple of Avadhoota Venkaiah Swamy, Anandaiah attributed his knowledge to his guru Dr Vivekananda, an expert in ayurveda and Siddha medicine, living near Chennai.

APSPDCL LAUNCHES
'DIAL YOUR DIRECTOR'
PROGRAMMEDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 16

The Andhra Pradesh Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (APSPDCL) has launched a phone-in programme to redress consumer grievances in the five districts of Chittoor, Nellore, Kadapa, Ananthapuram and Kurnool under its purview.

In view of power disruption at the field level in the wake of the second wave of Covid-19, the company's director (Projects) P. Kaladhara Rao has launched the 'Dial Your Director' programme, whereby consumers can directly call him on 94404 07946 from 10 am to 11 am everyday.

Launching the initiative, the Director said the 'Dial Your Director' programme is necessitated because many of the SPDCL's linemen have either got infected with or succumbed to Covid-19, which created a void at the ground level and led to disruption of services and left many complaints unaddressed.

BLACK FUNGUS IS NOT A NEW DISEASE: DOCTOR

From Page 1

Dr C. Prabhakar Reddy, cardiothoracic surgeon, said black fungus is not a new disease. However, incidence of death due to the ailment is one in a million patients.

On increased prevalence of black fungus among Covid-19 patients due to steroids, he maintained that use of steroids cannot be discontinued, as they benefit more than causing harm.

Even after discharge, such patients have to continue mild steroids.

"But the problem is public not being educated enough about keeping their sugar levels under control," Dr Prabhakar Reddy remarked. Termed mucormycosis, black fungus is a rare but dangerous infection. It is caused by a group of molds called micromycetes and often affects sinuses, lungs, skin, and brain.

Rush hour



People in large numbers seen shopping at Besant Road during lockdown relaxation in Vijayawada on Sunday. — DC

Private Covid hosps.
come under scanner

Notices issued to a few hospitals for overcharging patients

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 16

Vigilance, police and health departments have been closely monitoring activities of private hospitals involved in treating Covid-19 patients to prevent them from fleecing patients and their families.

Notices have been served on two hospitals for irregularities such as collecting charges over and above the prescribed rates while one hospital was asked to close down for overcharging Covid-19 victims, SPSR Nellore district collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said at

● NOTICES HAVE been served on two hospitals for irregularities such as collecting charges over and above the prescribed rates while one hospital was asked to close down for overcharging Covid-19 victims.

a press conference on Sunday.

"We will cancel your licenses if you charge more than the rates fixed by the government," he warned all private hospitals. He asked ambulance operators to stick to rates fixed by the authorities for different destinations. He advised families of

Covid patients to contact only 104-service for a bed and other Covid-related issues. He urged the public to call 1077 in case unrecognised persons provide services.

He said that 36 hospitals and 12 Covid care centres were rendering yeoman service and at each place a nodal officer has been monitoring the situation. He said that 50 per cent of the 2,848 beds available in Covid-19 hospitals and 3,500 in care centres, have been earmarked for Aarogyasri beneficiaries.

Chakradhar Babu said a survey on fever cases is underway in the district and they are providing

medical kits to patients based on their health status.

He clarified that they would provide the second dose of Covishield only between 12 and 16 weeks of the first dose as directed by the Centre.

Regional vigilance and enforcement officer K. Rajeswara Reddy said that they were keeping a tab on all Covid hospitals in the district and they would book criminal cases against those guilty of looting the public.

Superintendent of police P. Bhaskar Bhushan and other senior officials were also present.

NEW OXYGEN
PLANT COMING
UP IN KURNOOLDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 16

To ramp up oxygen generation, Rayalaseema Group of Companies is to convert its existing nitrogen plant at their manufacturing facility into oxygen units. This would bolster supplies to hospitals, which are in dire need of oxygen in the fight against Covid, said Rajya Sabha member TG Venkatesh, on Sunday.

Venkatesh, who is also chairman of parliamentary standing committee on transport, shipping, and civil aviation, said that ₹1.25 crore was being spent on providing ventilators and oxygen to different government hospitals. In addition, safe drinking water facilities are provided at five villages as well.

He said that the effect of the pandemic could last for another year. Kurnool city was sanitised with hypo to kill germs, he said.

Black fungus is throwing up major challenges as it develops from an unhygienic environment. Garbage piles and rotten fruits and vegetables have become breeding places for black fungus and the hypo liquid works as an efficient antidote to kill germs. Every household should take sufficient precautions and avoid throwing litter in a haphazard manner, he said.

Covid-19 cases on
rise in AnantapurDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 16

An alarming situation prevails in Anantapur district, following a steep rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths for the past one week.

As many as 14 persons died of Covid-19 on Sunday alone. A total of 17,465 active patients are being treated at hospitals, Covid care centres and in home isolation.

At least 3,356 patients reported positive in various parts of the district. The district cases crossed the 3,000 mark for a first time during the second wave.

The latest surge of infections is more worrying as more middle aged and youths are getting affected in the district.

Almost all hospitals including private nursing homes say there are no vacant beds any longer. nodal officers appointed

for Covid hospitals are under tremendous pressure from different sections — politicians, officers and friends — to allot oxygen beds for their close ones who are in critical conditions.

A senior medical officer told *Deccan Chronicle* they are not in a position to provide treatment even for their close relatives if they need oxygen beds.

In view of the horrific situation, the district administration sought immediate recruitment of medical staff for the 500-bed Covid hospital at Arzas Steel Plant near Tadipatri. Around 150 doctors, 300 nurses and 250 staff will be needed at the hospital.

DMHO Kameswara Prasad said that so far 14,57,540 tests were conducted and 1,14,156 positive cases were recorded in the district.

SRIKAKULAM
SEES TOTAL
LOCKDOWNDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM,
MAY 16

Srikakulam town observed a total lockdown on Sunday and all shops and business establishments pulled down their shutters. The district which witnessed a downward swing last week with caseload in three digits suddenly saw a spike during the last 24 hours with as many as 1,509 cases. The town observed total lockdown on four Sundays last year when the cases registered a sudden rise.

On Sunday, 1,939 people were discharged from various hospitals and 1,901 people are undergoing treatment for Covid-19. Over 10,392 people are in home isolation and 778 in Covid Care centres.

₹1.54 CR FINE
SLAPPED ON
PRIVATE HOSPS.DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 16

East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy cracked the whip on private hospitals by imposing a fine of ₹1.54 crore on 39 Covid-notified private hospitals in the district for collecting higher than the government-fixed charges, not accepting digital payments and violating Covid-19 protocols in treatment.

He said that vigilance officials, cluster officials, flying squads and other related officials made inspections on private hospitals and found several irregularities including not accepting health insurance cards from patients for treatment.

He said that some hospitals did not allocate 50 per cent of beds to Aarogyasri beneficiaries. These hospitals were imposed a fine ranging from ₹2 lakh to ₹10 lakh.

He directed the hospitals to pay penalties within 48 hours. He said the irregularities were treated as a first-time mistake and if they continued such practices, the hospitals would be taken over and run by the government staff.

● MURALIDHAR REDDY said that some hospitals did not allocate 50 per cent of beds to Aarogyasri beneficiaries.

'Mrithyunjaya Yagam
to drive away Covid'DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 16

Renowned Brahmaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple at Srisailam has started Maha Mrityunjaya Yagam for 40 days seeking God Shiva's blessings in overcoming Coronavirus crisis.

Temple executive officer K. S. Rama Rao said the Maha Yagam is being launched following an appeal by devotees from Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra states, who are suffering both economically and health-wise due to the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Devotees believe that Mrityunjaya Mantras will protect all from suffering.

The 40-day Yagam began on Sunday and will end on June 25. Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy

Task force to convert
educational centres
into Covid-19 centresDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 16

As fresh Covid-19 cases have not witnessed any downward trend in Chittoor district over the last few weeks and with government and private hospitals and health care centres occupied to full capacity, the Covid-19 task force officials on Sunday inspected various educational institutions in the district in a bid to convert them into Covid-19 care centres.

As per official data, there was no respite from the increasing number of cases in the district. More than 25,000 infections were reported during the last 10 days against nearly 21,000 during the previous 10-day period prior to the imposition of curfew. At present, the district has reported 23,436 active cases as on Sunday.

With the second wave of Covid tightening its grip and the curfew proving to be inadequate in curbing the surge of fresh cases and shortage of beds in all hospitals and Covid care centres, the district Covid task force officials have inspected the Indian Institute of Technology — Tirupati campus at Yerpedu on Sunday to examine the feasibility of converting the campus into a Covid care facility.

The officials also inspected other private colleges near Tirupati and later submitted their report to the district collector M. Hari Narayana.

Meanwhile, District joint collector Veerabrahmam held a meeting with all vendors supplying oxygen to various hospitals in the district and reviewed the status of supply demand scenario.

ADMISSIONS EXTENDED TO CAPF, VILLAGE
WOMEN AT POLICE COVID-19 CARE CENTREDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 16

The Covid Care Centre established by the police department at Police Training College will extend services to the village women care secretaries, central armed force officers and staff.

Prakasam district SP Siddharth Kaushal disclosed this at Ongole on Sunday. According to the SP,

the state-of-the-art Covid Care Centre has 100 beds. While 90 beds are common beds, 10 beds are equipped with oxygen and there are separate barracks for women and men.

Meanwhile, a 52-year old retired Constable in CRPF, Kellam Chennakeshavarreddy of Rajapanagal Road, Prakasam District, was admitted to the Police Covid Care Centre with Covid positive on Sunday.

HOSP. STAFF ALERTED
IN ADVANCE TO
GIVE MEDICAL AID

From Page 1

The hospital authorities were alerted in advance about the critical condition of Subbarayudu and asked to make necessary arrangements to provide emergency medical aid.

They even failed to arrange a stretcher, it was pointed out. Though, the nodal officer kept the ICU bed ready on the second floor, staff negligence led to the death of an honest official.

Meanwhile, Hindupur municipal 3rd ward planning secretary Harshavardhan Reddy was suspended by the municipal regional director over failure to coordinate with staff in oxygen utilisation.

He neglected duties at the hospital as the coordinating assistant, it was said.

TANA FUNCTIONARY N.R.C. NAIDU SUCCUMBS TO COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 16

N.R.C. Naidu (44), an NRI leader from PVG Palle near Rajampet in Kadapa district, lost his battle to Coronavirus in Washington DC. He was well-known to the Telugu people in the American capital. Satish Vemana, the former president of Telugu Association of

North America (TANA), who also hails from Rajampet area, said Naidu was an active member of TANA and was always available to all.

He was helping all activities of Telugu organisations, especially TANA, for over a decade. He also chaired the prestigious sponsorships committee under the guidance of Vemana at the 2019 DC

Conference, connecting many donors to TANA.

Naidu, who was also politically active, worked in the NRI TDP cell. Vemana said he had lost a brother and beyond.

TANA functionaries Komati Jayaram, Gangadhar Nadella, Jayasekhar Thalluri and many NRIs from Telugu states paid tributes to the departed soul.

₹9 L ROBBED
FROM A HOUSE IN
OGILI MANDALDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE MAY 16

Unidentified miscreants robbed ₹9 lakhs cash from the house of one Parvatamma of Ravipadu village in Ogili mandal during the wee hours of Sunday.

The woman had kept the cash to buy agricultural land in the village. She realised that her house was burgled when she noticed the cash missing in the steel cupboard which was lying open.

Ogili SI Sekhar Babu said that the inmates of the house failed to lock the main door while going to bed on Saturday night. The accused broke open the locker in the cupboard and relieved the cash.

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SHORT TAKES

KEEP RATION SHOPS OPEN ON ALL DAYS: CENTRE

New Delhi, May 16: The Centre on Sunday asked the state governments to keep ration shops, also called fair price shops, open for a longer duration and on all days to ensure timely and safe distribution of both subsidised and free foodgrains to the poor.

An advisory in this regard has been issued by the Union Food Ministry following representations that during the current lockdown in some states/UTs, ration shops' timings have been curtailed due to which the intended beneficiaries might not be getting adequate time to lift their entitled foodgrains.

"In view of ongoing lockdown in some States/UTs, that may curtail the functioning hours of Fair Price Shop (FPS), an advisory has been issued on 15th May, 2021...to keep the FPSs open, preferably on all days of the month," the ministry said in a statement.

The Centre is distributing highly monthly subsidised foodgrains of 5 kg per person at ₹1-3 per kg via ration shops to over 80 crore poor under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Over and above this, additional 5kg of free grains are being distributed to the same beneficiaries under the PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) scheme for two months — May-June in order to minimise economic hardships being faced by the NFSA beneficiaries during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

ANTI-COVID DRUG 2-DG TO BE RELEASED TODAY

New Delhi, May 16: The first batch of anti-Covid drug 2-DG, developed by the DRDO, will be released on Monday by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, officials said.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI) has approved the oral drug for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe coronavirus patients, the defence ministry said earlier this month.

The officials said the first batch of the drug will be released by the two ministers at an event at the headquarters of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) here.

The ministry, on May 8, said the clinical trials of the drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG), showed that it helps in a faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence.

The approval of the drug has come at a time when India is grappling with a record-breaking wave of the coronavirus pandemic that has stretched the country's healthcare infrastructure to its limit.

"In the ongoing second Covid-19 wave, a large number of patients are facing severe oxygen dependency and need hospitalisation. The drug is expected to save precious lives due to the mechanism of its operation in the infected cells. This also reduces the hospital stay of Covid-19 patients," the ministry had said.

PURI JAGANATH TEMPLE CLOSED TILL JUNE 15

Puri, May 16: Keeping in view the surge of Covid-19 cases in Odisha and also in Puri, the authorities of the temple of Lord Jagannath in the pilgrim town on Sunday announced that the 12th century would remain out of bounds for the public till June 15. The famous temple is closed for the devotees since May 5 as a statewide lockdown was imposed by the Odisha government.

The Shree Jagannatha Temple Administration made the decision to keep the temple closed for people till June 15 at a review meeting chaired by SJTA Chief Administrator Dr Krishan Kumar and attended by Puri Collector Samarth Verma. The administration of the temple in Puri is under the law department of the state government and the SJTA, which is responsible for management of the shrine, is headed by a senior IAS officer.

It was also decided at the meeting to review the standard operating procedure from time to time, keeping in view the evolving situation. Though members of the temple will not be allowed to enter the temple, all the age-old rituals of the deities continue with the help of servitors and the temple administration officials, Kumar said.



A deserted view of the Howrah Bridge during the first day of the ongoing Covid induced lockdown in Kolkata on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY



Health workers wearing PPE wait to admit a Covid-19 patient upon his arrival at a newly constructed 500 ICU beds Covid-19 care centre at Ramliila maidan opposite LNJP hospital in New Delhi, on Sunday. — PTI

Centre issues new SoPs to fight Covid

Modi directs states to intensify the vaccination drive to cover the population as soon as possible

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 16

With daily cases of Covid-19 still very high, several states have extended lockdowns to check the spread of the second wave and high fatalities due to it. It is expected these lockdowns, which to some extent have helped in breaking the speed of the virus' spread in parts of the country, will now continue till the positivity rate comes down to around five per cent.

Delhi, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday announced that they were extending the lockdown for another week, while Himachal Pradesh extended it till May 26 and Punjab till the end of the month. Many more are going the same way as the country on Sunday registered 3.11 lakh new Covid-19 cases and 4,077 deaths. Though the decline in cases may give some sense of relief to the Centre and state governments and the battered healthcare system, it is the rise in deaths that remains a major cause of worry as the fatalities are believed to be much more than reported or documented.

Dead bodies, possibly of Covid-19 patients, have been found floating in rivers and buried in the sands along the banks of rivers in several parts of northern India. The government has now asked local administration to prevent the dumping of bodies in rivers and banks.

With the spread of Covid infections now getting deeper into rural areas,



A nomad woman walks with her horse along the deserted Dal Lake during strict lockdown imposed in Jammu and Kashmir by Government administration to contain the surge in Covid-19 cases, in Srinagar, on Sunday. — PTI

the Centre has issued guidelines on the containment and management of infections in semi-urban, rural and tribal areas that have much fewer means to detect, contain and treat the deadly virus. The districts have been asked to set up a dedicated testing centre in each village to increase surveillance and testing, have Covid Care Centres in blocks and districts must have dedicated Covid hospitals. All mild patients have to be kept in home isolation with proper monitoring.

Since tribal communities are geographically and socio-economically relatively segregated and have poor access to health care, the SOP suggests strengthening community-based management through Gram Sabha and having Mobile Medical Units

(MMUs) that have medical officers, pharmacists, staff nurses and lab technicians. This team will also carry out Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT), take samples for RT-PCR, provide treatment for mild illness, and help establish referral linkage with district health care centres. It has been advised to utilise telemedicine and tele-consultation to bridge the geographical inaccessibility in tribal areas.

Patients, their contacts and suspected cases have to be closely monitored for oxygen levels and lung infection. The SOP prescribes home isolation for mild cases to be managed with paracetamol, and if needed other drugs like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Naproxen or ibuprofen. In mild cases, if symptoms

persist beyond seven days (persistent high-grade fever/ worsening cough) low dose oral steroids — dexamethasone 6 mg/Methylprednisolone 32mg — can be used. For moderate cases, Tab Ivermectin or HCQ, inhalational Budesonide can be given. Anticoagulation shall also be provided.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a meeting with the chief ministers of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh and Puducherry to review the Covid situation. The states have been asked to intensify the vaccination drive to cover the population as soon as possible. The priority has to be given to 45-plus people who are going for their second dose.

In several parts of the

country nearly no vaccinations took place Sunday as vaccines stocks ran out. However, the vaccines are likely to be easily available in the coming week as the CoWIN app has been recalibrated to reflect the dose interval of Covishield vaccines from 6-8 weeks to 12-16 weeks. However, the Centre said already booked online appointments for the second Covishield dose will remain valid and are not being cancelled by CoWIN, though beneficiaries are advised to reschedule appointments for the second dose in alignment with the enhanced duration between the two doses. The arrival of the second consignment of Russian vaccine Sputnik V is also expected to boost the availability of the vaccines.

Cyclone: Vaccination drive on hold

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 16

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation of (BMC) has cancelled Covid vaccination scheduled on Monday in view of the IMD alert regarding cyclone Tauktae. The BMC on Saturday night shifted 580 patients from jumbo Covid facilities to state and civic-run hospitals in Mumbai. The IMD has said there is likelihood of heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in Mumbai on Monday. An orange alert has been issued for Mumbai and red alert for Raigad district in Maharashtra.

As per Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) warning the Cyclonic storm Tauktae is

likely to pass close to Mumbai city.

The Mumbai civic body has also informed that the revised schedule will be Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (May 18 to May 20). According to the IMD, cyclone Tauktae has intensified into a "very severe cyclonic storm" and is expected to reach the Gujarat coast in the evening hours of May 17 and cross it with wind gusts of up to 175 kmph (109 mph) between Porbandar and Mahuva in Bhavnagar district around the early Tuesday morning.

The BMC had already suspended the inoculation drive on May 15 and 16 to avoid troubles for people due to the heavy rain and windstorm ahead of cyclone Tauktae.

UDDHAV URGES FAMILY PHYSICIANS TO JOIN STATE'S COVID-19 FIGHT

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MAY 16

In a bid to make a fight against the Coronavirus pandemic more comprehensive, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has appealed to the family physicians in the state to lend a hand in treating the Covid-19 patients, who are under home isolation.

He has also requested the private doctors to extend their services in the Covid care centres in their vicinity.

"Nearly 70 to 75 per cent coronavirus patients are asymptomatic and undergo treatment by staying in

home isolation. It makes the role of family physicians very important as they can help in managing the treatment protocols of these patients more effectively," said Mr Thackeray on Sunday.

He was addressing an online medical conference on Covid treatment, which was attended by nearly 17,500 private medical practitioners across the state. The conference was a part of Maharashtra Government's Majha Doctor (My Doctor) initiative launched with an aim of involving family doctors in the state's fight against the Coronavirus.

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 16

In an unprecedented outburst, heavyweight Trinamul Congress MLA Madan Mitra raised his voice against the rampant sale of emergency requirements — from oxygen cylinders to Remdesivir to hospital beds — for Covid-19 patients in West Bengal at exorbitant black market rates.

Though the former state transport minister did not name the brains behind the illegal business of profiteering, his explosive claims are bound to cause an embarrassment to party supremo Mamata Banerjee as she is not only the chief minister but the state's health minister too. Mr Mitra's high-voltage allegations came days after he failed to get a berth in Ms Banerjee's third Cabinet despite his victory by a good margin over Raju Banerjee of the

BJP at Kamarhati, where he had lost to Manas Mukherjee of the CPI(M) in 2016.

On Facebook Live Saturday, the TMC MLA said: "On one hand oxygen, which saves life, and Remdesivir and steroids, which are life-saving drugs, are sold in the black market while on the other, beds are unavailable in the hospitals. I know such nursing homes, which I do not want to name, charging anything in between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakhs per bed."

He added: "In the name of treatment on a ventilator, a patient is shown getting the facility only when his family members come to visit him. As soon as they leave, the patient is shifted to the general ward. Even after brain death, it is said ECMO has been underway, the patient is on life support, ventilator, etc."

Edamalakkudy, the first tribal panchayat where there is zero positive cases

SELF ISOLATION

Kerala tribals face Covid by 'self lockdown'

Idukki (Ker), May 16: Confining himself to his forest hamlet isolating from the outside world seems to be a non-issue for Rajesh, a tribal youth living in Oonjampara, a settlement located over five kms away from Marayur here. If anyone asks if he is not missing his frequent trips to the nearby town these days, he has a clear but sure answer: "This isolation is for our well-being only...to keep this disease away. Isn't it?" This wisdom has helped a section of forest dwellers in this

hill district to keep Covid-19 at bay in their hamlets, at a time when the entire country is reeling under its second wave.

Long before the government clamped lockdown officially, they were confined to their fringe hamlets isolating themselves to ensure that no one among them got infected. They come out of the shelter of forests only rarely to collect essential articles, baby food and medicines.

They were also not hesitant to request the outsiders including police

● **HEALTH AND FOREST** department officials are constantly monitoring the situations and conducting periodic health checks in these settlements.

and health workers to ensure that they are not carriers of the virus while visiting them. Edamalakkudy, the first tribal panchayat of the state located about 30 kms away from the tourist town Munnar here, is the only panchayat in the southern state now where there is

zero positive case, thanks to the self isolation.

A habitation of Muthuvannan community, around 3,000 people, belonging to over 750 families are living in more than 25 settlements in this village. Located inside the Munnar forest division, the remote hamlet, having no proper road or other connectivity, has now become a model for the entire world outside to emulate in their fight against the pandemic.

Besides Edamalakkudy, the inhabitants of Koodalkattukudy, a tribal

ward in Marayur panchayat, have also succeeded in keeping their settlements Covid free so far through self-isolation.

Located about five kms away from Marayur, there are over 1,300 tribals, belonging to 500 families of Muthuvannan and Hill Pulaya community, living in 9 settlements in this panchayat ward. If 'oorukoottam', the tribal council, of Edamalakkudy had decided to adopt self-isolation when the first wave of Covid-19 hit the country, the dwellers of

Koodalkattukudy isolated themselves from the outside world from the beginning of this April.

Health and Forest department officials are constantly monitoring the situations and conducting periodic health checks in these settlements. Twenty-five-year old Rajesh, belonging to Oonjampara settlement of Koodalkattukudy, said everyone, cutting across all age groups, are diligently obeying the directives of the tribal council to follow self-isolation. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

VENEZUELA FLAYS 'KIDNAPPING' OF EIGHT SOLDIERS

Caracas, May 16: Venezuela on Saturday condemned what it said was the "kidnapping" of eight soldiers by armed groups operating on the Colombian border, where clashes have been ongoing for nearly two months. "During the fighting, eight professional soldiers were captured and on May 9 we received proof of life," Venezuelan Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said in a televised statement.

"We denounce before the international community... the appalling kidnapping of these soldiers," he said.

Venezuela's armed forces have engaged in clashes with Colombian armed groups along the border since March 21, displacing thousands of civilians who fled to Colombia.

Venezuela does not name the armed groups it blames for the unrest, apart from calling them "terrorists" or linking them to drug trafficking.

EXTENSION OF CJ TENURE WRONG: ZIMBABWE COURT

Harare, May 16: Zimbabwe's High Court on Saturday ruled that President Emmerson Mnangagwa's controversial extension of tenure of the country's top judge is illegal.

Mnangagwa announced last week that he had extended Luke Malaba's term of office by five years, just hours before the Chief Justice was to due to retire, a move seen as aimed at consolidating the president's power. Three high court judges sat through Friday night as lawyers argued over the legality of the extension.

The court ruled on Saturday that "Malaba ceased being a judge and Chief Justice of Zimbabwe at 0000hrs on 15 May 2021." Malaba has been accused of favouring Mnangagwa's administration. He dismissed opposition leader Nelson Chamisa's presidential election petition following the 2018 vote.

Decrying the ruling as "baseless and meaningless", the government said the case was "a typical case of judicial overreach".

TWO KIDS FOUND DEAD IN ARIZONA, MOM DETAINED

Tempe (Arizona), May 16: Two children were found dead Saturday morning in a suburban Phoenix apartment after a woman flagged down a police officer and said she was hearing voices telling her to kill her children, police said.

Officers went to her apartment and found a nine-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy dead with "obvious signs of physical trauma," Tempe Police spokesman Sgt. Steven Carbajal said. The mother who flagged down a Tempe officer about 7 a.m. near a police station is Yui Inoue, 40, Carbajal said in a statement.

Inoue was arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder, he said. No other identities have been released. Police said they had been called to the same apartment earlier Saturday morning because of a domestic dispute involving a husband and wife. Carbajal said the couple was separated, and no one was arrested. The children were safe in bed at the time, and there was no apparent reason to call child welfare authorities.

EASING AFRICA'S ECONOMIC WOES AT VIRTUAL MEET

Paris, May 16: French President Emmanuel Macron will on Tuesday host a virtual summit of European and African leaders to seek solutions to the financial crisis in Africa, where governments hope to boost development while managing massive debts.

The "summit on financing African economies" was planned last year after the International Monetary Fund calculated that African economies risk running into a total "financial gap" of \$290 billion by 2023.

Economic growth on the continent, which experienced its first recession last year, is expected to rebound to 3.4 percent this year and 4.0 percent in 2022. A moratorium on debt servicing, put in place in April 2020 by the G20 and Paris Club group of creditor nations, has given Africa a bit of breathing space, suspending the repayment of 5.7 billion euros (\$6.9 billion) by 50 countries.

The G20 also convinced China, by far the biggest bilateral lender on the continent, and private creditors to take part in future debt negotiations.

Israel kills 42 as Bibi warns war will go on

Prime Minister says country wants to levy a heavy price on the militant Hamas rulers of Gaza City



People inspect the rubble of the Yazegi residential building that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike, in Gaza City, on Sunday.

BIDEN TALKS TO ABBAS ON GAZA ESCALATION

Ramallah, May 16: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has spoken on the phone with President Joe Biden and urged the US to intervene in the conflict and "put an end to Israeli attacks on Palestinians".

The official Palestinian news agency *Wafa* says Abbas on Saturday updated Biden on the escalations across the Palestinian territories and said he was working to halt "the Israeli aggression against our people and to reach a cease-fire". The report says Abbas also told Biden that "security and stability will be achieved when the Israeli occupation ends," adding that Palestinians are ready and willing to work toward peace with international mediators.

Biden stressed the need to achieve calm and reduce violence in the Mideast, noting intensive American diplomatic efforts to that end. That's according to the *Wafa* statement.

Biden told Abbas on Saturday that Hamas must stop rocket attacks on Israel, the White House said.

Biden "stressed the need for Hamas to cease firing rockets into Israel," a statement said. Biden also "underscored his strong commitment to a negotiated two-state solution as the best path to reach a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

— AFP

Why were news offices destroyed, asks media

Gaza City, May 16: News organisations demanded an explanation Saturday for an Israeli airstrike that targeted and destroyed a Gaza City building housing the offices of *The Associated Press*, broadcaster *Al-Jazeera* and other media outlets.

AP journalists and other tenants were safely evacuated from the 12-storey al-Jalaa tower after the Israeli military warned of an imminent strike.

Three heavy missiles hit the building within the hour, disrupting coverage of the ongoing conflict between Gaza's Hamas

rulers and Israel.

At least 145 people in Gaza and eight in Israel have been killed since the fighting erupted on Monday night.

"The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what happened today," AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt said.

He said the American news agency was seeking information from the Israeli government and engaging with the US State Department to learn more.

Mostefa Souag, acting director-general of *Al-Ja-*

zeera Media Network, called the strike a "war crime" and a "clear act" to stop journalists from reporting on the conflict. Kuwait state television also had office space in the now-collapsed Gaza City building.

"The targeting of news organisations is completely unacceptable, even during an armed conflict. It represents a gross violation of human rights and internationally agreed norms," Barbara Trionfi, the executive director of the International Press Institute, said.

— AP

Israel faces highest ever rate of rocket attacks

Jerusalem, May 16: Israel has faced the highest ever rate of rocket attacks on its territory during its latest confrontation with the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas that controls Gaza, the army said Sunday.

Since Monday, armed groups in Gaza have fired about 3,000 rockets towards Israel, surpassing the pace during an escalation in 2019 and during the 2006 war with Lebanon's Hezbollah, said Major General Ori Gordin.

Gordin, commander of Israel's home front, presented a graphic to reporters with data of

rockets fired toward Israel in past years and now.

During an escalation in November 2019 between the army and the Islamic Jihad group, 570 rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel over three days. And in the 2006 war with the Iran-backed Hezbollah, a total of 4,500 rockets were fired at Israel over 19 days, according to the data Gordin shared with reporters.

Asked if the pace since Monday was the highest ever rate of rocket attacks on Israeli territory, Gordin said: "Not only do I agree, this is what I present."

— AFP

03 days: 570 rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel during escalation between army and Islamic Jihad group in Nov. 2019.

19 days: A total of 4,500 rockets fired at Israel during 2006 war with the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Protesters in US cities decry airstrikes

Los Angeles, May 16: Pro-Palestinian protesters took to the streets of Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and other US cities to demand an end to Israeli airstrikes over the Gaza Strip.

Thousands of people shut down traffic on a major thoroughfare in west Los Angeles on Saturday as they marched two miles from outside the federal building to the Israeli consulate. The protesters

waved signs that said "free Palestine" and shouted "long live intifada," or uprising. In San Francisco, a raucous crowd banged drums and yelled "Palestine will be free" as they marched across the Mission district to Dolores Park. A similar scene played out in Boston as protesters walked a short distance from Copley Square to the Israeli Consulate for New England, blocking traffic.

Footage on social media shows protesters unfurl a banner in the colours of the Palestinian flag with the words "Free Palestine" while standing on top of the awning of the building where the consulate is located. In Washington, thousands of protesters streamed from the Washington Monument and to the National Archives.

In Philadelphia, demonstrators filled Rittenhouse Square to decry US suppo-

rt for Israel. At a protest in Pittsburgh, one speaker called on lawmakers to put restrictions on how Israel can spend aid from the United States.

The protests were stoked by five days of mayhem that left at least 145 Palestinians dead in Gaza and eight dead on the Israeli side. The violence, set off by Hamas firing a rocket into Israel on Monday, came after weeks of mounting tensions and

heavy-handed Israeli measures in contested Jerusalem. Israel stepped up its assault and slammed the Gaza Strip with airstrikes Saturday, in a dramatic escalation that included bombing the home of a senior Hamas leader, killing a family of 10 in a refugee camp and destroying a building that house the offices of *The Associated Press* and other media.

— AP

Qatar FM wants attacks to stop

Doha, May 16: Qatar's foreign minister on Saturday met with the political chief of Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas and called for an end to Israel's bombardment of Gaza, state media said.

"The international community must act urgently to put an end to Israel's brutal and repeated attacks against civilians in Gaza and (Jerusalem's) Al-Aqsa mosque," Qatar's Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said in a statement carried by the official QNA news agency.

He also assured Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh of Qatar's support for its "Palestinian brothers".

Their meeting came amid days of Israeli air strikes on Gaza, the group's stronghold, in response to rocket fire by Palestinian militants in the coastal strip.

The violence was sparked by clashes between Palestinian

demonstrators and Israeli forces at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

Hamas issued an ultimatum for Israel to remove its forces, then started firing rockets into the Jewish state.

"We warned that the blessed Al-Aqsa mosque was a red line and we told Netanyahu: 'Don't play with fire,'" Haniyeh, who lives in exile, told hundreds of supporters at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Doha.

He was speaking hours after an Israeli air strike flattened a building housing international media outlets, including *The Associated Press* and Qatar-based *Al Jazeera*.

Qatar, a key Hamas backer, has used its vast natural gas riches to provide aid and loans to Israeli-blockaded Gaza as well as mediating with Israel.

— AFP

ISLAMIC LEADERS HOLD EMERGENCY MEET ON GAZA

Beirut, May 16: The 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation held an emergency virtual meeting Sunday over the situation in Gaza calling for an end to Israel's military attacks on the Gaza Strip.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan urged the international community to work on ending Israel's military operations against Gaza and to allow aid to reach the coastal region. Speaking from Ramallah in the West Bank, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki blasted Israel calling it an "apartheid state" that is practicing "crimes and brutality against our people in Gaza."

He added that the latest round of violence that began on Monday has displaced 10,000 people.

— AP

EGYPT SENDS AMBULANCES TO BRING WOUNDED

Cairo, May 16: Egypt opened its Rafah border crossing with Gaza Saturday to allow 10 ambulances to transport Palestinians seriously wounded in Israeli air strikes to Egyptian hospitals, medical officials said.

Egypt "exceptionally opened the Rafah crossing to allow 10 Egyptian ambulances into the Gaza Strip to transport wounded Palestinians... to be treated in Egypt," a medical official said.

An official at the Gaza border said the opening was "exceptional" because it is usually closed during public holidays including Eid al-Fitr.

The Egyptian public health authority said that the holiday was being suspended for some Egyptian doctors and nurses.

— AFP

BIG CAT

Animal owner maintains 2017 murder charge against him for fatal shooting was in self-defence

Police: Missing Texas tiger has been found safe, healthy

Houston, May 16: A tiger that frightened residents after it was last seen briefly wandering around a Houston neighbourhood has been found after a nearly week-long search and appears to be unharmed, police announced Saturday evening.

In a short video tweeted by Houston police, Cmdr. Ron Borza can be seen sitting next to the tiger, petting the animal and saying it has been a long week searching for it. "But we got him, and he's healthy," Borza said as the wife of the man police allege is

the animal's owner sat next to him and fed the tiger with a baby bottle.

The tiger was being held at BARC, the city of Houston's animal shelter, but was expected to be taken Sunday morning to the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch, an animal sanctuary in Murchison, Texas, located south-east of Dallas. Authorities had been searching for the tiger, a nine-month-old male named India, since it was spotted May 9 in a west Houston neighbourhood. At the time, it was nearly shot by an off-duty

deputy before being whisked away in a car by Victor Hugo Cuevas, who police allege is the owner.

At a news conference later Saturday evening, Borza said that Cuevas' wife, Giorgiana, turned over the tiger to police on Saturday after a friend of hers reached out to officials at BARC. "It is Victor's tiger. That's what I was told by (Giorgiana Cuevas) ... She says they've had that animal for nine months," Borza said. He alleged that the tiger was passed around to different people but that Cuevas'

wife knew where the tiger was at all times this week as authorities searched for it. Police are still trying to determine where exactly the tiger was held this week and if any charges related to having the tiger will be filed.

Tigers are not allowed within Houston city limits under a city ordinance unless the handler, such as a zoo, is licensed to have exotic animals. But Cuevas' attorney, Michael W. Elliott, on Saturday night continued to insist his client doesn't own the tiger, saying, "I am not sure it

makes any difference who technically owns India as he does not have a birth certificate or title."

"Victor was not the primary owner of India nor did India stay with him the majority of the time," Elliott told *The Associated Press*. "Victor was however involved in the caretaking of India often. Victor loves India as anyone else would love a favorite pet ... He treated India with love and fantastic treatment in all respects." Cuevas was arrested Monday by Houston police and charged with evading arrest for

allegedly fleeing his home with the tiger after officers had responded to a call about a dangerous animal.

At the time of his arrest by Houston police, Cuevas was already out on bond for a murder charge in a 2017 fatal shooting in neighbouring Fort Bend County. Cuevas has maintained the shooting was self-defence, Elliott said. Cuevas was released on a separate bond for the evading arrest charge on Wednesday. But prosecutors in Fort Bend County then sought to have him held with no bond on the

murder charge.

After an all-day hearing on Friday, a judge revoked Cuevas' current \$125,000 bond on the murder charge and issued a new bond for \$300,000.

He remains jailed. During Friday's court hearing, Waller County Sheriff's Office Deputy Wes Manion, who lives in the Houston neighbourhood where the tiger was seen, testified he interacted with the animal for about 10 minutes to make sure it didn't go after someone else.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

17 MAY 2021

Covid-19 in India is more than a crisis of numbers

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortation to states to be transparent with the Covid-19 numbers — mainly about the number of people who test positive and those who fall victim to the virus — could not have come at a more opportune time than now as there have been reports of numbers being fudged by several states, including Gujarat and Delhi. Worse, the officials have still not yet completed counting the bodies of Covid victims floating in the river Ganga even as those bizarre images have created consternation among Indians living in India and abroad.

The world has lived with the virus for one-and-a-half years. Medical science and responsible administrations all over the world have come out of their initial confusion on the ways to deal with the micro-organism, and have developed fairly elaborate treatment protocols. There are also proper guidelines on ways to count a death as a Covid-related one. However, the reports coming from Gujarat inspire little confidence as the number of death certificates issued in the state far outnumber the recorded Covid deaths; it also bears little comparison with the number of total deaths in the previous years, giving room for suspicion that the government has discounted some. Such allegations are not limited to Gujarat; there are states which refuse to list a death under the Covid head once the patient tested negative and then succumbed to medical conditions triggered or exacerbated by the viral infection. Accurate data is critical to the proper analysis of the impact of the pandemic that would guide policymakers and scientists into taking proper decisions. Hence the Prime Minister is right in telling the states that they should be transparent with numbers "without pressure of high numbers showing

The Prime Minister is right: we should have accurate numbers. Yes, we miss the numbers. But we miss a government more. And it shows.

adversely on their efforts".

The bodies floating in the holy river points to a deeper malaise. Governmental apathy last year had lakhs of guest workers, women and children included, walking hundreds of kilometres to their homes after losing their livelihoods in the cities in the aftermath of the national lockdown. There was no government to help them out, and hundreds of Indians died on the road. The government, in fact, has no data on them. They presented this nation with images that generations will remember with a sense of shame and guilt.

A repeat of what Indian roads saw last year is happening on its rivers now. Villagers with infected lungs that disallowed them to breathe could not get oxygen, a hospital bed, a shot of life-saving drug and die helpless deaths. Their bodies are flung in the waters, as relatives have no wherewithal, financial and otherwise, to attend to the dead and accord them a decent farewell. The bodies of Indians float, or caught in the current, or stuck in the rocks or nibbled by crows and vultures. What we miss is the presence of a government, central and state, mandated to protect the right to life, guaranteed by the Constitution. All we need is a government that is willing to do a minimum job.

The Prime Minister is right: we should have accurate numbers. Yes, we miss the numbers. But we miss a government more. And it shows.

Bengal Gov. must follow norms

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's public observations in the context of post-poll violence in the state appear to be a bundle of contradictions. Last Friday, visiting Dhubri district in Assam, where according to him 175 people from his state fled to be safe from post-poll violence, Mr Dhankhar expressed "concern" that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had maintained "silence" on this issue and on the subject of post-poll violence as such. He noted at the same time, "I should not say much as the cases are under investigation."

Well, if the cases are being investigated, then the CM has clearly not been silent. So, where is the misdemeanour on her part that the governor darkly hints at? Without a shred of evidence, and when investigation is on, the governor seems to have done his best to give a communal touch to the violence. This is a matter of record and deserves to be discussed in the state legislature.

If the Governor's numerous observations were to be placed before a commission of inquiry, it might become amply clear that the burden of his song is that law and order does not exist in the state and that the constitutional machinery has broken down. If such is indeed his extraordinary reading, it is not clear what prevents him from reporting exactly this to the Centre, and recommending President's rule.

It is noteworthy that Mr Dhankhar, although a Constitutional head with severely circumscribed authority except the discretionary powers to appoint a CM, has been touring various parts of the state to study first-hand the post-poll violence situation. He has visited Cooch Behar and Nandigram. His most unusual Assam visit was also in the same context.

The state government frowned on these trips (when an inquiry is on). This did not deter him. For a Governor, to make repeated forays into the countryside is unconventional, to say the least. It is akin to the role that Opposition parties, journalists, and NGOs play. In a formal communication, the Chief Secretary has now urged Mr Dhankhar to desist from further trips since the state has just been placed under a lockdown to deal with Covid. It is to be seen if the Governor's wanderlust gets the better of constitutional propriety.

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Subhani



Israel's brutality in Gaza has dented heroic image



Mohan Guruswamy

The ongoing Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip is horrific in its ferocity and far exceeds any limits of justifiable and even acceptable retribution. There was once an image of the Israelis being a people of heroic dimensions and sterling character forged by the many tyrannies that the Jewish diaspora have suffered, including the industrial scale programme of extermination by Nazi Germany.

The founding of the State of Israel held out the promise of a new nation that, being tempered by their experiences and motivated by the high idealism of its founders, would give the world something to look up to. It was this idealism that inspired India to be among the first three nations to recognise Israel.

The first generations of Israeli leadership, drawn from the European Jewry known as the "Ashkenazim", were generally liberal and progressive. This was seen in early Israel when most agriculture was under cooperative farming organised around the kibbutz, which also entailed a communal (sharing) lifestyle.

The Histadrut, the labour union, which was the bedrock of the Labour Party and political movement led by Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, was also Israel's biggest employer and owned much of its transportation, dairy, construction and services sectors. Israel was intended as a progressive, socialist and democratic state. It has moved along quite a bit away from that now.

During the initial years of its existence, Israel heroically defied the odds and many writers like the late Leon Uris captured this new promised spirit of the Israeli people. His 600-page masterpiece *Exodus* created a sensation in 1957 and

propelled him to the highest literary fame. It was a detailed and heroic chronicle of European Jewry from the turn of the last century to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Exodus, while being the epic story of a nation seeking a state, was also the touching love story of Ari Ben Canaan, an Israeli freedom fighter, and Kitty Fremont, an American nurse who joins Canaan's fight for a Jewish state.

In 1958, after it became one of the most popular novels of the century, *Exodus* was made into a film by Otto Preminger and featured Paul Newman as Canaan. It was probably the first time that Hollywood had portrayed a Jewish man in such heroic dimensions. The book and the movie contributed to the mythologising of the Israeli fighter as an indomitable and idealistic hero.

But it is not that Israel lacked such men those days. The founders of the Palmach, the elite strike force of the Haganah that was the forerunner of the Israeli Defence Forces, were men like Moshe Dayan, Haim Bar Lev, Ezer Weizmann, Yigael Yadin, Yitzhak Rabin and Yigal Allon, who were all men of heroic proportions and each one could have been a prototype for Canaan.

But it was Yigal Allon who came closest of all to it. Allon, who died in 1980, began life as a Haganah field commander in 1936 when he was just 18 years old. In 1941 he was one of the founders of the Palmach, the Haganah's mando-style strike unit. In 1948 he was made a lieutenant-general and commanded Israeli forces in the south that "liberated" the Negev in what became to be known as the War of Independence. He retired from the IDF in 1950, at the ripe old age of 32.

In 1960, Allon went to Oxford's St. Anthony's

College to study international relations. He later entered public life and became deputy prime minister in 1967 and devoted himself to seeking a durable peace with the Palestinians.

The Haganah was founded in 1920 as the underground military organisation of the Jewish *Yishuv*, or community, and was then a loose organisation of various local defence groups. The Palmach was its first mobilised unit, gained battle experience in the Second World War as the Jewish Brigade under British command. The Palmach consisted of many first generation "Sabra", or Palestine-born Israelis, who were also fluent Arabic speakers, which gave it the ability remain concealed among the Arab population and to wage a lethal unconventional war on them.

The British learned as much from this experience. Captain Orde Wingate, who later led the famous Chindits Brigade in Burma, learned his art of fighting from the Palmach. Wingate was a charismatic dreamer who, though a Christian, had joined the Jewish movement and led the joint British-Haganah's Special Night Squad which fought in Ethiopia. Wingate's African experience found expression in Burma and its successes led all traditional armies to establish special warfare forces to give them similar deep strike capabilities.

The combination of unconventional warfare by the British SAS and US Special Forces and deep and precision air strikes by modern fighter and bomber aircraft in Afghanistan has now given

The continued occupation of the West Bank since 1967 and the continued building of settlements in defiance of UN resolutions and in the face of world opinion are ugly and contemptuous manifestations of a narrow nationalism

modern warfare a new dimension. Of the three battalions who formed the original Chindits Brigade, the 2/4 Gurkha Rifles is still with the Indian Army and carries the Chindits tag with great pride.

Wingate was born in Nainital in 1901 and died in Manipur in 1944.

The Israeli Defence Forces' heroic sheen has now largely dissipated with its emergence as a mighty army with the latest weapons and America's unstinted support. It is now no longer David with a slingshot facing mighty Goliath. In the four major wars that it has fought, the IDF had worsted numerically superior Arab armies with ease. It is difficult to remain a heroic David against such adversaries for long.

The Palestinian intifada is now the heroic struggle of a people seeking to find their identity and their freedom. Just like Israel was before 1948.

The atrocities during the War of Independence can even be justified by the fact that there was a war declared on the Jewish State by all its Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and supported by the entire Arab world. The moth-eaten Israeli mandat- ed by the UN was not tenable in terms of security, and addition of territory to gain security could have even been justified.

But the continued occupation of the West Bank since 1967 and the continued building of settlements in defiance of UN resolutions and in the face of world opinion are ugly and contemptuous manifestations of a narrow nationalism.

Israel is no longer the valiant and beleaguered underdog, but increasingly seen as an increasingly arrogant oppressor seeking to crush another old nation under its jackboots. The sad truth about Israel is that Benjamin Netanyahu is fact and Ari Ben Canaan is fiction.

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

LETTERS

WORK HARDER

It is shocking that in spite of partial lockdown for the last 10 days, there is no decrease in Covid infections and deaths (*AP records 22,517 covid-19 cases, 98 deaths, DC, May 16*). Some other states are getting better results with lockdowns and in India as a whole the number of cases is dwindling. It is clear that government has to put more efforts to control the situation and people have to cooperate with government.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

CANCEL SSC EXAMS

AP government's decision to conduct SSC exams is troubling parents and students in this pandemic. There are three reasons for their concern. One is inadequate time for preparation, second is poorly designed online and offline classes and third is fear of Covid-19 second wave. So, AP government must immediately cancel SSC exams and pass everyone with grades like our neighbouring states. Else, if the AP government conduct exams, the result will be neither in favour of students or the government.

D.Ravikumar
Visakhapatnam

STEP UP DRIVE

Until now, India has lost over 2.7 lakh people (*Covid spreading to rural India: PM, DC, May 15*). However, even after many warnings, some citizens do not wear mask properly. Government must take more steps for virus awareness in rural areas.

Maresh Kumar Kachhawah
Anantapur

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Ceiling an urban property

LUDHIANA, May 16. Communications Minister H.N. Bahuguna today said that ceiling would be imposed "soon" on urban property and that the only question before the Government was whether it should be decided by the Union or the State Government. He said the deletion of the Right to Property clause from the Constitution was necessary if this Right was to be extended to the havenots.

Sanjaya Baru
Sanjayovacha



For the second year in a row Covid-19 has disrupted India's mango exports to the United States because the two governments have not been able to devise a solution to the problem of securing US government clearance of export consignments. India's mango exports to the US were the fruit of prolonged negotiations that finally came to fruition as part of the new strategic partnership inaugurated by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

In June 2007 I was presented with the opportunity of handing over the first basket of mangoes legally imported into the United States to then US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice at the annual meeting of the US-India Business Council (USIBC) in Washington D.C. I insisted that the USIBC include in the basket that I was to hand over to Ms Rice at least ten different varieties of mangoes, and not just the most popular export variety — Alphonso or Hapus.

While presenting the basket I said to Ms Rice that it represented India's national motto — unity in diversity. Every Indian regards the mango as the "king of fruits", I told her, but each In-

dian has his/her own favourite variety, and most of us can get very argumentative about which is the best variety.

The diversity in the subcontinent's preference for its favourite fruit is a metaphor for an India that is home to around 1,500 varieties of mangoes. While Maharashtra's Alphonso and Gujarat's Kesar dominate the export basket, other varieties like Andhra Pradesh's Banganapalli and Uttar Pradesh's Langra are also being increasingly marketed around the country and exported overseas.

But the immensely popular mango is not the only edible symbol of unity in diversity. Consider the case of the biryani. The social media has seen from time to time animated arguments about which is the best biryani among biryani aficionados and the authority of food columnists has often been summoned to pass judgement. Yet, between the biryani of Malabar, Bengal, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chettinad and a dozen other places, it is difficult to select the best.

In the larger discussion on India's plurality and diversity, the culinary preferences of over a billion and a quarter people does not get the attention it deserves.

Just as most Indians who agree that democracy is the best form of governance would have sharp differences on which political party they would support in the interests of preserving that democracy, most of us would be united in our view that Indian food is the tastiest in the world, and yet argue about which part of India offers the most scrumptious cuisine. Unity in diversity is written into our social and cultural DNA.

Foreigners used to imagining that Indian food is tandoori chicken and mattar paneer or dosa and sambar are always surprised by the diversity of what Indian kitchens can conjure up. From imagining that there is something called Indian cuisine, they slowly get used to the idea that there may well be a north, east and south Indian cuisine. But when they discover that "Rayalaseema ruchilu" can be very different from "Telangana vantakalu", they give up looking for a common thread.

I have so far made a series of fairly obvious observations. Who would disagree with any of these statements? If we are a land of 1,500 mangoes, we are also the land of 15,000 gods and goddesses and 150,000 local deities. While

the Constitution recognises 22 official languages, close to 20,000 languages and dialects are spoken as the mother tongue across the subcontinent.

The miracle of Indian democracy and development is that despite this diversity the country has remained united and the roots of national unity now run deep into the soil of Mother India. Against this background, the desperate attempts by certain political elements to impose one religion, one language, one election on this diversity is an insult to the national imagination and an affront to our national personality.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the resistance to the "Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan" project has most recently been asserted by a clutch of regional political parties in the non-Hindi-speaking states.

The electoral victory of the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal and the DMK in Tamil Nadu are only recent examples. They remind those who need reminding that diversity has never been India's weakness. Rather, it is its strength since it prevents the emergence of majoritarian authoritarianism.

If there is one lesson that the present political leadership in New Delhi

should re-learn, it is that India cannot be governed as if it was a land of homogeneity. Unity is rarely imposed on a nation from the outside. It is the product of shared values, interests, culture and experience.

No Indian has to be commanded to love the mango. That love is second nature to us. No Indian can be commanded to love just one variety of the mango. That assertion of independent thinking too is second nature to us.

There is much that political and religious leaders can learn from the preferences of the Indian palate. The national popularity of a dosa and a tandoori naan has not been imposed on us by any overbearing political philosophy of national unity. They have become popular across the length and breadth of the subcontinent because, like the majestic mango, we have all come to like their taste. We have our own favourite biryani and we love our own language, but we recognise that we belong to one nation.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,732.55	0.09
Nifty 50	14,677.80	-0.13
S&P 500*	4,173.85	1.49
Dollar (₹)	73.28	0.19
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.05	-0.06
Euro (₹)	88.74	0.01
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,110▲146	0.30
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.44	2.07
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.986	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.645	-0.023

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Cairn picks \$70b Indian assets in US for seizure

The United Kingdom-based oil major Cairn Energy has identified \$70 billion of Indian assets overseas for potential seizure to collect \$1.72 billion due from the government — a move if successful will put India in league with Pakistan and Venezuela which faced similar enforcement action over failure to pay arbitration awards. These assets are across several jurisdictions, sources said without giving further details.

Special drive to clear GST refunds by month end



The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has launched a special drive to clear all pending GST refunds by month-end. The 15-day GST refund drive is on the lines of an ongoing similar drive organised by the CBIC for refund of customs and duty drawback claims. The CBIC said there is a need to focus on timely disposal of all pending GST refund claims to provide immediate relief to business entities.

Airtel offers free pack to 5.5 cr low-income users

Bharti Airtel on Sunday announced offering a recharge pack of ₹49 for free to as many as 5.5 crore low income customers to help them stay connected during the pandemic. Additionally, customers buying the ₹79 recharge coupon will now get double the benefits, the company said. It said the scheme is worth ₹270 crore, covering credit of ₹49 mobile plan for 5.5 crore low income group customers.

Geojit Financial Q4 net profit nearly doubles

Reflecting the buoyancy in the markets, Geojit Financial Services has nearly doubled its net profit at ₹36.8 crore for the quarter to March, up 95 per cent from ₹18.8 crore a year ago, when the market was ravaged by the pandemic last year. The board of the company, which is leading distributor of mutual fund SIPs, has also decided to enter the international Finance Centre in Ahmedabad with an AIF.



Data shows recovery in manufacturing Power use up despite Covid

New Delhi, May 16: Power consumption in the country grew by around 19 per cent in the first fortnight of May to 51.67 billion units (BU) over the same period last year, showing recovery in industrial and commercial demand of electricity, according to the power ministry data.

Power consumption in the first fortnight of May 2020 was 43.55 BU. The power consumption in the entire month of May last year was 102.08 BU.

During the first fortnight of May this year (from May 1 to 14), peak power demand met or the highest supply in a day touched the highest level of 168.78 GW (on May 6, 2021) and recorded growth of over 15 per cent over 146.54 GW (peak met) recorded in the same period in 2020 (on May 13, 2020).

The power consumption in April grew nearly 40 per cent to 118.08 BU. Power consumption in April 2020 had dropped to 84.55 BU from 110.11 BU in the same month in 2019, mainly because of fewer economic activities following the imposition of lockdown by the government in the last week of March 2020 to contain the spread of deadly Covid-19.

The power consumption also fell in May 2020 to 102.08 BU from 120.02 BU in May 2019.

Similarly, peak power demand met or the highest power supply in a day also slumped to 132.73 GW



in April last year from 176.81 GW in the same month in 2019, showing the impact of lockdown on economic activities.

The fewer economic activities also resulted in a fall of peak power demand in May 2020 to 166.22 GW from 182.53 GW in May 2019. Davinder Sandhu, advisor, Primus Partners said, “Energy is derived demand, and with onset of summer and the productive pre-monsoon cycle of the Indian economy, an uptick is always expected.”

Sandhu who is also a former Advisor at World Bank said, “Both energy demand and supply have risen by 25-40 per cent over March-May 2021, with thermal PLFs (plant load factor or capacity utilisation) rising to 75 per cent and more, after many quarters. This is aided by the opening of the economy in Q1 (January-March 2021), with rising economic output as well as sharp uptick in exports.”

The second wave of lockdowns will certainly impact economic activity, and in turn, energy demand. The larger than usual increase in part is attributed to lower base, and as well as to the pent up demand being executed now, he added.

After a gap of six months, power consumption had recorded a 4.6 per cent year-on-year growth in September 2020 and 11.6 per cent in October 2020.

In November 2020, the power consumption growth slowed to 3.12 per cent, mainly due to the early onset of winters. In December 2020, power consumption grew by 4.5 per cent while it was up 4.4 per cent in January 2021.

Power consumption in February this year recorded at 103.25 BU compared to 103.81 BU last year. But 2020 was a leap year. In March this year, the power consumption grew nearly 22 per cent to 120.63 BU compared to 98.95 BU in the same month of 2020.

— PTI

Markets to witness robust IPO line up in H2 of 2021

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 16

While the government’s proposed privatisation drive has been hit by the Covid’s second wave, a strong initial public offerings (IPOs) pipeline of privately owned companies is building up for the second half of calendar year 2021.

Several new names have filed draft red herring prospectus and some of them have already received market regulator Sebi’s approval.

In the last few days some new names have filed DRHP like Go Airlines, Penna Cement Industries, Nuvoco Vistas Corp (Nirma Group’s Cement Company), Supriya Lifescience, Krsnaa Diagnostics, Aptus Value Housing Finance,

In the last few days some new names have filed DRHP like Go Airlines, Penna Cement Industries, Nuvoco Vistas Corp, Supriya Lifescience, Krsnaa Diagnostics, Aptus Value Housing Finance, Devyani International and Windlas Biotech.

Devyani International and Windlas Biotech.

Zomato, Aditya Birla Sun Life AMC, Glenmark Life Sciences, Shriram Properties have also filed DRHP last month for their respective initial public offerings.

Sona BLW Precision Forgings’ proposed Rs 6,000 crore IPO received Sebi nod last week. Another IPO by Shyam Metalics and Energy

worth ₹1,100 crore is awaited after getting Sebi approval.

In the first half of 2021 so far 19 IPOs have successfully listed on the bourses and only four of them are trading below their public issue price.

Among these, three government owned companies listed were Indian Railway Finance corporation, Powergrid Infrastructure Investment Trust and RailTel Corporation Of India.

Meanwhile, the much awaited IPO of Life Insurance Corporation of India is getting pushed back as the health crisis has also hit the bureaucracy badly with many key officials infected by the coronavirus, slowing decisions on privatisations, among other proposed reforms, said a report.

Hero MotoCorp to foray into electric two-wheeler market

New Delhi, May 16: The country’s leading two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp is looking to launch an electric model next year and mark its entry into the segment, according to a senior company official.

Bullish on the electric vehicle (EV) vertical, the company is utilising its Jaipur (Rajasthan) and Stephanskirchen (Germany) based R&D set-ups to develop its own products.

Besides, it has tied up with Taiwan-based Gogoro Inc to bring the latter’s battery swapping platform to India. The partners have also decided to collaborate on electric vehicle development to bring Hero-branded, powered by Gogoro network vehicles to market.

“We are trying to launch one of the EV products in fiscal year 2022, and you will see multiple actions, whether it is our own product or a swap product

or with Gogoro. All of those actions you will see in the next calendar year,” Hero MotoCorp CFO Niranjan Gupta said.

In order to tap the segment, the two-wheeler maker has already invested in Bengaluru-based EV startup Ather Energy, which already has introduced models in the market. He said the company’s R&D centres have been working to develop products based on fixed charging system.

— PTI

GRANULES TO INVEST ₹1,000CR FOR CAPITAL SPEND IN 3 YRS



New Delhi, May 16: Drug firm Granules India has earmarked a capex of around ₹1,000 crore which it aims to invest over the next three financial years on expansion of operations, according to a top company official.

The Hyderabad-based firm plans to invest on a new manufacturing facility and on expanding production capacities at existing plants.

“During FY22, we expect to spend ₹400 crore and the rest of the ₹600 crore is spread over FY23 and FY24,” Granules India chairman and MD Krishna Prasad Chigurupati said in an analyst call.

The drug firm plans to invest about ₹180 crore on a Multiple Units Pellet System (MUPS) block, around ₹250 crore on expanding active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) capacity, ₹320 crore on a new formulation plant and another ₹30 crore on expansion of a facility near Hyderabad which rolls out paracetamol and metformin, he noted.

“And then there is maintenance capex. So this is a broad breakup of what we are doing. There’s very clear visibility, and we are very excited that we’re going to invest all this cash. And all this, like I’ve been repeatedly saying, we are very confident we can meet with our internal accruals. And I don’t see the need for any debt going forward,” Chigurupati said.

The company, which manufactures several off-patent drugs, including paracetamol, ibuprofen, metformin and guaifenesin on a large scale for customers in the regulated and rest of the world markets, also aims to invest in the range of ₹150 crore on R&D activities every year.

— PTI

Hester in talks with Bharat Biotech to make Covaxin

New Delhi, May 16: Hester Biosciences on Sunday said it has tied up with the Gujarat government to explore production of Covid-19 vaccine through technology transfer from Bharat Biotech.

The Ahmedabad-based firm said it has already initiated the discussions with Bharat Biotech in this regard.

“A triparty consortium has been formed with the government of Gujarat as the lead partner, to explore the prospects of manufacturing the Covid vaccine through technology transfer from Bharat Biotech,” Hester Biosciences CEO and MD Rajiv Gandhi said in a statement.

The discussions are currently ongoing with Bharat Biotech towards reviewing the infrastructure at Hester, the technology adaption process and the regulatory compliances, he added.

Based on the outcome of the review, the next course of action will be determined, he noted.

Hester Biosciences is a



leading player in the animal healthcare segment. It is the second largest poultry vaccine manufacturer in the country.

Only three vaccines have so far been approved to be sold in India — Covaxin, Covishield and Sputnik V.

Sputnik V has been approved to be imported from Russia by Dr Reddy’s, but is yet to be widely available in the country.

Last week the Delhi government urged the Centre to use its special

power to allow more firms to manufacture vaccines.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the Centre should share the vaccine formula of the two manufacturers with other capable pharmaceutical companies to scale up production in the country.

He said the Centre can also terminate the monopoly on vaccine production through the patent law.

— PTI

VACCINE, GLOBAL CUES MAY INFLUENCE INDIAN MARKETS

New Delhi, May 16: Equity markets this week are likely to follow the quarterly earnings outcome of listed companies, pace of vaccination drive in India and global market trends for further direction, according to analysts. “In absence of any major event, participants will be closely eyeing the performance of global indices, US bond yields, movement of rupee against the US dollar, and crude oil prices.”

Religare Broking vice-president (research) Ajit Mishra said, “Needless to say, Covid-19-related updates and progress of the vaccine drive will also be in focus.”

On the earnings front, Bharti Airtel, Tata Motors, Indian Oil Corp, Havells, Hindalco and

Federal Bank are some of the prominent names who will be announcing their results during the week along with several others, Mishra added.

The quarterly earnings from Canara Bank, JK Tyre & Industries, Havells India, JK Lakshmi Cement, JSW Steel and State Bank of India will also be watched by investors this week.

“Going forward, market will track the pace of vaccination, trajectory of active cases curve and management commentary of companies,” Shibani Kurian, senior executive vice-president at Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Co, said.

Investors would also track the WPI-based inflation data to be announced on Monday.

— PTI

CHANGING TIMES Ticket size of cash withdrawals at ATM rises

Covid wave spikes digital payments again

New Delhi, May 16: The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a behavioural change in usage of cash with people withdrawing larger amounts from ATMs but preferring to make digital modes to make payments, said experts.

The ferocity of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic has scared people, forcing them to withdraw larger amounts from the ATMs with a view to avoid frequent visits. The money thus withdrawn is mostly held for emergency use and often payments are being made through UPI and other digital modes.

Talking about the behavioural change in currency usage, Sarvatra Techno-



logies founder and MD Mandar Agashe said that in view of the lockdown and social distancing norms, people are not venturing out to banks and ATMs as frequently.

“The average ticket size of withdrawals at any given time has gone up by almost 20 per cent, as peo-

ple withdraw in larger quantities and prefer to hoard, pre-empting medical or any other form of emergencies, which ultimately is not consumed as much.

“The average ticket size of withdrawals which earlier ranged between 2,000-3,000 now has invariably gone up by 20 per cent to ₹3,000-4,000 across both rural and urban India,” Adashe said.

He further said UPI was taking care of small-ticket transactions with the average ticket size constant at Rs 1,000.

Owing to this behavioural shift, daily average transactions on IMPS have now gone up to Rs 9,000 which was earlier in the range of around Rs

COVID CLAIMS RISE MANIFOLD FOR HEALTH INSURANCE COS

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 16

Commensurate to the rise in Covid-19 cases, insurers are witnessing a surge in claims. Compared to the September-October period, Covid-related claims have gone up by more than three times.

“When the country is witnessing three to four lakh Covid cases every day and all hospitals are running beyond their bed capacity, a significant percentage of patients are also making insurance claims. The insurance industry is seeing a significant surge in claims,” said Dr S Prakash, managing director of Star Health and Allied Insurance.

According to Sanjay Datta, Chief Underwriting, Claims and Reinsurance, ICICI Lombard General Insurance Company, the industry has seen a three-fold rise in Covid claims in April compared to September-October 2020. Though the industry-wide loss ratios for FY21 are not yet out, insurers expect that it would be much more than 100 per cent.

However, during the first half of last fiscal, the claims of non-Covid cases were considerably down due to the lockdown. But now, he said, claims related to elective procedures have once again tapered down.

“We are only receiving claims of emergency non-Covid cases,” said Prakash.

DICGC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India, provides insurance cover on bank deposits.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget speech in February said the government had approved an increase in the Deposit Insurance cover from ₹1 lakh to ₹5 lakh for bank customers last year.

It could not be presented in the Budget session due to curtailment of the last session following the spread of second wave of Covid-19 pandemic.

It is to be noted that the enhanced deposit insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh is effective from February 4, 2020. The increase was done after a gap of 27 years as it was static since 1993. The cover is provided by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the RBI. With increased insurance cover, the banks are paying a higher premium of 12 paise against 10 paise per Rs 100 deposited without any additional burden on account holders.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

Shankar bags high jump gold in US

New Delhi: Indian high jumper Tejaswin Shankar has claimed a gold medal at the Big 12 Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Manhattan, USA. Representing Kanساس State University, Tejaswin cleared 2.28 metres on Saturday, making a facility record. It was also the season's finest performance for the Indian but a centimetre short of his personal best and the current national record of 2.29m which he created in 2018. University of Oklahoma's Vernon Turner (2.25m) and Texas Tech University's Jequan Hogan (2.11m) claimed the silver and bronze respectively. This was Tejaswin's second successive gold at the event. — PTI

Covid-free Hussey off to Australia

Chennai: Having recovered from Covid-19, Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey left for Australia on Sunday via Doha, a top official of the IPL franchise said. Following an RT-PCR test, the former Australia batsman had returned negative for Covid-19 on Friday, paving the way for his departure in the early hours of Sunday. "Yes, Hussey has left for Australia via Doha by a commercial flight. He left in the early hours of Sunday," CSK CEO K. S. Viswanathan said. Hussey, who had first tested positive for Covid-19 during the now-suspended Indian Premier League, is expected to reach home on Monday. — PTI

Bryant inducted into Hall of Fame

New York: Los Angeles Lakers icon Kobe Bryant was inducted posthumously into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on Saturday part of a star-studded group that also included Tim Duncan and Kevin Garnett. Bryant was inducted as part of the Class of 2020, almost 16 months after he and his 13-year-old daughter Gianna were killed in a helicopter crash along with seven others in southern California. Bryant's wife, Vanessa Bryant, took the podium Saturday to speak movingly about his love for basketball, his family, his teammates and his fans. "You did it. You are in the Hall of Fame now. You are a true champion, not just an MVP. You are an all-time great," Vanessa said. — AFP

Countdown begins for Paralympics

Tokyo: As Japan struggles to slow infections ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, officials in Japan held an event marking 100 days to go to the start of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The event was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building with strict corona counter-measures in place. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike in her opening remarks paid tribute to all the medical professionals fighting against Covid-19 and also thanked all the businesses in Tokyo that have been cooperating with the latest state of emergency requirements. Koike went on to point out that Tokyo will be the only city to have hosted the Paralympic Games twice and lauded the barrier free initiatives that have been implemented in the city thanks to the Paralympics. — AP

Indian women likely to tour Oz

New Delhi: The Indian women's cricket team is set to travel to Australia in September. India, who have played only one series amid the Covid-19 pandemic, tour England next month to play their first Test in seven years besides three ODIs and as many T20s. Australia pacer Megan Schutt dropped a hint that India will be visiting in September though Cricket Australia is yet to announce the schedule. The tour is expected to comprise ODIs and T20 Internationals. "We have got a tour against India in mid-September," Schutt said. — PTI

TIM AND AGAIN

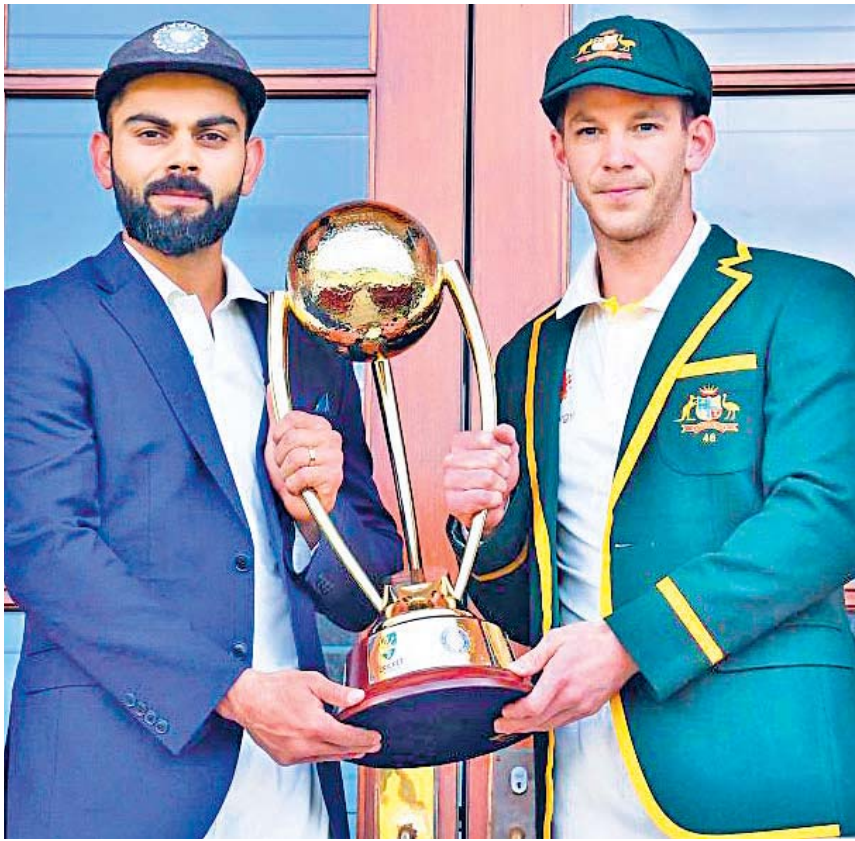
Paine says Kohli will always be remembered as world's best

Melbourne, May 16: Virat Kohli seems to have left an indelible mark on Australian Test captain Tim Paine, who says he will "always remember" the Indian skipper for being the world's best batsman, capable of also getting under the opposition's skin with his competitiveness.

Kohli and Paine have had a fiery rivalry which goes back to India's 2018-19 tour of Australia. Their on-field spats were an interesting sub-plot during the historic showdown in which India became the first Asian country to win a Test series Down Under. "For Virat Kohli, I've said many times, he seems like the type of player you would love to have on your team. He is competitive. He is the best batsman in the world," Paine said on the 'Gilly and Goss' podcast. "He (Kohli) is challenging to play against and he can get under your skin because he is so good and he is so competitive. But yeah, for me from where I came from, sharing a feud with him four years ago, He is certainly someone I will always remember," he added.

Interestingly, last year Paine had said that Kohli is "just another player" in the Indian team who "doesn't really bother me". He had also stated that the Australian team "loves to hate" the superstar for his awe-inspiring abilities with the bat. Paine, after the stunning loss in 2018-19, endured another debacle earlier this year when an injury-ravaged Indian team, which did not have Kohli after the opening Test, upstaged the Aussies in the Tests for a second successive tour.

He had recently caused a flutter by stating that his side was distracted by the Indian team's "niggling" during this year's series. — PTI



Virat Kohli and Tim Paine in this file photo.

Sachin reveals he battled anxiety for 10 to 12 years

New Delhi, May 16: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday said he battled anxiety for a major part of his 24-year-old career before realising that his pre-game quirks were an important part of his preparation.

Talking about mental health, which has gained significance in the Covid times with players spending lot of time in bio-bubbles, Tendulkar said acceptability is the key. "Over period of time I realised that besides preparing physically for a game, you have to prepare

yourself mentally also. In my mind the match started long before I entered the ground. The anxiety levels were very high," Tendulkar said in an interaction organised by Unacademy.

"I felt the anxiety for 10-12 years, had many sleepless nights before a game. Later on I started accepting that it was part of my preparation. Then I made peace with times I was not able to sleep in the night. I would start doing something to keep my mind comfortable."

That "something" included shadow batting,

watching TV and playing video games in the wee hours of the day. Even making his morning cup of tea helped him prepare for the game.

"Making tea, ironing my clothes also helped me prepare for the game. I would pack my bag the day before the game, my brother taught me all of it and it became a habit. I followed the same drill even in the last match I played for India," he said.

Tendulkar said a player is bound to go through ups and downs but it is important to accept when one is feeling low. — PTI

VIRAT VS KANE DEBATE TURNS UNSAVOURY

London, May 16: Former England skipper Michael Vaughan on Sunday launched a sarcasm-laden counter at Salman Butt, wishing that the ex-Pakistan skipper had shown such "clarity" of thought while "fixing matches", like the one that was on display while trashing his Kane Williamson greater than Virat Kohli viewpoint.

Vaughan told New Zealand's host broadcaster *Spark Sport* that had Black Caps captain Kane Williamson been an "Indian, he'd be the greatest player in the world".

"But he's not because you're not allowed to say that Virat Kohli is not the greatest, because you'd get an absolute pelting on social media. So, you all say Virat is the best purely to get a few more clicks and likes, a few more numbers following here."

"Kane Williamson, across formats, is equally the best. I think the way he plays, the calm demeanour, his humbleness, the fact that he is silent about what he does," Vaughan said.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, Butt, who was banned from cricket for 10 years for the spot-fixing scandal in 2010, which was later reduced to five years, slammed Vaughan for stirring up an unnecessary controversy by drawing comparisons between Kohli and Williamson. "Kohli is from a country that has a huge population. So, he will have a bigger fanbase. Moreover, no other batsman in the world has 70 international centuries. He has dominated the batting rankings for a long period because his performances have been outstanding. So, what is the need of this comparison," Butt said. — PTI

OLYMPIC | PREPARATION

Sindhu sings Sang's praises

New Delhi, May 16: The lack of competitions before the Olympics is a major concern for Indian shuttlers but not so much for P. V. Sindhu, who trusts her Korean coach Park Tae Sang to create match situations for her in training itself.

Owing to the raging Covid-19 pandemic, the Badminton World Federation has been forced to cancel the remaining three Olympic qualifiers in India, Malaysia and Singapore. These were to be the last set of events before the Tokyo Games in July-August.

Asked if cancellations will affect her preparations, Sindhu said: "Well, we were thinking that Singapore will be the last event before Olympics but now we don't have another option, so I am playing matches against different players and my coach Park is trying to create match situations for me in training."

"Different players have different styles like Tai Tzu (Ying) or Ratchanok (Intanon) have different styles of play but Park is there to guide me, to prepare me for it. Obviously, we will be playing each other after a few months and there will be something new in our games, so I will have to prepare for



P. V. Sindhu

that," she added.

Sindhu doesn't train with the rest of the Indian Olympic-bound team. She has been training at the Gachibowli indoor stadium in Telangana and does her fitness training at Suchitra academy.

The 25-year-old endorsed BWF's decision to cancel the events, saying while it is sad that competitions could not take place but life is more important than sports.

"It is sad that the whole world has come to a standstill but before sports-persons, we are human beings and life comes first. If tournaments happen, we don't know if we will be safe, we might think we will be but we can't be sure because we don't know from where this virus will come," Sindhu said. — PTI

BHAKER TO WRITE BA EXAMS WHILE SHOOTING IN CROATIA

New Delhi, May 16: Inside her hotel room in Croatian capital Zagreb, India's Olympic medal hope Manu Bhaker is juggling shooting-related activities and studies.

However, a day before the Tokyo-bound Indian shooting contingent hits the range for its first training session in Croatia, Bhaker's pistol will give way to a pen and the shooting gear to her study materials, as she logs in for her BA fourth semester exam.

A student of political science in the Delhi University's prestigious Lady Shri Ram College for Women, the champion shooter's exams start on May 18 while the European Championship in Osijek, in which the Indian team will compete as a guest invitee, begins two days later, from May 20.

The continental tournament and Bhaker's exams will run almost concurrently but she is relieved that the dates of her events are not clashing with the papers.

"I will manage both, as I have done in the past. At least I don't have competition on days I have my papers, so it's manageable," Bhaker said. — PTI

Spurs continue last-four quest

London, May 16: Harry Kane scored his 22nd Premier League goal of the season as Tottenham Hotspur beat Wolves 2-0 on Sunday to maintain their hopes of a top-four finish.

England captain Kane fired Spurs ahead on the stroke of half-time before Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg doubled their lead in the 62nd minute.

Victory left Spurs in sixth place, five points behind fourth-placed Chelsea, with a maximum of six points available to them from their final two league games.

The top four in the Premier League are assured of a place in the 2021/22 Champions League.

Already crowned Premier League title-winners Manchester City and Chelsea will contest this season's Champions League final in Porto on May 29.

Earlier, Crystal Palace twice came from behind to beat Aston Villa 3-2, with Tyrick Mitchell's first goal for the club sealing victory six minutes from time.

Victory lifted south London club Palace to 13th. — AFP

JUVENTUS PIP INTER TO KEEP ALIVE CL BID

Milan, May 16: Juan Cuadrado scored twice, including a late penalty, as Juventus beat Inter Milan 3-2 to keep their Champions League hopes alive on Saturday in a game where three spot kicks were awarded and both teams finished a man down.

Juve moved up to fourth equal on points with third-placed AC Milan and two points ahead of Napoli who both play on Sunday. The win ended the 20-match unbeaten run for Antonio Conte's Inter who had denied Juventus a 10th consecutive league title this season. "It was important for us to win so we can keep hoping," said coach Andrea Pirlo.

Cristiano Ronaldo missed a penalty after 24 minutes but turned in the rebound to bring his tally to a Serie A leading tally 29 goals this campaign. — AFP

FABULOUS WIN

Schmeichel hails Leicester's historic win

London, May 16: Kasper Schmeichel described leading Leicester to the club's first ever FA Cup as a dream come true after he played a huge role in beating Chelsea 1-0 on Saturday.

Youri Tielemans's stunning strike just after the hour mark separated the sides in front of the largest sports attendance in England since the coronavirus pandemic hit, with 22,000 fans at Wembley.

But Schmeichel had to rescue his side late on with brilliant saves from Ben Chilwell and Mason Mount. "I've dreamt about this since I was child," said Schmeichel, whose dad Peter Schmeichel won three FA Cups with Manchester United.

"We have talked about wanting to win trophies. The performance today, the grit and determination, I'm so proud of everybody, everybody contributed to get to the final. Everyone has played and been sensational," he added.

Even when Schmeichel was eventually beaten, Chilwell's late equaliser against his former club



Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel (right) and Wesley Morgan hold the trophy aloft after winning the FA Cup in London on Saturday. — AP

was ruled out for offside after a VAR review. "Thank you VAR! What an amazing technology," said Tielemans.

SUPPORT FOR PALESTINE

Leicester players Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana showed support for the Palestinians after winning the FA Cup final. English midfielder Choudhury and French

defender Fofana were seen holding a Palestinian flag. Choudhury had the flagged draped over his shoulders as he collected his winner's medal.

A social media post from Arsenal midfielder Mohamed Elneny also showing his support for the Palestinian people has been hit by a backlash from Jewish fans. — AFP

Dravid as NCA head has excelled in making Indian cricket stronger



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

Former Australia captain Greg Chappell has credited Rahul Dravid for India's pre-eminent position in cricket in the past few years. Chappell says Dravid understood the Aussies system of excellence, picked his brains (and of others from

his country) and replicated it successfully as coach of the under-19 and India A teams and now as director of the National Cricket Academy.

The ICC Test rankings put out last week seem to support his contention. India are top of the pops at no.1, New Zealand no. 2

and England no. 3. Australia, vying with India for the top place not too long back, have slipped to no. 4.

Barring a few weeks here and there, India have been no. 1 in the Test rankings for almost five years, which is a remarkable achievement. It shows consistency of performance, the only yardstick for excellence. This is true for India not just in Tests, but also in the other formats.

Fundamentally, India's current strength is based on a regular supply of high quality players. This

was the case with the Australians almost since the time cricket went Down Under. The West Indies too, till three decades back. And therein lies a message.

The West Indies faded away after a decade or so after the Packer Series, but the Australians continued to be strong, and in fact got better. What this showed was that it is not enough to just have a legacy of outstanding talent, also effective systems and structures for sustaining excellence.

Which brings me to why

Indian cricket is flourishing currently.

Primarily, credit must go to the BCCI for spreading the footprint of cricket all over the country. The more youngsters play, the larger the talent pool, the greater the number of elite cricketers. The BCCI has ensured this. It has also put in place institutions like the National Cricket Academy that can make a big difference.

The NCA has been around for just over two decades. For the most period, it functioned as rehab centre-cum-sanatorium for

injured cricketers. While putting cricketers back on their feet is obviously a big part of the academy, the NCA can't be limited to just that.

This is where Dravid has been of great value. As head of NCA he has gone beyond his job profile of being just administrator. He's proactively pursued the agenda of making Indian cricket stronger.

In this, he's drawn not just on his understanding of the Australian system, as Chappell highlights, but has brought his vast experience as player, and coach

of under-19 and India A teams to set up a more dynamic agenda to enrich Indian cricket.

This includes spotting and mentoring talent, mitigating fear of competition in young players and a desire for success.

Dravid's success is not an exhaustive formula or curriculum. It provides a kind of template of intent and practices. For India to keep excelling at the highest level depends on how this is assimilated, absorbed, improved upon at every nodal point in the cricket system.