DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

HYDERABAD | THURSDAY | 6 MAY 2021

WORLD | 9

WTO mulling IP waiver for vaccines

SPORTS | 12

MacGill kidnapped and released

TABLOID

How old is too old to be a mother?

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WEATHER

Max: 37.6°C
Min: 25.6°C
RH: 82%
Rain: 2 mm

Forecast: Partly cloudy. Rain likely in evening. Max/Min temp. 36/25ºC

ASTROGUIDE

Plava; Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Dasami till 2.13 pm
Star: Satabhisha till 10.33 am
Varjyam: 5.28 pm to 7.11 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.05 am to 10.56 am; 3.11 pm to 4.01 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 23,1442 AH

PRAYERS
Fajar: 4.43 am
Zohar: 12.23 pm
Asar: 4.40 pm
Maghrib: 6.44 pm
Isha: 7.55 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.38 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.48 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.51 AM
MOONSET TODAY 13.30 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.44 PM (TODAY)
SEHRI: 4.20 AM (TOMORROW)

COUNTER POINT

Hike the prices by a paise where we won, and by a rupee where we lost!

SHORT TAKES

Stalin to take oath as CM tomorrow

Chennai: TN Governor Banwarilal Purohit appointed M.K. Stalin as Chief Minister on Wednesday and invited him to form the next government. Stalin would be sworn in as CM along with his ministerial colleagues on Friday 9 am at the Raj Bhavan in a simple function, which will be attended by 200 persons.

■ Full report on Page 8

Deadline for KYC update extended

Chennai: Considering the Covid situation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday provided some relief to the customers by asking banks and other financial institutions not to impose punitive action against those who fail to update KYC. This relief is being provided till December end.

■ Full report on Page 11

IDBI Bank to be privatised

New Delhi: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday gave its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank. The extent of shareholding to be divested by the Centre and LIC would be decided later in consultation with RBI.

■ Full report on Page 11

BJP claims win in UP local polls

Lucknow: The ruling BJP on Wednesday rejected opposition claims that it had received a setback in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls and called itself the "overall winner". Samajwadi Party, however, claimed that it has bagged over 800 out of about 3,000 in zila panchayat seats, breaching also the BJP bastions of Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Ayodhya.

Centre warns of 3rd wave

Third wave of Coronavirus is inevitable in India, says top adviser

New Delhi, May 5: The government on Wednesday said that a third wave of Coronavirus pandemic was "inevitable", although a time-frame for it could not be predicted.

In a press briefing by the ministry of health affairs on Wednesday, officials said the long Covid wave of such "ferocity" that the country was experiencing currently "was not predicted".

Twelve states, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, have more than one lakh active Covid cases, the government said.

> Phase three is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur. We should be prepared for new waves
>
> — **K. Vijay Raghavan,** *Principal scientific advisor to the Centre*

Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Bihar are among the states that show an increasing trend in daily cases, it said.

The government also said that 24 states and UTs show more than 15 per cent Covid positivity rate.

From May 1, 6.71 lakh people in the age group of 18-44 years in nine states have been administered the vaccines, it added.

"Phase three is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur. We should be prepared for new waves," said K. Vijay Raghavan, the principal scientific advisor to the Centre.

Member, NITI Ayog, Dr VK Paul requested "physicians' fraternity" to come forward and provide teleconsultations to people and families at home who are infected with coronavirus.

"The response to the changing virus rem-ains the same. We need to follow the Covid-appropriate behaviour such as mask, distancing, hygiene, no unnecessary meetings and staying at home," Dr Paul said.

Union health ministry joint secretary Lav Agarwal said that the foreign aid coming from abroad is being monitored by a group of senior officials. — *PTI*

Covid cases under control in TS: CS

Official says positivity rate was brought down under the active guidance of KCR

BALU PULIPAKA | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Covid-19 cases in Telangana are showing a downward trend, indicating that the disease is under control, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar declared on Wednesday. "The situation," Somesh Kumar said, "is totally under control now."

He said, "It is because of the guidance from Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, who despite being Covid-19 positive, was reviewing the situation three to four times a day, we are doing well now."

Somesh Kumar, speaking to reporters, said the downward trend was evident over the past 10 days or so, and it was also being reflected in the case positivity rate. "The Chief Minister has given blanket orders that funds are not an issue when it comes to containing Covid and taking care of patients. He said as much money needed can be spent for this," Somesh Kumar said.

The CM, he said, also instructed that every government hospital bed in Telangana must be equipped with oxygen, a goal that was being worked on.

He said among the things Telangana did well that other states stopped when cases began to fall earlier this year, was that, "We worked continuously. We never worked with the thought that the disease has gone down." The state had 18,000 beds in September last, "now we have 52,000 beds," he said.

He also said the health department and other officials, under the guidance and directions of Chandrashekar Rao was monitoring the situation every day and issuing directions on what needs to be done to contain the disease and ensure all patients are well taken care of.

Asked if any outlook for the days to come was worked upon by the officials in view of the downward trend he was speaking about, especially with respect to pressure on hospitals for beds and treatment to patients in hospitals, he said the result of the work being done on Covid-19 control by the government could be seen in about a week from now.

He said Hyderabad was the medical treatment capital of the country and as many as 33 air ambulance flights landed in the city from different parts of India carrying Covid-19 patients for treatment.

■ Page 2: Panic buying caused shortages, says CS

2 OFFICIALS IN INDIAN TEAM TO G7 MEET TEST COVID POSITIVE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

In a major embarrassment to India, two members of the official Indian delegation in London ahead of the G-7 meeting reportedly tested Covid positive on Wednesday, according to international media reports that quoted a British government official.

Soon after the news broke, external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar tweeted that he had been informed on Tuesday evening about "exposure to possible Covid positive cases" and that he would now attend the G-7 meeting in virtual mode out of "abundant caution and also out of consideration for others."

British media reports also said that the entire delegation was in isolation and that Jaishankar had tested negative.

But sources said all members of the Indian delegation had tested negative before their departure from New Delhi. This would then mean that two of these Indian delegation-members in that case seem to have tested positive in London after testing negative initially in New Delhi.

Another worry is that Jaishankar had met both US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and British Home Secretary Priti Patel in-person in London in the past two days raising questions now on whether they need to be in precautionary self-isolation as well.

> Another worry is that Jaishankar had met both US Secretary of State and British Home Secretary in-person in London raising questions on whether they need to be in precautionary self-isolation as well.

Masks off

Trinamul Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar after taking the oath of office for the third time, at Governor House in Kolkata on Wednesday. ■ Reports on Page 8 — *PTI*

States have lost power to identify BCs, says SC

Rules Maratha quota invalid; backs 50% cap

New Delhi, May 5: The Supreme Court by a majority of 3:2, on Wednesday held the 102nd Constitutional amendment, which also led to setting up of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), took away states' power to identify socially and educationally backward classes under their territory for grant of quota in jobs and admissions.

The 102nd Constitution amendment Act of 2018 inserted Articles 338B, which deals with the structure, duties and powers of the NCBC, and 342A which deals with power of the President to notify a particular caste as SEBC and power of Parliament to change the list.

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan, in their four separate verdicts, however, was unanimous on other key issues such as the Maratha quota law was invalid and the 1992 Mandal judgement, capping total reservation to 50 per cent, did not need a relook.

> The states can, through their existing mechanisms can only make suggestions to the President or the Commission, for inclusion, exclusion or modification of castes or communities in the SEBC list, SC said.

Justice S. Ravindra Bhat wrote 132-page long verdict and Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta, in their separate judgements, concurred with Justice Bhat and his reasoning in holding that states have lost their power to identify SEBC under their territory after 102nd amendment.

Writing the majority judgement on this aspect, Justice Bhat, said, By introduction of Articles 366 (26C) and 342A through the 102nd Constitution, the President alone, to the exclusion of all other authorities, is empowered to identify SEBCs and include them in a list to be published under Article 342A (1), which shall be deemed to include SEBCs in relation to each state and union territory for the purposes of the Constitution.

■ Page 2: Maratha quota fails to meet Mandal criteria

Covid curbs hit TS coffers hard

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY I DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Night curfew and Coronavirus second wave have taken a toll on the state government's finances in April. While last financial year (2020-21) started with total state-wide lockdown in April 2021, the present financial year (2021-22) has begun with state-wide night curfew from April 20.

This apart, the rapid spike in coronavirus cases halted financial transactions as people remain confined to their homes for fear of contracting the virus.

Added to this, the voluntary closure of shops and establishments at several places in all districts even during the day to contain the virus compounded the financial woes of the state government.

According to official sources, "The state's average income per month from all sources, including Centre's tax devolution is around ₹12,500 crore. Of this, ₹6,000 crore go towards establishment expenditure which include salaries and pensions for staff. Of this, around ₹2,000 crore used for clearing debts and payment of interest and principal amount."

However, the state government earned only ₹7,000 crore this month. To fill this gap to some extent, the government has raised ₹3,000 crore from RBI by auctioning state development bonds in April, they added.

The finance department seems to be worried about meeting the huge budgetary target of ₹2.30 lakh crore set for this fiscal 2021-22 if new Covid restrictions are imposed in the coming days.

■ Page 2: TS budget target averted tough Covid curbs

HC ASKS STATE TO IMPOSE MORE COVID CURBS

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA I DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed the state government to impose additional restrictive measures to flatten the Covid curve in the state.

■ Full report on Page 3

HC ASKS CENTRE TO SOURCE 02 FOR TELANGANA

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 5

The Telangana HC on Wednesday advised the additional solicitor general to ensure that Centre supplied 600 MT of oxygen and life-saving drugs and vaccines to Telangana state.

■ Full report on Page 3

Techie attacks nurse for Covid vaccine shortage, case booked

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

A 24-year-old IT employee from Gachibowli was arrested by the Saifabad police for allegedly assaulting, molesting and injuring a medical worker at a Government Urban Primary Health Centre on Wednesday. The police said the man, identified as Rajesh, a software professional, picked up an argument with a 45-year-old health worker, Manjula, after learning that the centre was running out Covid vaccine stock.

Manjula was attacked by Rajesh, who had booked a slot for vaccination and came to the place at 4 pm on Wednesday, said Police Inspector of Saifabad, Saidi Reddy.

"After he was told that the place was out of vaccine stock, Rajesh allegedly picked up a fight and tried to shoot a video of the woman."

■ Page 2: Police booked molestation case

DUAL | USE

Black marketers use helpline groups to hawk oxygen, key Covid drugs

Fraudsters sneak into WhatsApp groups

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

When the sudden spike in Coronavirus cases came about and the related problems multiplied, the WhatsApp groups too mushroomed, mostly with an intent to help those in dire need of support.

These groups helped the needy get information on treatment, availability of plasma, oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators and the emergency medicines used for Covid19 treatment. These are also helping patients get beds in hospitals, food for those in isolation or quarantine, and reach up to newly established centres for patients with minimum symptoms.

All these groups have been adding members regularly as many are coming forward to extend a helping hand to the suffering patients and their families. They have information on their finger-tips.

Predictably, some fraudsters and the black marketers too have become a part of these groups. When someone post a message about an urgent requirement in the group, crooks would immediately catch on it and start sending private messages in spite of the group having common slots for communication. There starts the bargain for emergency products, be it for remdesivir injections, oxygen cylinders or any other item of an emergency nature.

> While WhatsApp groups have helped patients with critical information, some fraudsters too joined the group to reach out to those in need to bail them out for a heft price

Needless to say, these crooks make a kill out of any deal they are able to strike with the needy in desperation.

Safer Hussain, an IT employee, was in need of remdesivir injections on Tuesday night. There was a serious shortage of this medicine. When a request was posted on the groups, a lot of black marketers rushed in with offer of help. "This will create a tense situation. If we don't buy from one, there are others in wait. In an emergency situation, we end up spending a lot of time, haggling over rates etc," he said.

A international school teacher, on condition of anonymity, narrated her experience in a Telegram, which they had started to help out people.

■ Page 2: Police arrested doctor for black marketing

RBI lets lenders restructure loans

SANGEETHA G | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Responding to the second Covid wave, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday allowed lenders to provide loan recast for certain individuals and small businesses.

Individual borrowers, small businesses and MSMEs, having aggregate exposure of up to ₹25 crore and who have not availed restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks, are eligible for Resolution Framework 2.0.

This loan recast can be invoked up to September 30, 2021 and has to be implemented within 90 days after invocation. The beneficiaries have to be classified as standard accounts as on March 31, 2021. If individual borrowers and small businesses, who have availed restructuring of loans under last year's loan recast, their plans can be modified by increasing moratorium period.

■ Full report on Page 11

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A man risks riding in the rain in Hyderabad without wearing a helmet, on Wednesday. More rain has been forecast for the city and surroundings. — *R. PAVAN*

Rain further cools city

Many areas receive over 3 cm rainfall, more forecast

T.S.S. SIDDHARTH I DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Rains lashed parts of the city for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, giving respite from scorching summer heat. Rains measuring up to three centimetres in the evening brought down the temperature considerably.

According to the Telangana State Development Planning Society (TSDPS), as of 7.30 pm on Wednesday, the highest rainfall in the city was recorded at Miyapur (32.8 mm), followed by Gajularamaram (30.8 mm), Jeedimetla (26.3 mm), and Shapurnagar (20.5 mm). In the state, Bachpalle and Dharur received the highest rainfall. These areas had recorded 37.3 mm and 36 mm of rainfall, respectively.

Interestingly, the rains that showered over the city on Wednesday were of high intensity in western and west-central parts of the city. "The wind pattern currently is from the west to east, that is why the clouds are moving in that direction," said an official. "Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds (30-40 kmph) very likely to occur at isolated places in Telangana," said a weather warning issued by the department.

Now, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast more rains for the next 24 hours. Speaking to this newspaper, IMD director Dr K. Nagaratna, said, "There is a trough that is moving from parts of north-interior Karnataka, under its influence there are rains in the state."

TWO-WHEELER RIDER HURT AS GHMC TOILET FALLS ON HIM DURING RAIN

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

A biker heading home in the sudden downpour on Wednesday evening sustained injuries when a streetside GHMC bathroom flew and fell on him. He fell from the bike and sustained minor injuries.

Madhapur police said that it was a minor mishap and the man survived with simple injuries. "We did not get to catch his name as he picked up his bike and took off. No cases were booked," said a police official.

Doctor held for black marketing

From Page 1

"We teachers of the school created a group in Telegram and added those who wanted to extend some help to the Covid-affected. This group comprises some 8,000 participants. There has been a lot of good work happening in this group. Many have taken up the counselling work, there are people who started providing food for those infected nearby their house. But there are fraudsters too. They have been marketing the medical emergency medicines and equipment at higher rates. One person was selling remdesivir injections for as high as ₹50,000. There are also such deals on oxygen cylinders," she said

Speaking to Deccan Chronicle, Rachakonda police ommissioner Mahesh Bhagwat said, "Sixteen such networks have been busted. They were into the black marketing of remdesivir injections. Around 70 persons have been arrested. All the leads we got were through the social media networks."

"In these two days, we arrested a lady doctor who was black marketing these injections. In another case, a reputed hospital's duty doctor was caught while black marketing remdesivir vials."

The commissioner appealed to the people that if any lead is available about such rackets, it may be passed on to 9490617111.

TS BUDGET TARGET AVERTED TOUGH CURBS

From Page 1

The huge budgetary target is cited as the main reason for the government not keen on imposing further lockdowns.

It may be noted that the government could meet only about ₹1.50 lakh crore against budgetary target of ₹1.72 lakh crore last fiscal due to the lockdowns last year. Instead of lowering the budget target this fiscal, the government increased it to ₹2.30 lakh crore.

Earnings through commercial taxes, GST, sale of liquor, petrol, diesel, stamps and registrations are the main revenue sources for the state.

Due to pandemic conditions and night curfew, these collections have come down. To fill this revenue gap, the government has decided to raise ₹47,500 crore this fiscal through auction of bonds.

The government is also planning to raise ₹30,000 crore through sale of lands but it looks difficult, given the slowdown.

Maha Maratha quota fails to meet Mandal criteria

From Page 1

The states can, through their existing mechanisms, or even statutory commissions, can only make suggestions to the President or the Commission, for inclusion, exclusion or modification of castes or communities in the SEBC list, Justice Bhat said.

The states' power to make reservations, in favour of particular communities or castes, the quantum of reservations, the nature of benefits and the kind of reservations, and all other matters falling within the ambit of Articles 15 and 16 except with respect to identification of SEBCs, remains undisturbed, the judgement, endorsed by two other judges, said.

While Justice Bhushan wrote the 412-page long verdict for himself and Justice Nazeer and was in minority on the point whether the 102nd Amendment takes away the right of states to identify SEBC.

All the five judges however held the 102nd amendment valid and it did not affect the federal polity and did not violate the basic structure of the Constitution.

Article 342A by denuding states power to legislate or classify in respect of 'any backward class of citizens' does not affect or damage the federal polity and does not violate the basic structure of the Constitution, Justice Bhat said.

All judges concurred on aspects such as the Indra Sawhney judgment, also known as the Mandal verdict, did not require to be referred to a larger bench.

They agree that the Maharashtra State Reservation (of seats for admission in educational institutions in the State and for appointments in the public services and posts under the State) for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act granting 12 and 13 per cent reservation for Maratha community in addition to 50 per cent social reservation is not covered by exceptional circumstances as contemplated in Mandal judgement.

The state government, on the strength of the Maharashtra State Backward Commission Report chaired by M.C. Gaikwad has not made out a case of existence of extraordinary situation and exceptional circumstances in the state to fall within the exception carved out in Indra Sawhney judgement, Justice Bhat said.

All judgments said the appointments made in government jobs and admissions in post graduate courts after the Bombay High Court verdict of 2019 upholding Maratha quota and September 9, 2020 order of the top court staying the implementation of quota ill not be affected. — *PTI*

Tigers get relief amid the pandemic

PILLALAMARRI SRINVIAS I DC
ADILABAD, MAY 5

The second wave of Covid pandemic has brought relief and security to tigers as the human movement has largely reduced. Yet, poachers are on the prowl.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has advised officials of tiger reserves and the wildlife sanctuary and reserve forests to keep tourists off tiger reserves in view of the threat of Covid19 spread to animals, especially tigers.

Kawal reserve authorities imposed restrictions on the entry of tourists and other outsiders. Recently, poachers killed a tigress in the forests in bordering Maharashtra at a spot 30km from the Adilabad town.

Poachers have become active in research forest areas during the summer and killed animals including tigers and leopards. The gangs camp at water bodies to trap and kill forest animals when they come down to quench their thirst.

Jannaram DFO Madhavrao said they have received instructions from the NTCA to not allow tourists and others into reserve forests. He said the NTCA has, in its advisory, said there was the possibility of Coronavirus spreading to animals if human movement is allowed around.

All steps are being taken to prevent outsiders as well as tourists from entering tiger reserves, he said, and added that they are closing the Peddaiah temple near Utla in Dandepalli mandal of Mancherial district.

Tiger movement is found in the old Adilabad district, particularly in the Kagaznagar forest division in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district. Tigers frequently migrate to the state from the Thadoba Andhari reserve on the Maharashtra border. Forest staff of the old Adilabad district is tracking the movement of tigers especially in the Kagaznagar division.

OU SUMMER VACATIONS TILL MAY 31

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Osmania University on Wednesday announced that all affiliated colleges and constituent and district degree and PG colleges will have their summer vacations from May 5 to May 31.

The colleges will reopen on June 1, the university said in a circular released on Wednesday.

All state and central universities had earlier suspended offline classes in April. In most colleges, teachers and other staff members were still being mandated to travel to go to college physically, exposing them to the deadly virus.

UoH STUDENTS WANT CLASSES SUSPENDED

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Students Union of University of Hyderabad (UoH) has requested the varsity management to suspend all academic activities in view of the increasing Covid-19 situation for a period of at least two weeks, and to resume only after a thorough evaluation of the situation.

In a representation to the university Vice-Chancellor, the student body said that keeping academic activities optional for students will not do them any good, and only add on to the troubles that come with students and their families testing positive and battling the deadly virus.

They added that the distress at the University was also evident with the isolation facility almost full, and defects in the testing facility in the city.

They requested that if the situation worsens in the next two weeks, the University should adopt a mechanism similar to last year, that is promoting outgoing students by evaluating them only on the basis of the portions taken, and ongoing students on the basis of their previous performance.

PANIC BUYING REASON FOR SHORTAGES: CS

From Pqge 1

The state, he said, was in discussions with vaccine makers to ensure adequate supplies, and was making use of IAF planes and trains to bring oxygen into the state. "We have asked the Centre to make up for the shortfall of 58 tonnes of oxygen that we were supposed to get from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka," he said.

Somesh Kumar said there was some palpable fear among people about the current conditions, and this was also resulting in some people acquiring oxygen cylinders, remdesivir injections even when they did not need them, just because they feared they might need in case they contracted Covid.

"Situation in the state would be better if people followed safety precautions," he said.

POLICE BOOK MOLESTATION CASE ON TECHIE

From Page 1

"When she tried to stop him from taking the video, he pushed her away and caused an injury on her face. He also attacked others at the place when they tried to intervene," said the police.

Following a complaint from the nurse, cases were booked against him for assaulting a public servant, molesting and threatening her. He was placed under arrest, an official said.

SHORT TAKES

VIRUS MONITORING PANELS SET UP FOR COPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Health monitoring coordination committees would be set up in the offices of police commissioners and superintendents of police, Director-General of Police M. Mahendar Reddy said on Wednesday. The decision was taken during a video conference at the police headquarters here.

He said that the police department was according priority for the safety of its personnel and WhatsApp groups were created at the departmental, commissionerate and district level, including SHOs and doctors.

They can interact and counsel those who test positive through Zoom meetings.

Instructions were also issued to provide Covid kits and dry fruits to patients. Instructing officials to prepare the health profile of everyone in the department, Reddy asked authorities to take necessary steps to rush patients to the nearest hospital if they develop any complications

KCR TO TAKE UP VACCINE SUPPLY ISSUE WITH MODI

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Covid-19 vaccination drive continued for the 45-plus years category, and some hiccups that dogged the drive were on account of the Centre reducing the supply of vaccines to the state, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar said on Wednesday.

He told reporters that the reason for taking walk-in vaccinations off the table was to cut down crowding at vaccination centres. Online booking of slots had streamlined the system.

He said Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao was expected to take up with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the issue of vaccine supplies as there has been no response to the letters written by the state to the Centre on the matter. Somesh Kumar said Telangana state needed 30 lakh to 40 lakh doses but these were not coming.

With respect to the vaccination drive for the 18-plus years category, Somesh Kumar said the state had 1.7 crore people in the age group of 18 to 44 years. This means the state needs 3.4 crore doses for proper administration of the vaccines.

"We have been corresponding with the Government of India on this, and we have also written to vaccine companies," he said.

Meanwhile, the health department said that 47,481 people received their first doses on Tuesday, and another 18,070 got their second dose of the vaccines.

HC TAKES NOTE ON ZERO PLAN FOR VACCINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The High Court has faulted the state government on its vaccination programme. The court took note of the prevailing confusion among the citizens due to the huge shortfall in vaccine supply even for the second dose for the age-group of above 45 plus. It said the state government has "zero plan" on vaccination.

"How many of you (state government) have placed orders for vaccines and how many of you have got it? Did you write a letter to the Union Government explaining the situation," a division bench of the Telangana High Court headed by Chief Justice Hima Kohli asked the state government. The court sought from the state government details of the vaccine stocks supplied to private hospitals.

Public health director Dr Srinivasa Rao submitted that there is no choice before the state government to procure the vaccines directly from the manufacturers. Only 3.03 lakh doses of vaccines have been allotted to the state by the Centre in May so far, and this will be used as the second dose for those above 45 years.

Apart from this, the Union government has allotted some quota to private hospitals directly from manufacturers. But he was unable to cite the figures as to how much would be allotted to private hospitals.

The court expressed its dissatisfaction on the vaccination programme.

A man with oxygen support wait in an ambulance for a bed to get admitted at King Koti hospital on Wesnesday. — DEEPAK DESHPANDE

A sanitation worker sanitises an ambulance with a patient inside on support of oxygen cylinder as the patient's relatives look for a bed at the Fever hospital on Wednesday. — DC

People above 45 years wait for their turn to get vaccinated after online registration at Fever hospital. — DC

HC asks TS to impose more curbs

CJ bench orders 1 lakh Covid tests a day, measures to stop AP variant from entering the state

VUJJINI VAMSHIDHARA | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Concerned over the rising number of Covid-19 cases and detection of virus on zoo animals, the Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed the state government to impose additional restrictive measures besides extending the night curfew and imposing a weekend lockdown so as to flatten the curve in the state. The court directed the state government to conduct a review meeting before the night curfew ends on May 8.

The division bench of the High Court comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy, which sat on Wednesday to monitor the situation though the court is in summer vacation, asked the government to be 'dynamic' to deal with the situation.

"Our instructions to the government for the last several weeks to show some heed and to increase Covid testing have been like water off a duck's back. The government is continuously reducing testing since the last week from 92,000 to 70,000. This automatically shows a decrease in the number of infected persons. By that, you are saying there is a fall in Covid cases. This is not correct," the bench said and noted, "Testing at private centres is static but is decreasing at government centres."

The court firmly directed the government to conduct one lakh Covid tests per day, as long as the situation prevailed, as well as deploy vans to conduct tests in the 186 micro-containment zones.

Justice Kohli brushed aside the contention of Dr G Srinivasa Rao, Director of Public Health, who said that people were not coming to the 1,100 testing centres across the state.

"There is no logic in your contentions. We came across some news reports that there were long queues and people were being sent back due to lack of testing kits. People are thronging the testing centres after seeing the piling up of bodies at burial grounds and crematoriums," the Chief Justice said.

"If people do not come to testing centres, you go to the people, where we are seeing a large number of people in markets, malls and other public places in the afternoon time," Kohli said.

Meanwhile, Senior Counsel L. Ravichander brought to the notice of the court that in some testing centres in the GHMC area, only 20 tests are being conducted per day whereas more people are waiting in queues.

LIMIT ON GATHERINGS

Expressing deep concern and dismay over the government order (GO) of November 16, 2020, which permits 200 persons to congregate by following Covid-19 norms, and empowering collectors, SPs and heads of local bodies to permit congregations, the High Court said it would be unsafe in the current situation.

The court directed the government to issue a fresh GO in this regard limiting the gathering to 50 persons at marriages and 20 at funerals, regardless of whether it is open or closed premises. This GO should be issued within 24 hours, the court said.

CONFISCATE VEHICLES

The High Court also directed the government to examine the laws to issue orders to seize vehicles of those not wearing face masks properly. Apart from imposing a ₹1,000 fine on violators, their vehicles should be seized for at least 48 hours as a deterrent, it said.

Justice Kohli asked Director General of Police M. Mahendar Reddy, who appeared before the court in virtual mode on being ordered, about the authority of the force to seize vehicles of those who are not wearing the masks properly.

The DGP replied that the police had no such authority. He submitted that the police were taking over vehicles of those failing drunk drive tests only in view of the driver's safety. "If any family member of that person comes, we hand over the vehicle," he submitted.

Justice B. Vijaysen Reddy suggested that the government, as per the Hyderabad City Police Act and Article 162, can give powers to the police to confiscate vehicles.

Explaining the rules in the Disaster Management Act, senior counsel L. Ravichander said that during the pandemic, the government could issue any order to restrict or empower authorities to even seize the vehicle under Section 18.

SURPRISE INSPECTIONS

The High Court directed the DGP to book organisers, hosts, owners of function halls and other premises who violate Covid-19 such as social distancing or allowing more than the permitted number of patrons. The court directed police, municipal and revenue authorities to conduct surprise inspections, where the congregations take place.

The Chief Justice directed the DGP to create help centres at Covid-designated government hospitals as well as at private hospitals where the police in coordination with self-help groups can reach out to patients and people in distress.

JUSTICE KOHLI asked Director General of Police M. Mahendar Reddy, who appeared before the court in virtual mode on being ordered, about the authority of the force to seize vehicles of those who are not wearing the masks properly. The DGP replied that the police had no such authority.

RAMZAN SHOPPING

Considering the concern of senior advocate Mir Masood Khan to told the court about the violations of Covid protocols during the shopping for Ramzan and spiritual gatherings at Nampally, Afzalgunj, Madina and Charminar, the High Court directed the police to step in to control the gatherings and congregations. The court asked the authorities to implement strict rules to prevent this. Masood Khan said any type of spiritual meeting was to be prohibited.

HOSPITAL CHARGES

Responding to inputs from advocates about exorbitant charges at private hospitals and black marketing of life-saving drugs, the court directed the medical and health department to lay down guidelines regarding uniform rates for life saving drugs, oxygen and other tests including beds.

The court also directed Advocate General B.S. Prasad to take necessary steps to close all zoos as the media had reported that wild animals were affected with the Coronavirus.

It directed the government to ensure that all hospitals update information on availability of beds. Several counsels pointed out that there were differences on the availability of beds in hospitals from what was being displayed.

The court was not happy with the non-submission of minutes of the meetings of the expert body to Covid-19. Directing that these should be submitted, the court adjourned the hearings to May 13.

Chief Secy rules out lockdown; says situation 'better' in Telangana

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Allaying fears of an imminent lockdown, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar said the Telangana state government was not in favour of any such measures as they were unlikely to serve the purpose. He said the government was, however, taking every possible step to control the spread of Covid-19 in the state, adding that the situation in Telangana was much better than in many other states, including Telangana's neighbours.

Somesh Kumar, while addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, also spoke about Telangana's strategy for containing the spread of Coronavirus saying that anyone with symptoms should visit the Covid-19 out-patient clinics at all government health centres and get themselves checked. Those who are determined to have symptoms, will be given medicine kits for Covid-19 and should start medication and isolate themselves. In the event the symptoms persist even after five days of medication, they should seek medical help again and will be given additional medications as needed, he said.

SOMESH KUMAR'S comments come in the wake of the government earlier issuing instructions to all testing centres it runs across the state to limit the number of daily tests for Covid. The govt had previously said that anyone with symptoms must assume that he or she has caught Covid, should begin medication.

"The Indian Council of Medical Research's latest guidelines suggest to begin treatment if someone has symptoms, something Telangana is already doing. If this is done, then people get early treatment and the chances of Covid-19 patients turning serious will be reduced, and bring down hospitalisations. The ICRM guidelines are a paradigm shift in Covid-19 management," he said.

The Chief Secretary's comments come in the wake of the government earlier issuing instructions to all testing centres it runs across the state to limit the number of daily tests for Covid-19. The government had previously said that anyone with symptoms must assume that he or she has caught Covid-19 and should begin medication. He said the state had stocks of testing kits, and was in the process of starting new RT-PCR testing centres in all districts soon, adding that the state as on Wednesday, had a stock of 11 lakh Rapid Antigen Test, and 3 lakh RT-PCR test kits. "We are in the process of getting more," he said. "Telangana has a stock of 9,00,100 Remdesivir doses. But there is no guarantee that Remdesivir saves lives but there are indications that it might reduce hospital stay among Covid-19 patients. As the days go by, I see a downward trend coming with regard to demand for Remdesivir," he said.

High Court seeks adequate supply of oxygen, drugs

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Telangana High Court on Wednesday advised the additional solicitor general representing the Union Government to ensure that the central government supplied 600 metric tonne of oxygen as also enough of the life-saving drugs and vaccines to the Telangana state.

Responding to the state's complaint that it is not getting the full allocation of 430 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen due to non-supply of 55 MT of oxygen from a unit at Perambadur of Tamil Nadu, a division bench of the Telangana High Court headed by Chief Justice Hima Kohli advised the Centre to take up the matter with the authorities in Tamil Nadu so as to ensure that there is no hindrances in the supply of oxygen to TS.

If this is not possible, the government is advised to make alternative arrangements from other states, the court said.

THE COURT has examined the data as to how much of the oxygen was supplied to the state since April 25.

The court has examined the data as to how much of the oxygen was supplied to the state since April 25. It found fault with the director of the medical health department for his failure to inform the court as to the extent of demand for oxygen in Telangana now. The court sought details as regards the quantity of oxygen being supplied to private hospitals and government hospitals and what is the shortfall of oxygen.

Director of health has only submitted that there is the necessity of 600 metric tonnes of oxygen in Telangana State, whereas the Union government has allocated only 430 MT (306 MT from other states, 124 MR from Telangana).

The Telangana government told the court that there is a daily requirement for 25,000 vials of remdesivir in Telangana, whereas, an average of 4,300 vials are allotted to the state by the Union government.

Public health director Dr Srinivasa Rao submitted that people from other states are also coming to Hyderabad and other cities in Telangana for treatment due to the best medical facilities available in this state. Some 35 per cent of the patients being treated for Covid in Telangana came from other states, he said and stressed that there is a higher demand for oxygen and life-saving drugs. The Union Government does not allocate the required quantity, he stated.

HOSP STAFF SWAP BODIES OF DECEASED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOTHAGUDEM, MAY 5

In a major goof-up, hospital staff handed over wrong bodies to the family members of two Covid-19 victims here on Wednesday, leading to mild tension.

According to sources, two persons died due to Covid-19 on Wednesday in Singareni Hospital in Kothagudem. The persons were identified as Chandraiah and Rajeswara Rao. Relatives of Rajeswara Rao were given the body of Chandraiah mistakenly by the staff of the hospital. Grieving relatives of Rajeswara Rao, without crosschecking the body, buried it in the graveyard. Later, relatives of Chandraiah came to the hospital to take the body and they were handed over Rajeswara Rao's body instead. The relatives noticed that it was not Chandraiah's body while carrying it in the vehicle.

However, the bodies were exchanged in the burial ground. Relatives of Chandraiah exhumed the body and buried Rajeswara Rao's body in the same place. Chandraiah's body was buried in another place.

TOLL CROSSES 2,500-MARK WITH 51 NEW DEATHS CAUSED BY COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The death toll from Covid19 in Telangana crossed the 2,500 mark with the state reporting 51 more deaths on Tuesday while another 6,361 people were infected. The total cases so far rose to 4,69,722.

As many as 27,400 people were being treated for the disease at hospitals as on Wednesday evening. Of these, 8,042 were in ICUs and 13,526 on oxygen support. Some 5,842 Covid19 patients were on regular beds, the health department said.

The total cases so far in GHMC areas rose to 1,10,034. An addition of 1,225 cases from the city and adjoining areas has been reported.

Nalgonda district, home to the Nagarjunasagar assembly constituency that went to polls recently, reported the second highest caseload from any district on Tuesday — of 453 new cases — followed by 423 in Ranga Reddy and 422 in Medchal-Malkajgiri. Karimnagar registered 248 cases, Siddipet 244, Suryapet 239, Warangal Urban 234, Sangareddy 224, and Mahbubnagar 224 cases.

The health department said 8,126 persons have recovered from the disease on Tuesday, taking the total recoveries so far to 3,89,491 in the state.

Career Chronicle

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Secretary

A leading construction company, Hyderabad based, with construction of over five million sq ft of state-of-art high end Residential Projects on hand in prime area of Cyberabad and fast expanding into other real estate projects is looking for:
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IN BRIEF

IAF STAFF BOOKED FOR HARASSING WOMAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Alwal police booked a case against an Indian Air Force staffer stationed at Hakimpet the Air Force Station for allegedly sexually harassing a woman colleague on Tuesday.

According to the police, the accused, S.K. Sharma, 39, was stationed at the technical wing and had promised to arrange for a job for the victim's daughter. "Last week, under the pretext of applying for the job, he called her to his cabin and allegedly misbehaved with her, following which she approached the station and lodged a complaint," said Alwal inspector A. Gangadhar.

A case was booked under Section 354 (outraging a woman's modesty) of the IPC and an investigation was taken up. Officials said further action would be initiated based on evidence before an arrest.

MESCO FOUNDER DR. FAKHRUDDIN PASSES AWAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Mesco founder and chairman Dr. Fakhruddin Mohammed passed away on Wednesday afternoon at a corporate hospital in the city. He was 61 and survived by wife, two sons and two daughters.

Funeral prayer of the noted philanthropist was performed after Namaz e Isha at Masjid Dargah Abdullah Shah Saheb, Misri Gunj. He was laid to rest at the adjacent graveyard.

Dr. Fakhruddin founded the Muslim Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (Mesco) in 1983. With this, he and his team have been instrumental in bringing Muslim doctors around the world on a common platform. He was instrumental in organising ambulance and relief aid services during the first wave of Covid in 2020 in collaboration with Al-Hamd Foundation.

FIRM LAUNCHES NON-INVASIVE VENTILATOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Developed in collaboration with CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories, Hyderabad based Apollo Computing Laboratories announced the unveiling of what it said was the first of its kind portable non-invasive ventilator, SwasthVayu.

The company said the non-invasive ventilator had a bacterial viral filter. The exhalation filter enables a Covid-free ambience, company managing director Baddam Jaipal Reddy said.

SwasthVayu delivers oxygen through a non-vented mask tightly fitted to the face, without the need for a tube being inserted through the mouth into the windpipe. The design includes three layers of filtration mechanism, one each at the inlet, inter-stage and exhale stage, the company said.

The indigenously built device has been certified for safety and performance by NABL accredited labs besides may hospitals. SwasthVayu is certified by Director General of Health Services (DGHS), the company said.

THE EXHALATION filter enables a Covid-free ambience.

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public are hereby informed that our client is intending to enter into a Sale Deed with 1) Surender Kumar and 2) Sushma Gupta in respect of the below Schedule of Property:

Schedule of Property

In respect of Plot no 31 bearing municipal H.no 8-2-684/3/31/A and H.no 8-2-684/3/31/B . admeasuring 20 Sq. Yards and 110 Sq. Yards respectively and Plot no 32 bearing municipal H.no 8-2-684/3/32 admeasuring 307 Sq. Yards, total admeasuring 437 Sq. Yards in survey no. 129/53 situated at Road no 12, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, Telangana.
NORTH : Plot No 31 Part.
SOUTH : Plot No 33.
EAST : Neighbours Property.
WEST : 30 Ft Road.

The above-mentioned Schedule of Property is intended to be purchased free from all encumbrances, charges, liens, attachments, litigation, tax arrears, dues or mortgages by our client.

Any person(s) or bodies of persons, corporate bodies having any right, title or interest in the above mentioned Schedule of Property or having any objections to the proposed sale transaction, may contact the undersigned with all the relevant documents in support of their objections, right, title or interest in the above mentioned Schedule of Property, within 7 (Seven) days from the date of publication of this notice, else our Client will proceed further and complete the proposed acquisition and no claims thereafter will be entertained whatsoever.

Bharath Kondaparthy, Advocate
104, Vijaya Enclave, Srinagar Colony,
Hyderabad - 500073. Mobile: +91 8500433333

Oppn flays CS for 'worst lies' on Covid

Says state has turned upside down

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Opposition parties across the political spectrum on Wednesday slammed Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar for making "blatant false claims" about the Covid-19 situation, saying the situation was under control, and alleged that Somesh Kumar was "lying to the people" of the state.

Senior Congress leader Mallu Bhatti Virkamarka, while talking to reporters here, said the state has been turned upside down by Covid. "The Chief Secretary says everything is there. Is he ready to come with us to visit hospitals? If beds are available, then injections are not. If injections are available, oxygen is not. How can an official vested with so much responsibility lie like that," Bhatti wondered.

"If everything is okay, then why are ambulances lined up in front of the government hospital in Khammam? You get paid by people's money. Instead of serving people, who are you serving?" Vikramarka asked the Chief Secretary.

He said, "The state government, deep in a health crisis, sacked its health minister and the Chief Minister has taken charge of the department. What has he done after doing this? He has not held a single review on Covid. He promised to include Covid under Arogyasri but never did."

TPCC president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy, speaking to Deccan Chronicle from a hospital bed, where he is still recovering from Covid, said that the ongoing fever survey by the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has blown the lid off the cover-up of true number of Covid-19 cases in the city.

"The government says that anyone with Covid-19 symptoms should be considered a Covid positive case and immediately begin taking appropriate medicines. Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar confirmed this at his press conference. As per the GHMC's own revelations on Tuesday, as part of its fever survey and checking the health of people who went to the Covid-19 out-patient services at government health centres, 5,000 people were given Covid medicine kits," Uttam Kumar Reddy said.

"But officially, the state government only announced 1,225 cases for the GHMC area for Tuesday. What happened to the 5,000 who were given medicines for the disease because the health staff decided that they are possibly Covid victims? Why is the TRS government not adding these people to the list of Covid victims?" the TPCC chief asked.

Apparently the GHMC has realised that it revealed the well-hidden truth about the true spread of Covid in Hyderabad city and that is the reason why it stayed silent on how many people were given these medicine kits on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, the GHMC claimed that in all, its staff and health workers checked the health of people in 40,000 homes, in addition to health checks on another 18,600 people who visited government run health clinics and hospitals. On Wednesday, the GHMC said it covered 41,305 homes while another 19,090 people got checked at Covid out-patient clinics.

This shows how the government is covering up actual numbers and hiding the real extent and damage Covid is causing to the people of the state. If they can do it for GHMC, they are doing it for every other part of the state, he said.

Congress Lok Sabha MP Komatreddy Venkat Reddy said, "It is sad the Chief Secretary spoke like a TRS worker. As an MP, I am getting nearly 100 calls everyday for help, seeking hospital bed, oxygen, medicines? I am unable to get a single bed on most days. Every person in Telangana knows there are no beds. And everyone knows this government is lying."

Speaking about the situation in Telangana, Venkat Reddy said, "In the middle of a pandemic the health minister is sacked. A Chief Minister who never visited office to work takes charge. Collectors from several districts are sent to do surveys on Etala Rajendar's lands. And everything is left to a lying CS Somesh Kumar."

Civic chiefs to be elected on Friday; aspirants lobby hard

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY AND RAVINDRA SESHU I DC
HYDERABAD/ KHAMMAM, MAY 5

The Telangana State Election Commission (TSEC) on Wednesday issued notification for election of Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairman and vice-chairman posts in two corporations and five municipalities on Friday. These urban local bodies (ULBs) went to the polls on April 30 and the results were declared on May 3.

With this, hectic lobbying has begun in the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) with multiple aspirants staking claims and running around ministers and party leaders who enjoy considerable clout at the top leadership. Since the TRS made a clean sweep in the municipal election results announced on May 3, all these posts will go to the TRS.

TRS president and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao on Wednesday appointed party observers for the election of heads for these ULBs.

Sources in the TRS said consequently to the latest political developments in the state following the sacking of health minister Etala Rajendar from the Cabinet recently, the name of Indla Nageshwar Rao, who hails from Backward Classes and won from 45th division, is doing the rounds for Warangal Mayor post.

Gundu Sudha Rani was considered as the only frontrunner for this post all these days, but BC leaders in Warangal district are lobbying hard to get the Mayor post for Nageshwar Rao to pacify the community to some extent over the unceremonious removal of Rajendar

For the Khammam Mayor post, which is reserved for woman in the general category, the TRS leadership has left the choice in picking up the candidate to district in-charge minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar. Paidipalli Rohini from 56th division is said to be his choice. Other names include P. Neeraja and C. Madhuri. For Deputy Mayor, Maqbool is said to be in the race under the minority quota.

In Atchampet municipality, the competition is between Narasimha Goud and Shailaja for municipal chairperson post, while Manohar Prasad, who won from 15th division is in the race for the vice chairman post.

In Nakrekal municipality, sources said, the TRS leaders had already shifted 11 TRS corporators to a resort on the city outskirts to prevent poaching by the Congress. TRS Nakrekal MLA Chirumarthi Lingaiah, who defected from the Congress to the TRS, has been lobbying hard to secure the chairperson post to his follower Rachakonda Srinu.TRS MLA Gyadari Kishore is said to be lobbying for vice-chairman post to his follower Uma Rani.

In Siddipet municipality, the chairperson post is reserved for woman under general category. Kadavergu Rajanarsu, who served as chairperson until recent elections fielded his wife Kadavergu Manjula Rajanarsu. He is insisting on his wife to be made chairperson this time to his family as he had already served as chairperson for two terms. For the vice-chairman post, party town president Kondam Sampath Reddy is in the race. Medak in-charge minister T. Harish Rao"s decision to be the key in selection for these posts, say TRS sources.

In Jadcherla ,unicipality, Dorepalli Laxmi Ravinder is said to be the frontrunner. Her husband Ravinder is known to be the close aide of former minister and Jadcherla MLA C. Laxma Reddy.

HIGH COURT DIRECTIVE TO REVENUE TRIBUNALS

Hyderabad: Telangana High Court on Wednesday directed district collectors, who are also chairpersons of revenue special tribunals, not to issue adverse directions in pending cases if parties to cases do not appear before them because of Coronavirus pandemic.

The court's direction came after it received reports that the tribunals are issuing adverse orders if parties did not appear for hearings. High Court also asked the Advocate General to look into the issue and ensure that rights of no one get affected because of such orders.

2 DEAD AS TRUCK CATCHES FIRE

Hyderabad: Two persons died after the truck they were travelling in came into contact with a live electric wire and caught fire at IDA in Uppal on Wednesday morning. They have been identified as Ganga Sagar, 50, a native of Bihar, and Sahazad, 37, a native of Rajasthan.

IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE

IN THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF
Sri V.V. NARAYANA Garu
Founder Member and Vice-Chairman,
Chaitanya Bharathi Educational Society (CBES) & Member, CBIT
(DOB: 08th April, 1932 - DOD: 28th April, 2021)
The Values you set in life, will always remain with us
A fountainhead of knowledge and always a source of inspiration,
He has left behind a rich harvest of memories to cherish, honour and emulate
11th Day Ceremony will be held on Friday, 07-05-2021
+91 98493 37260, +91 92471 07030
MANAGEMENT, STAFF AND STUDENTS OF CBIT AND MGIT.

10th DAY CEREMONY

G. RAJENDRANATH GOUD GARU
Chairman, Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Srinivasapuram, Chikkadapally, Hyd.
Expired on 27-04-2021.
Peddha Karma will be held at our Residence on 06-05-2021.
Inserted by: Wife: **Suvarnalatha**
Son: **G. Srinath Goud**
Daughter-in-Law: **G. Keerthi**
Daughter: **G. Jayakeerthana**
Son-In-Law: **P. Gurushankara**
Grand Child: **G.Yashaswini**
And Family members

OBITUARY

Kshatriya Gourav Jagdish Pratap Singh I.A.S. (Rt)
DOD: 5-5-2021
(Trustee & Ex President)
Hero of our Community gave New Dimension to the Service of the Community during his Long Memorable 18 yrs of Presidentship.
A Great Administrator who Never Compromised with his Principles.
Inserted by: President, Trustees & Off. Bearers
Kshatriya Rajput Sabha - Telangan

OBITUARY
"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" *Psalm: 23-6*

Mr. MADDALA YESU RATNA KUMAR
S/o Maddala Nagesh (Late)
D.O.B:04-06-1961 D.O.D:02-05-2021
Passes away peacefully on 2nd May 2021
Memorial Ceremony:
6th May 2021 @11am
Contact: 72074-66228, 99485-66791
(S/2122/D00138)

2ND DEATH ANNIVERSARY
"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" **Phillipians 1"21**

Mrs. N. SHOBA ANAND
DOB: 16.08.1964 DOD: 06.05.2019
We miss you every moment in our life.
N. Anandam (Husband), Vinnu (Son)
Christy (Daughter-in-law),Vickka (Lovely Son)
Cutu (Daughter), Joylu & Joviinn (Grand Sons)
Ph.: 9160045367, 7702853579

1ST ANNIVERSARY

Smt. Santosh Kumari Nagpal
W/o: Late Omprakash Nagpal
DOB: 28-10-1942 DOD:6-5-2020
May her soul rest in peace
Inserted by:
Nagpal's Family
9573284811, 9885021969

11th DAY CEREMONY

Mr. ALAPATI RAMA MOHAN RAO
(BHEL Employee Retired)
DOD: 26-04-2021..
"You will be remembered in our hearts for ever"
Deeply mourned by:
Son: **VENKATA SAI KIRAN**
Daughter-in-Law: **SINDHU**
Son-in-Law: **PAVAN KUMAR**
Daughter: **CHAYA LATHA**
& FAMILY MEMBERS
@ Our Chandanagar Residence
Ph: 9247593593

OBITUARY
"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the Race, I have kept the faith".
2 Timothy 4:7

Raya Emmanuel Samrajyam
DOD - 05-05-2021 DOB - 19-08-1948
Inserted by: **Wife:** Rajasree,
Children: Sheba and Prashanth, Shirley and Simon and Shiny

10th DAY CEREMONY

Smt. BALLUR KALAVATHI
W/o. Late Ballur Ramaswamy
Passed away on : 28-04-2021
You were a great institution and inspiration who thought to do good.
"SHANTI HAVAN"
at10.30am, H.No.6-3-25, Premnagar, Khairthabad, Hyderabad
Inserted By:
Son: **Sri Ballur Narender**
Daughter-in-law: **Smt. Ballur Geetha**
Daughters, Son-in-laws, Grand Daughter's Grand Son's , & Great Grand Children

OBITUARY

DOB : 14/05/1940 DOD : 05/05/2021
Smt. PALLE UMA RANI
W/o. LATE PALLE RAM GOPAL
PASSED AWAY PEACEFULLY IN HER SLEEP
YOUR MEMORIES WILL ALWAYS REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS FOR EVER.
Inserted by :
Daughter : Ratna Prabha
Son In Law : Vinod Kumar
Daughter : Sree Devi
Son In Law : Late Hriday Nath
Grand Children
Great Grand Children

1st Anniversary Remembrance
IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Late Mrs. ANGELINE DASS
W/o Late Mr. S.T.A. Dass
DOB : 09-06-1933 DOD : 06-05-2020
Days are passing into years,
We remember you in silent tears.
Inserted By : **Family Members**

Tearful Homage to Our Beloved Patron

Mr. M C Sivadasan Nambiar
DOB: 01-11-1941 DOD: 05-05-2021
Inserted by
Naveena Samskarika Kala Kendram
Fathenagar,Hyderabad
Ph. 040- 27753876, 9440388322

8th ANNIVERSARY
The memory of the righteous is a blessing Pro 10:7

ABEL KOSHY
Wife, Daughters and Grandsons
Ph: 9441237613

3rd DEATH ANNIVERSARY

SHRI KOTHA ESHWAR RAOJI
(S/o. Late Sri Kotha Kothari)
DOD : 6-5-2018 - Age 94 Yrs
You were a symbol of love and affection.
You will remian in our hearts forever.
Inserted by : **K. Uttam Kumar** (Son), **K. Kiran, K. Goverdhan, K. Praveen** (Grandsons) **& Kotha Family**
KASTURBA RIBBON & BANGLE STORE
KASTURBA JEWELLERS
Mobile : 9848132624, 9440010662

OBITUARY

B.V. RAMAMOHAN RAO
HIGH COURT ADVOCATE
Passed away peacefully on 4th May 2021
"You are our light, our source of inspiration and strength. You always live in our hearts and life.
We love you "APPA" forever.
Inserted by:
Family Members
House Address-103, AK Enclave, Road no-3, Banjara hills, Hyd - 34
Ph: 9848012884

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" *Matthew 5:8*

Late Mrs. VANITA QURAISHY
W/o Stanley Zahid Quraishy
Date of Birth : Feb 1st, 1952
Entered Glory : May 3rd, 2021
"Your life was a blessing, your memory a treasure, you are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure"
Inserted by: **Loving husband, Children, Daughter-in-law, Son-in-law, Grand-children and Family members**
Cell number : 9985878707
(B/2122/D00019)

SHRADHANJALI

Shri. GADDAM AJAY KUMAR YADAV
DOB: 17.09.1963 DOD: 24.04.2021
You will always be in our Memories.
10th Day Ceremony on 06.05.2021
Wife: **G. Padma,**
Son: **G. Sushilkumar Yadav,**
Daughters: **G. Soundarya, G. Sanjana & Family Members**
(S/2122/D00145)

OBITUARY

P. VENKATSWAMY
(Retd. D.C.T.O)
DOB: 14.10.1938 DOD: 04.05.2021
S/o Mallaiah
Inserted by: **P. Sarala** (Wife)
Family members.
Mahendra Hills
PH: 9618418906, 9391205022
(S/2122/D00144)

5th DAY CEREMONY

S. JOSEPH DENNIS
S/o G. Swamy Nathan
DOB: 19.08.1949 DOD: 02.05.2021
Retd. Sc.Rly, CBC, Yakutpura Railway station.
Prayer services @ Residence 1.00 pm.
Inserted by: **Family Members**
Ph: 8639493913
(S/2122/D00143)

In loving memory of

Errol Joseph Parker
26-07-1939 to 04-05-2021
Errol will be missed by his cherished wife, **Faye**, his daughter **Sharon**, son-in-law **Devender**, grand daughters **Disha, Saasha & Aakanksha**, his son **Ricky**, daughter-in-law **Donella** and grandson **Ryan**.
Sharon: 83749 14623, Ricky: 94949 78679

OBITUARY
I will dwell in the house of the lord forever....psalms 23:6

Late Pt. Shri. Vijay Raj S. Kapole
PALMIST, ASTROLOGER & VAASTHU
S/o. Late Shri. Shiv Raj R. Kapole
10th Day Ceremony will be held on 6 May 2021 Thursday at our Residency Shanthi Paat (Hawan) at 09:30 am
KAPOLE PARIVAAR
(S/2122/D000147)

Mr. G.V. SANJEEVA RAO
H/o. Late. G.V. Suhashini
DOB: 17-02-1948 DOD: 05-05-2021
Funeral at CSI Mettuguda Cemetery on 06-05-2021 at 3.00pm
Inserted By:
Children & Grand Children
Ph: 9704842829

9th DAY CEREMONY

In Loving Memory of
Varkala Ravindra Kumar
DOD : 28 April 2021
Inserted by : **V. Shailaja** (Wife&Children)
Mr & Mrs - M. Anjaiah Yadav (Uncle)
Mr & Mrs - D. Srinivas Yadav (Co-brother)
Mr & Mrs - Varkala Sridar Yadav (Brother)
At their residence on 6th April 2021
Bolliguda, Boduppal-92.
Ph:9014830009, 9515917103

SHORT TAKES

YOUTH HELD FOR ILLEGAL SALE OF REMDESIVIR

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

A 26-year-old man was apprehended by the Special Operations Teams of Malkajgiri zone on Wednesday night for selling remdesivir injection vials at higher rates. Officials seized four injections, a mobile and an SUV which was used to transport the drug illegally.

According to officials, the accused, K. Madhu, a businessman, was caught selling the vial for ₹35,000 as against its price of ₹3,490 under the limits of Jawahar Nagar police station.

The accused, along with the seized property were handed over to Jawaharnagar police for further investigation.

LOKAYUKTA SEES LAPSES IN AP TAX REPORT ON TD MLC

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Andhra Pradesh Lokayukta has noticed serious lapses in a report submitted by chief commissioner of state tax Peeyush Kumar in a case filed against Telugu Desam MLC P. Ashok Babu.

The Lokayukta directed special chief secretary Rajat Bhargav to conduct a fresh inquiry and submit a report by June 14.

Deccan Chronicle carried a report on April 19 titled 'AP tax staff helping TD MLC', exposing the botched up inquiry by senior officials of the department and endorsement of the same by the chief commissioner.

According to the Lokayukta order, a copy of which is available with DC, "important aspects related to the complaint have not been taken into consideration by the inquiring officer and certain allegations have been ignored and not inquired into."

The Lokayukta said, "The very inaction on the representation submitted by the complainant warrants this institution to recommend further inquiry."

The legal authority asked the special CS to inquire into specific allegations which were substantiated with evidence by complainant Meher Kumar, GST officer.

Drawing the contours of the inquiry, the Lokayukta wanted to probe whether the TD MLC applied for transfer, whether he produced a fake B.Com certificate, whether he was allowed to retire in the middle of the month in violation of rules, whether campaigning for a political party while in service was not against service rules and who was responsible for the acts of tampering with the service register.

EXTENDED CURFEW TAKES EFFECT IN AP

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

All activities, barring emergencies and essential services, came to a halt in Andhra Pradesh after an 18-hour long curfew imposed — from 12 noon to 6 am per day — from Wednesday.

APSRTC suspended all its bus services while shops, malls, business establishments and transportation activities ceased during the curfew period. The police did not allow vehicles into AP along the borders and were allowing only emergency/essential services and travel for medical treatment and such purposes.

People were seen thronging the markets to purchase essentials in the morning hours. The curfew is adversely impacting the working classes including petty traders, daily wage workers, fruit vendors as also pushcart sellers apart from hotels, who are all forced to close their activities by noon.

Shops in the busy market places were closed by noon and the busy roads wore a deserted look. A majority of the people were confined to their homes due to the strict curfew norms.

The continuous plying of auto rickshaws has stopped for the duration of the curfew and only a few auto rickshaws and taxis were permitted by cops during this period.

Restrictions were imposed on vehicles moving between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States during the curfew term.

Ahead of Id-ul-Fitr, expected to be celebrated on May 14, depending on the sighting of the moon, Muslims throng the Charminar area for festival shopping, in Hyderabad on Wednesday. — *DEEPAK DESHPANDE*

Old City opens up for Id-ul-Fitr

Business activity in market areas to end at 8.30 pm due to curfew

ATHER MOIN | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

As Id-ul-Fitr festivities draw closer, shopping centres in the Old City have opened their gates to welcome the growing number of people every day — and conduct their business activities till 8.30 pm as curfew is imposed at 9 pm. Id-u-Fitr may probably fall on May 14, leaving just about 10 days for shopping amid reduced hours.

People are thronging markets in the Old City, right from Pathergatti, Madina Circle, Patel Market, Lad Bazaar, Khilwat, Shah Ali Banda and adjoining areas. With a large number of people throng markets to purchase items, traffic jams are the order of the day. Footpath markets on Pathergatti and Charminar stretch have come up. In most of those footpaths and at the hawkers' markets, the Id shopping has got momentum.

A large number of Hyderabadis buy clothes, shoes, children's garments, jewellery, furnishing articles and curtains ahead of the Id celebrations. Demand for sheer khurma kits, perfumes, cosmetics and decorative items also remains high.

Traditionally,

A LARGE number of Hyderabadis buy clothes, shoes, children's garments, jewellery, furnishing articles and curtains ahead of the Id celebrations.

Hyderabad experiences a major shopping frenzy in the last 10 days of Ramzan. These commercial activities culminate hours before the Id prayer. The megacity is home to a crore people who are known for their passion for shopping. A large number of non-Muslims come up to pick new arrivals. On this mega event, an average buyer normally spends a minimum of ₹10,000 on shopping.

This year, cloth merchants are finding fewer customers compared to previous times as this time people are not in a mood to purchase unstitched fabrics. They may opt for ready-made garments, considering the prevailing pandemic situation.

Mohammed Imtiaz Sayani of DFR Exclusive, Nayapul, said people from the districts were not travelling to the city due to the curfew at night. Most people thronging the markets are from the city.

Mohammed Akram of Akram Textiles, Moosabowli, said Muslim usually purchase garments three to four for each in Ramzan. Now they are purchasing one or two garments.

Charminar inspector B. Guru Naidu said the crowd in the market increased from Monday. "We have beefed up surveillance and deployed teams consisting of police mufti to apprehend pickpockets and attention diversion gangs," Naidu said.

He said there were no major cases reported until now. "We will set up public address systems and flexes of older offenders at all vulnerable spots to alert citizens," he said.

Wakf Board asks for deletion of 'forged' request

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

The Wakf Board has requested the Registration department to avoid taking any action on "a forged request" seeking removal of a property from CARD Centralized Architecture (CCA). Board officials said they are filing a complaint with the police. Officials of the board said they received a letter from joint sub-registrar-1 at the registration office here intimating that he received a letter from TSWB on April 4 by courier, requesting deletion of the property of Moin Manzil situated on Church Road, Gunfoundary, from the list of Wakf properties.

The sub registrar sought clarification whether the said property measuring 1987 square yards is private and make clear whether the letter purportedly issued by the CEO, Wakf Board, was genuine or not.

Immediately, the Wakf Board officials approached the joint sub-registrar-1 at his Nampally office and informed him that the letter was fake. No such letter was issued by the CEO, they stressed.

They took the copies of fake NOC and the courier service details as to who sent it. Notably, Wakf properties have been classified as prohibited properties in Section 22-A (c) of the Registration Act.

Chairman of the Wakf

THE SUB REGISTRAR sought clarification whether the said property measuring 1987 square yards is private and make clear whether the letter purportedly issued by the CEO, Wakf Board, was genuine or not.

IMMEDIATELY, THE Wakf Board officials approached the joint sub-registrar-1 at his Nampally office and informed him that the letter was fake. No such letter was issued by the CEO, they stressed.

Board Mohammed Saleem said the woman Mutawalli of the said Wakf property, Azeemunnisa Begum, alienated the property in favour of M/S Legend Estates, represented by its managing director Nageshwar Rao in 2009 without intimating the Wakf Board, based on the forged NOC from the then CEO. But, at that time, the Wakf Board acted promptly, cancelled the transaction and took possession of the property. Later, she died.

He said, "Now we came to know that a fake NOC was communicated to the registration department. We had verified our records and no such communication was found in the files. Though we asked the registration department to not take action on the said fake letter, we will lodge a criminal complaint to expose the persons involved in this fraud."

CCS NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF AGRICULTURAL MARKETING (CCS NIAM)
(An Autonomous Organisation of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Government of India)
Bambala, Tonk Road, Jaipur -302033, Rajasthan

NIAM Agri-Business Incubator (NABI) Launches
"Startup Agri-Business Incubation Program" and "Agripreneurship Orientation Program"
Under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana- Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied section Rejuvenation (RKVY -RAFTAAR)

Applications are invited for

Startup Agri-Business Incubation Programme: (Prototype to MVP)	Agripreneurship Orientation Programme: (Idea to Prototype)
i. Two months/online Residential Training	i. Two months/online Residential Training
ii. Grant-in-aid upto Rs. 25 lakhs	ii. Grant-in-aid upto Rs. 5 lakhs

For last date of application and other details : Visit: www.ccsniam.gov.in; email: nabi@ccsniam.ac.in;
Tel : 0141-2795112/13/14/15 , Mob. +919359145776, +918275218220
Davp 01375/11/0002/2122

AP RECORDS 22,204 NEW COVID-19 CASES

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

The surge in Coronavirus positive cases continued unabated across Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. It registered 22,204 new infections and 85 deaths registered in the past 24. The state created a record by testing 1,16,367 samples, which is the highest till date. They found 22,204 positive cases taking the overall total to 12,03,337. Of them, 1,70,588 are active cases and 10,27,270 have recovered. The recovery rate in AP is 85.16%. The death toll stands at 8,374.

The single day highest number of 2,344 new corona positive cases was registered in East Godavari district followed by 2,304 new cases in Anantapur district, 2,113 in Visakhapatnam, 2,001 in Prakasam, 1,985 in Kurnool, 1,982 in Srikakulam, 1,972 in Guntur, 1,756 in Chittoor, 1,304 in West Godavari, 1,202 in Vizianagaram, 1,200 in Nellore, 1,138 in Krishna.

Majority of prison inmates get jab

Prisons DG says jailbirds safer than general public

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Majority of the inmates aged above 45 in prisons across the state got vaccinated in the past one month, said officials of the Telangana orisons department, adding that it would start a drive for those aged 18 and above soon. They said Telangana state had been way ahead in vaccination drive than most of the prisons in the country.

"The vaccination drive inside the prison has been going on for a month and a fairly large number of inmates aged above 45 are vaccinated so far," said Director General of TS Prisons, Rajiv Trivedi.

"We are conducting the drive by coordinating with the district medical officer of the areas where the prisons are located. Medical officers have been visiting jails and administering the doses to the inmates in a systematic manner. As the demand for vaccines is high, we will be catering to the 18+ age group once we are done with the previous batch of 45 and above," said the official.

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

Prisoners serving jail term appear to be safer than the general public when it comes to Covid-19 infection, said the higher officials at the Telangana State Prisons department while talking about strict protocols being maintained for 'new admissions' and quarantine facilities inside jails as fresh cases during the second wave of Coronavirus is becoming increasingly fatal.

Speaking to this newspaper about the new system, Director General of TS Prisons Rajiv Trivedi said following the arrests by the police, a new batch of inmates are first screened at the gate and sent to hospital according to the readings and RT-PCR test.

"At the time of admission, their clothing is taken away for washing and the prisoner is provided with fresh clothes after he is made to take a bath. Our special task force monitors the medical health of all inmates. While the ones who are tested positive during the screening are sent to hospitals, the rest of them are shifted to a special barrack which we have set aside for their 14-day quarantine. Following their quarantine period, they are allowed inside the jail among the other inmates," explained the Director General.

He also said that on an average, from a batch of 20 new inmates in quarantine, one or two start showing symptoms within a week and are shifted to a medical facility for further necessary treatment. "So far, the situation inside the jails is nothing alarming as every precaution is being taken. The inmates inside are isolated, locked up and are safer from the infection than the general public," added the official.

The Chanchalguda Central Jail in Hyderabad alone houses over a thousand inmates, including high-security prisoners, with most of them being remanded inmates and under-trial ones.

The second stage of vaccination to those above 18 years of age will be done differently as there is an online registration system. "As per the availability of vaccination and allocated quota by the district medical and health officer (DHMO), we will continue with the drive further," added the DG.

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
URBAN FORESTRY
HGCL Building, Nanakramguda, Hyderabad - 500 008
Re. No.471/UF/HMDA/2020 Dt :03.05.2021
Tender Notification
The Urban Forestry of HMDA is inviting tenders for Development of Greenery from Jadcherla to Mahaboobnagar-I Town Police Station and other maintenance / development works in HMDA jurisdiction from the registered contractors in any State or Central Government Departments / Organisations who have previous experience of executing similar nature of works on e-procurement platform. The last date for tender filling is 19.05.2021. For further details please visit HMDA official website http://www.eprocurement.telangana.gov.in
Sd/-
DIRECTOR
Urban Forestry, HMDA
DIPR. R.O. No.: 1781-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2021-22

Department of Atomic Energy
Hyderabad Regional Purchase Unit
Corrigendum to e-Tender Notice
Last Date for Submission of Online Bid against Tender No.: DPS/HRPU/NFC/E-7150/PT/TPT/CAP/11261 is extended upto 25/05/2021 up to 2:00 PM.
Visit https://etenders.dpsdae.gov.in for details.
[DPS/HRPU/NFC/2021/70C1]

NMDC Limited
(A Government of India Enterprise)
'Khanij Bhavan', 10-3-311/A, Castle Hills, Masab Tank, Hyderabad - 500 028, CIN- L13100TG1958G0I001674
ADVERTISEMENT FOR PURCHASE OF RESIDENTIAL LAND/RESIDENTIAL LAND WITH BUILDING
NMDC Limited, a Navratna CPSE, under the Ministry of Steel intends to purchase Residential Land/Residential Land with Building in the periphery of its Plot at Road No.2, Banjara Hills (Within a radius of 500 metres). The approx. Size of the plot should be not less than 500 Square Yards and upto 600 Square Yards.
All interested parties are requested to submit their Letter of Interest along with all documents and relevant papers in a sealed cover for further examination.
The applications should reach the office of GM (Personnel), NMDC Limited, Khanij Bhavan, Castle Hills, Masab Tank, Hyderabad-500028 on or before 31.05.2021 at 5 pm in sealed cover.
GM (Personnel)
हर एक काम देश के नाम इस्पाती इरादा

COVID | RELIEF

Key feature is 'verified, safe stay' for children, says Sajjanar

TS gets child care response centre

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

A child care response centre by the Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) and Cyberabad police was launched in the city on Wednesday. Childcare centres and individual caregivers are identified and verified to make it safe for the children whose parents are being treated for Covid-19.

Cyberabad police said that it was noted that young parents and nuclear families were being affected by Covid-19. In most cases, either one or both the parents were hospitalised or put in home quarantine.

"With no immediate relative around, children were seen sharing the same facility or left alone at home unattended. The key feature of the initiative is 'verified and safe stay' for children, psychological security for parent and child, basic childcare needs, child-friendly facility and provision for caregivers apart from a round-the-clock care centre having tie-up with hospitals and doctors for health support," said Cyberabad police commissioner V.C. Sajjanar.

"At short notice, we could mobilise the resources and get a few facilities operationalised," he said.

"There is a dedicated helpline once the details are taken. Our She Teams do a background check and safely reach the child or children of Covid-affected parents to this facility," he stated.

As many people are already using or many more are in need of this service, cops will scale up the facilities and provide assistance.

Child care centres and individual caregivers can register via the official covid.scsc.in portal. C. Anasuya, deputy commissioner of police, women and child safety, said the She Teams along with SCSC squads would make the service available for children. For queries, those needing the service could call 1215 between 9 am and 6 pm. For queries, the Helpline 08045811215 is available between 9 am and 6 pm.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH,
WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER
MAHANADI PROJECT, RAIPUR (C.G.)
NATIONAL OPEN COMPETITIVE PROCUREMENT
(Two-Envelope Bidding Process with e-Procurement)
e-PROCUREMENT REQUEST FOR BIDS
eProcurement Portal: https://eprocure.gov.in/app
CORRIGENDUM NO. 3
In Tender ID No. 2021_WRCWB_624787_/RFB No. 19/SAC/2020-21/Rudri/Drip-II Dated 30.03.2021 G.No. 60005, In Tender ID No. 2021_WRCWB_624791_/RFB No. 20/SAC/2020-21/Rudri/Drip-II Dated 30.03.2021 G.No. 60006. In Tender ID No. 2021_WRCWB_624792_/RFB No. 21/SAC/2020-21/Rudri/Drip-II Dated 30.03.2021 G.No. 60007 and In Tender ID No. 2021_WRCWB_624793_/RFB No. 22/SAC/2020-21/Rudri/Drip-II Dated 30.03.2021 G.No. 60008. Detail amendments is upload in (https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app)
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DECCAN Chronicle

6 MAY 2021

In the end, IPL proved to be a bridge too far

No normal cricket is possible in the face of an abnormal health crisis. That is the message for the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was a bridge too far to normality when the nation has been overwhelmed by the catastrophic coronavirus pandemic. A dystopian scenario is playing out as Covid-19 patients, gasping for oxygen, die due to gross inefficiencies in reaching the life-giving elixir and funeral pyres are lighting up the night skies over the nation's capital and several major cities across the country. There was no guarantee that one of the world's richest sports boards could run an inviolable bio-bubble at a time when a minuscule organism is playing havoc with lives, snatching loved ones and sending millions into poverty. Was cricket necessary on Indian soil at such a time?

Partners in the cash-rich cricket league may have to take a ₹2,000-crore hit as the league is suspended after 29 of 60 games were played in a bubble for close to a month before it burst. There will be little sympathy for those assumed losses, not among the millions of migrant workers whose lives have been thrown into turmoil once again even as severe restrictions incommode the lives of over a billion people. There is no one that the pandemic has not touched in some way, though it must be said that for about 97 per cent of 1.4 billion people not infected, the cricket on view every evening did provide some entertainment. The brutal power of the willow, as exemplified in Kieron Pollard's match-turning blitz, was the epitome of aggression at the crease but even that pales in front of an insidious organism that slips in to destroy lives.

The franchises had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May.

The franchises weren't too forthcoming on the Covid-19 trouble that had touched the IPL even before a ball was bowled, as in Devdutt Padikkal testing positive. To keep the show going, they had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May. In hindsight, the league would have been better off in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) venues, which hosted the 2020 season without too much ado. The talk then of running the Indian Premier League for "the sake of humanity" was simply pretentious and aimed at staving off criticism that was building up for blithely playing cricket in juxtaposition with death amid chaos.

The attempts to start the IPL as any other economic activity in the time of the pandemic could not be faulted. A full series of matches against the visiting England team was played without stress, but that seems a long time ago now. Timing is the essence of any enterprise and in that the IPL proved a failure because a safe bubble was impossible to maintain when mutating strains are cleverly sidestepping the protection of the vaccine too and infecting people.

And it was when the indian Premier League began to move as a travelling circus across cities that it invited trouble. Once players were infected, the IPL had to stop, not for any moralistic reason but because it had joined the list of Covid-19 spreaders. A return to an atmosphere of good health for the nation would be a prerequisite for cricket to resume in India. Greed cannot be the engine driving sport.

Action on hate speech welcome

The decision by microblogging site Twitter to permanently suspend the account of actor Kangana Ranaut for her tweet calling for violence in West Bengal is most welcome. The social media platform has found her tweet to be in gross violation of its Twitter Rules, which do not allow the "targeted harassment of someone or incite other people to do so". Stopping people from airing their opinion is not without consequences in a democracy which guarantees the right to speech and expression, and any response to it needs to be measured against a template formed by far too many factors. But the present case offers little defence for the blatant call to violence, which has triggered strong reactions across all the social media platforms.

The actor has responded to Twitter's action by playing the victim card, saying that "a white person feels entitled to enslave a brown person, they want to tell you what to think, speak or do". That, however, hardly washes. The mayhem that West Bengal has witnessed after the Assembly election results were declared may have infuriated the actor, and she has every right to protest against it. In fact, every right-thinking human being must share her angst, but the fact that she can recollect only what happened in Gujarat in "early 2000" as the solution to it is troublesome, whether she is brown or white.

Her request to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show his "virat roop" of those times could baffle even the most ardent followers of both Ms Ranaut and Mr Modi. If she was referring to the planned loot, arson, rapes and murders that the state witnessed in those horrific times, then she breaches all the limits of acceptable behaviour. Taking recourse to racism to justify her blatant criminal intent is unlikely to convince the defenders of the right to free speech.

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Subhani

Inequity & privilege in the time of a pandemic

Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

As India reels under a devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections, I hear people say that "we are all in this together, we are all equally affected". But I wonder.

Are we? We may be all trying to survive in a lifeboat on the same viral sea, but some of the lifeboats are just more seaworthy than others, as someone pointed out. Even as we grieve and try to navigate our way through these terrifying times, it is important to recognise that some of us are more privileged than others.

I am alive. My family is with me. We are under the same roof. We have food on our table. I have had both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. I can work from home. These are huge privileges when so many friends, colleagues and people one has loved and cared for have been felled by the coronavirus.

The infection tally has zoomed past the 20-million mark; more than 222,408 people are dead across the country, says the health ministry; the actual number of those who died is likely to be much higher.

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken. Those of us who are not that old, not that poor, do not have co-morbidities or a compromised immune system have a responsibility to protect those who don't have our advantages.

The first step is to acknowledge our privilege.

New Delhi, where I live, continues to be under lockdown, and continues to gasp as friends and families of critical patients run helter-skelter trying to organise medical oxygen. Hospitals have taken their battle to the courts. The Delhi high court has become the last hope for so many hospitals scrambling to get oxygen for their Covid-19 patients as supplies become precariously short and government officials engage in verbal jousts over who is responsible.

This week, the high court issued a show cause notice to the Central government over the "non-compliance" of its order from last week to provide 700 metric tonnes (MT) of medical oxygen for the treatment of Covid-19 patients in the in Delhi. "You can put your head in sand like an ostrich, we will not," the high court said.

Even from my vantage position, it is easy to relate to that.

How does one reconcile the rage and helplessness of people on the street with the Centre's claim that there is no shortage of oxygen? Or the grotesquely grandiose Central Vista redevelopment project continuing in the heart of the nation's capital as part of "essential services" despite a petition in the courts arguing that the project was not an "essential service" and that it posed "a threat to the lives of the citizens of Delhi and beyond, including the lives of the workforce/labour engaged in the project", and that the project construction could prove to be a Covid-19 "super-spreader".

Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones...

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken.

How does one recognise privilege at a time like this wherever we are?

I found a pandemic privilege checklist on the website of Arizona State University's initiative, Project Humanities.

Some privileges it flagged were: If you have health insurance, if your racial group has not been disproportionately affected by Covid-19, if you have easy access to private outdoor space, if you do not live alone, if you have not been quarantined from someone you live with, if you are below the age of 65, if you have not experienced an income/wage loss in the past two months, if you do not have a compromised immune system, if you have home access to high speed Wi-Fi, if you have not felt unsafe because of your job in the past two months, if you have received professional counselling in the past two months, if no one you know personally has contracted and died from Covid-19, if you have not received food assistance in the past two months, if you have exercise equipment in your home, if you do not have someone in your home that needs adult supervision, if you have a pet.

This is a list for people living in the US. But some of it could apply in this country too.

Even in these traumatic times, those of us who can work from home, for instance, are massively better positioned than those whose nature of work does not offer them that luxury or those who have no work right now.

The first wave of the pandemic took a heavy toll of those working in the service industry, especially in the lower rungs. People survived by tapping into their meagre savings. Many people went into debt, were forced to cut down on nutritious food. I wonder what is happening to the young spa attendant who shared her dreams with me few months ago, the tailor down the street, the man selling flowers in my neighbourhood market.

Knowing people who matter have always been part of privilege. It continues during the pandemic. At a time when money can't necessarily buy you medical oxygen or an intensive care bed, being on top of the food chain, having connections do help. Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones than those with no connections.

Of course, even that does not always work. A former Indian diplomat lost his life while waiting for a ICU bed in the parking lot of a top hospital in the national capital region.

We all live in fear of the virus, of losing our loved ones at a time when citizens appear to have been left to their own devices. Lack of privilege is when one copes with the fear of slipping into destitution.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has promised help to auto rickshaw and cab drivers in the city whose incomes have taken a huge hit due to the coronavirus. The Delhi government also says it will give free rations to 72 lakh ration card holders. These are baby steps but in the right direction.

However, there needs to be a strong nationwide social safety net for people who are likely to fall through the cracks in the coming days.

We must not let them fall. We must speak out. Privilege brings greater responsibilities.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and the emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

UNDUE HASTE

The Telangana High Court has rightly slammed the Telangana state government's action against former minister Etala Rajendar for his alleged land-grabbing activities, because there is unseemly haste in the impugned action. While there are many long-pending land-related cases and complaints against many public personalities in the state, prioritising pointedly only Rajendar's case over all others shows that he is unfairly singled out. That is why an opinion is fast gaining ground in the state that the action in question is politically motivated which will not bode well for the government.

K. Srinivasa Charyulu
Hyderabad

HOSPITALS FIRST

There is an urgent need for the state government to concentrate only on minimum requirements to hospitals on supply of oxygen and vaccines etc., instead of expansion of Cabinet and inquiries into MLAs.

V.R.K. Valmeeky
Secunderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Varsities can't declare exclusive medium

NEW DELHI, May. 5

The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court today declared that no university in the country can declare a particular regional language as the "exclusive" medium for instruction and examination of candidates studying in that university to the prejudice of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in Article 25 to 30 of the Constitution. In a judgment of far reaching implication on the language policies of State Governments, the five-Judge Bench unanimously ruled that while the Punjab University had the right to prescribe Punjabi as a medium of instruction it could not prescribe it as the exclusive medium nor compel affiliated colleages established and administered by religious minorities or by a section of citizens who wish to conserve their own languge, scripit or culture to teach in Punjab or take examination in that language,

Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu

Tripura DM who cracked whip at a wedding faces storm of protest

While the administration has been widely rebuked for complacency in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, a district magistrate in Tripura is under fire for being overly enthusiastic in enforcing night curfew rules during a marriage in Agartala, the state capital. A video that recorded the incident went viral on the social media and political parties are gunning for him.

West Tripura DM M Shailesh Kumar Yadav is in the dock for his arrogant behaviour with a bride and groom in the middle of a wedding. Angry citizens and politicians have written to Tripura CM Biplab Kumar Deb seeking strict action against Mr Yadav. Some have even demanded an FIR against the official and sought his removal from service.

In the viral video, Mr Yadav is seen shoving attendees and arresting everyone for flouting Covid-19 norms and tearing up the permission certificate for the wedding that he himself had signed! Sources say the CM has formed a committee of two IAS officers to investigate the incident and submit a report to chief secretary Manoj Kumar for further action. Watch this space for updates.

AD HOCISM IN J&K

If Jammu and Kashmir's change of status was meant to have a positive impact on governance in the Union territory, those hopes have been belied, many say. Ad hocism has become an integral part of governance in J&K, as evident from the list of top bureaucrats and officials who are holding more than one post. Just two examples: Shaleen Kabra, the principal secretary (home), is also the principal secretary (revenue) and financial commissioner. Similarly, Dheeraj Gupta, principal secretary (housing and urban development), is also J&K's principal resident commissioner in New Delhi.

Sources say as many as 10 IAS officers in the Union Territory are holding additional charge of different departments and institutions due to a shortage of manpower in the higher echelons of the administration. J&K has a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers, but only 58 are serving in the cadre, of which at least nine officers are on Central deputation. The Centre is apparently aware of the situation, and it recently moved to depute IAS and Group A service officers to the new UT. But this seems to have done little to solve the problem which has afflicted governance for decades in J&K.

PROBE INTO HARYANA COPS

Former Haryana home secretary and retired IAS officer Navraj Sandhu has been appointed chairperson of the Haryana State Police Complaints Authority (PCA). In addition, retired IPS officer Kamleshwar Kumar Mishra and retired IAS officer Ramesh Chand Verma have been named as members of the authority.

Haryana is one of 17 states that set up a PCA to protect citizens against the abuse of police powers. It adjudicates allegations of improper or shoddy investigations, refusal to register FIRs, allegations of custodial torture and police high-handedness. However, it should be noted that the recommendations of the PCA aren't binding on the state government — which makes the PCA merely a paper tiger.

For five years, the government did not appoint a chairman even as the the complaints piled up. Apparently, until 2019, the authority received 681 complaints, but it is not known how many were investigated and forwarded to the government for action. Hopefully, Mr Sandhu's appointment will make up for the lost time.

TAILPIECE

A significant recent non-babu event was Dr Karan Singh's ninetieth birthday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a unique edition of the Bhagavad Gita, in 11 volumes with 20 commentaries on each verse in facsimile. The function held at the Prime Minister's residence was attended mainly by family members and a few bureaucrats involved in evolving Kashmir policy. Dr Singh opened the proceedings with a talk on the Gita and steered away from current political matters. The Prime Minister spoke, as expected, on the Gita, and closed his speech by paying fulsome compliments to Dr Karan Singh, the elder statesman of the Kashmir region. What the babus were left wondering was how the tea leaves of this event needed to be read.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

13 die in TN hosp due to lack of O2

Authorities claim 'technical glitch' in oxygen supply, not shortage, caused deaths

SINDHIYA SAMUEL & P.A. JEBARAJ | DC with agency inputs
CHENNAI, MAY 5

As many as 13 patients died at the Chengalpattu Government Medical College Hospital on Tuesday night due to alleged oxygen shortage though the district collector A. John Louis, ruled out shortage of oxygen in the hospital. There could have been a 'technical glitch' in the supply of oxygen, John Louis told the media on Wednesday, adding that the director of medical education would probe into it.

Narrating the harrowing incident, the relatives of the deceased patients said that the deaths were caused due to insufficient oxygen supply. The 13 patients, aged between 40 and 85, who were in critical care passed away one after the other at around 10.30 pm, they said.

They also claimed that hospital staff took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control. But it was in vain. The situation was brought under control around midnight by transporting cylinders from SRM and Karpaga Vinayaga medical colleges to the hospital GH and the situation was brought under control. Yet 13 persons lost their lives,

HOSPITAL STAFF took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control.

John Louis said he received a call at 11 pm that there were some issues in the hospital and rushed there. The hospital had 10 kilolitre oxygen as against the total capacity of 23 kilolitre, he said, adding that there were also two external 3 kilolitre oxygen set ups. "We also had cylinders that were refilled and when the pressure dropped we continued this. There is no question of oxygen shortage," he said. The Collector further said that those who required oxygen at high pressures survived and that the patients who died were already critical with other comorbidities and issues.

Of the deceased, only one patient was Covid positive while others tested negative but had viral pneumonia and comorbidities. The collector deputed a deputy collector to continuously monitor the beds and oxygen supply at the GH and shift the severe cases to the Covid Care Centres.

Meanwhile, the Postgraduate doctors at the Chengalpattu government hospital staged a protest on Wednesday morning in the hospital premises against the alleged negligence exhibited by the administrators of the institute. According to protesting doctors, the hospital could not meet the oxygen demand as almost all oxygen beds in the wards treating Covid-19 and those suspected to have Covid-19 were occupied. The hospital that usually requires 2.3 kilolitres of oxygen per day, needed 4.5 kilolitres on Tuesday, which the hospital doctors deliberately ignored.

Similarly, around 50 people from the Democratic Youth Federation of India(DYFI), staged a protest outside the Chengalpattu government hospital, condemning the negligence from the hospital side. They held placards and raised slogans against the hospital management.

The GH has 325 beds with oxygen lines. "Of the 447 patients, 256 were Coronavirus positive while 191 were suspected to be infected with the virus. Yesterday, 309 patients were put on oxygen support," the collector said. Owing to the increase in the number of infected patients, the GH had to provide 4.5 kl oxygen to the patients yesterday alone as against the daily intake of 2.9 kl.

Louis deputed a deputy collector to continuously monitor the beds and oxygen supply at the GH and shift the severe cases to the Covid Care Centres.

"Compared to the situation in March, the district is now witnessing a five time increase in the number of infections. We will rise to the occasion if any issues arise," he added.

TN: New norms to control spike

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Grocers, vegetable vendors, tea shop owners and other shop keepers would have to down shutters by 12 noon from Thursday as the new set of restrictions come into force with a view to controlling the spread of Covid-19, which is wreaking more havoc in its second wave.

Announcing a new timing for the sales of liquor, the government announced that TASMAC shops will remain open from 8 am to 12 noon, while bars, clubs, pubs, and other places of public gathering have been shut until further orders. In the new restrictions that will be in force till May 20, government and private offices will work with 50 per cent attendance and public transport, too, would run with 50 per cent occupancy.

Government employees with disabilities have been fully exempted from attending office during the period between May 6 and 20, an official order said.

Another GO made it clear that all Group A officers and heads of departments should attend office regularly while the other staff would be attending work on alternate days or as per the schedule drawn up depending on their requirement in office.

However, all officers and staff should be available for office work and accessible through electronic mode of communication and all government staff have been barred from leaving headquarters without permission. As far as eateries are concerned, the regulations restrict the timing on all days other than Sundays when a total lockdown will be observed.

13 STATES REPORT MORE THAN 100 DEATHS A DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

India reported 3,584 deaths in the last 24 hours. Over 900 deaths were from Maharashtra, while Delhi and Uttar Pradesh reported 338 and 351, respectively.

At least 13 states are reporting more than 100 deaths a day. These include previously uncounted deaths from earlier days.

The country reported 3,91,184 lakh cases of the Coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday. Of these, Maharashtra recorded 51,880 cases, while Karnataka reported 44,631. Active cases are now more than 35.58 lakh.

Maharashtra reported 57,640 fresh Covid-19 positive cases, 57,006 discharges, and 920 deaths. Karnataka reports 50,112 new positive cases, 26,841 recoveries and 346 deaths in the last 24 hours. 22,204 new cases, 85 deaths and 11,128 discharges reported in Andhra Pradesh in last 24 hours.

Kerala reported the highest single-day rise of 41,953 new Covid-19 cases and 58 deaths. Active cases stand at 3,75,658 in the state, 23,106 recovered. Total 13,62,363 patients recovered so far, while 5,565 deaths have been reported till now said Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan

12 states have more than one lakh active cases, seven states have 50,000 to one lakh active cases, and 17 states have less than 50,000 active cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh have around 1.5 lakh active cases, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary.

Meanwhile India has given emergency use authorisation for a Covid-19 antibody drug cocktail developed by Roche (ROG.S) and Regeneron (REGN.O), expanding its arsenal of drugs to battle a massive second wave of infections.

India has become the fastest country in the world to administer 16 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine in 109 days, said health ministry.

Liberalised policy (for vaccination) was started on May 1st. Under this, the drive has begun smoothly in 9 states and 6.71 lakh people in the age group of 18-44 years have been administered vaccines, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary.

K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor to Centre, has warned that a third wave of Covid infections is inevitable.

"A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus but it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur. Vaccines are effective against current variants. New variants will arise all over the world and in India too but variants that increase transmission will likely plateau. Immune evasive variants and those which lower or increase disease severity will arise going ahead," he said.

EAM defends holding elections amid Covid spike

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

Elections are "sacrosanct" in India and "we are a deeply political society", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said, defending the government from criticism that the election process including rallies led to the spread of Covid in the country. In an interaction as part of the "Global Dialogue Series", the Minister—who is currently on a visit to London—however conceded that the healthcare system in the country stood "exposed" in the country and blamed it on inadequate spending on health in the past 75 years, adding that this was why Prime Minister Narendra Modi had emphasised the Ayushman Bharat health scheme.

EAM Jaishankar also conceded that everyone in the country had let their guard down after the number of cases came down drastically in February this year, adding that while the focus was on reviving the economy after the lockdown last year, the "attempt to instil confidence had created a societal complacence that all of us are part of".

Describing the current pandemic crisis in the country as "difficult and painful" as the current strain of the Covid virus ravaging the country was "much more virulent", the EAM however said that the Government was tackling it by "giving it everything we have and more". He made it clear that all people of the county need to "put the blame game aside" and look at "what we can do" to tackle the situation.

Mr. Jaishankar also said that after the first wave of Covid, the Government had authorised 1,200 Oxygen plants and that money had been given to states since Health was a state subject in the Indian federal devolution of powers.

"You can't not have elections in a democratic country like India. We are a deeply political country. ... Elections are sacrosanct ... We are a deeply political society," the EAM said. Responding to criticism on the Government allowing the Kumbh mela, the EAM shot back saying that one cannot argue that while religious crowds area risk, (farmer) protest crowds are not. He pointed out that the Government had been accused in some quarters of imposing lockdown last year to quell the CAA protests when in fact, the Government had declared the Lockdown to save the country from the first wave of the Covid virus.

On vaccines and why India exported millions of doses to foreign nations in the past few months, the EAM made it clear that the country had international obligations such as the Covax Initiative and that the Covishield vaccine itself was a British-developed vaccine manufactured in India.

Isolation coaches

The Indian Railways has put together 70,000 isolation beds in more than 4,400 Covid care coaches across the country. A total of 232 coaches with nearly 4,000 beds are in use at 14 railway stations. Around 4,176 coaches are still available for deployment.

— *DOMAL KAMRAJ*

16% vaccinated test +ve: Study

New Delhi, May 5: A small-scale study on 113 healthcare workers who had received at least one vaccine dose at a private hospital in Delhi found that 18 tested positive for Covid but all except one had mild symptoms.

The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal Diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research and Reviews on May 3, was conducted on employees of the Fortis Centre of Excellence for Diabetes, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology in Delhi.

The participants in the study by researchers at Fortis, National Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol Foundation, and Diabetes Foundation (India), New Delhi, included doctors, nutritionists, nurses, paramedical workers, and maintenance staff.

Of the 113 in the study, 107 had received the second dose of the vaccine.

Taken in percentage form, the study found that breakthrough infections — Covid infection in vaccinated individuals — occurred in 15.9 per cent (18 persons) of the vaccinated individuals and 95 per cent had mild symptoms. Of these, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose and one person.

Except one person who required hospitalisation, all others had mild Covid-19 disease, the researchers said.

According to the study, of the breakthrough infections in 18 persons, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose. These 17 had got their second dose after a mean of 34.8 days following the first jab. — *PTI*

BIZZARE | EVENT **Villagers felt that Covid will go away if water is poured on temple**

Guj: Women flout norms to 'eradicate' virus

Ahmedabad, May 5: Cocking a snook at Covid-19 norms, a large number of women turned up at a religious event organised in a village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district to "eradicate Coronavirus", police said on Wednesday, adding 23 people, including the village head, have been arrested.

A video of the incident, which occurred in Navapura village in Sanand taluka on May 3, showed around 500 women carrying water pots on their heads while walking towards a temple.

The video grab also shows some men taking these pots to the top of the temple and emptying them.

After the video clip went viral on Wednesday, Ahmedabad rural police said appropriate action had already been taken.

A police officer said villagers believed that Coronavirus will just go away if water is poured on the Baliyadev temple.

"The incident took place on May 3 at Navapura village where women had gathered in large numbers carrying water pots. A police team rushed to the spot on the same day and arrested 23 villagers, including sarpanch Gafabhai Thakor, for organizing this event. Police had also seized the music system from the spot," said Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sanand Division, K.T. Kamariya.

He said all the accused have been booked for violating a police notification regarding public gatherings under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act.

In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government had banned all kinds of public gatherings in the state.

As of Tuesday, Gujarat's overall Covid-19 tally stood at 6,20,472 with 7,779 fatalities, the state health department had said. — *PTI*

CORONAVIRUS NEGATIVE REPORT MANDATORY TO ENTER AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad, May 5: Residents of Ahmedabad who visit other states for work are now required to produce a negative Covid-19 RT-PCR test certificate to return to the city, civic authorities said on Wednesday.

Following a direction from the Gujarat High Court, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has scrapped its April 5 order which said Ahmedabad residents who visit other states for work will not be required to undergo RT-PCR tests upon their return to the city.

While hearing a PIL taken up suo motu (on its own) on the overall Covid-19 situation in the state, the high court on April 29 asked the AMC to scrap its order issued on April 5.

The court noted that the AMC's announcement was in contravention of the state government's March 27 order, according to which a negative RT-PCR test certificate was compulsory for everyone entering Gujarat from other states. — *PTI*

IN BRIEF

Himachal goes into 10-day lockdown

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to impose a lockdown in the state from May 7 to May 16 to check the spread of Covid-19, an official said here. The decision to impose the lockdown was taken at a state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, the spokesperson added. The meeting was held to review the current Covid-19 situation in the state.

Kerala: Helpline for hearing impaired

Thiruvananthapuram: At a time when the Covid-19 cases are surging, the National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH), an autonomous organisation here and the State Disaster Management Authority, have jointly set up a 24 X 7 Covid-19 helpline exclusively for the deaf and hard of hearing. The facility is primarily meant for answering queries and concerns related to the pandemic and extending counselling to stress-related issues. Sign language interpreters will be available to attend the WhatsApp video calls made to the helpline, an official statement said here. The helpline will also reply to queries related to monsoon and the preparedness for and management of the season, it added. The Helpline numbers are: 9446750983, 9496918178, 9249505723.

ODISHA PERMITS HOME DELIVERY OF FOREIGN LIQUOR

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 5

The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to allow home delivery of foreign liquor during the lockdown.

A decision to this effect was taken as all the non-essential shops, including liquor outlets, have remained closed during the 14-day statewide lockdown that began with effect from Wednesday morning.

In a letter to the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P.K. Mohapatra, the excise department principal secretary S.K. Lohani stated the home delivery of liquor is proposed to be permitted during lockdown.

"Home delivery of liquor Indian-made Foreign Liquor and beer (IMFL/beer) by duly authorised food aggregators/technology platforms/delivery service providers as well as by IMFL OFF/ON shop licensees following the extant guidelines of Excise Department," the letter read. The government has also decided to allow operation of all the godowns of Odisha State Beverage Corporation for wholesale trade between 6 am to 2 pm.

Another decision was also taken to ensure smooth passage of vehicles carrying genuine duty-paid liquor, the letter stated. The decision for home delivery of liquor was taken in view of the past experience during which it was found that consumers had resorted to illegal means to avail the intoxicant beverages.

LOCAL TRAIN SERVICES SUSPENDED IN WB

Kolkata, May 5: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday took stock of the Covid-19 situation in the state, shortly after her swearing-in ceremony, and announced fresh curbs to combat the spread of Covid-19, including suspension of local train services.

Banerjee, following a high-level meeting with top officials, said that metro rail and state transport services will be curtailed by 50 per cent from Thursday, as part of the newly imposed set of restrictions.

Banks will be operational from 10 am to 2 pm, and government offices have been told to make do with 50 per cent workforce, Banerjee said at the press meet.

The satte administration has also requested private firms to encourage work from home, the Chief Minister said.

"Local trains will be suspended from tomorrow. State-run transport and metro services will be reduced by 50 per cent. Starting May 7, air passengers will be allowed in Bengal only if they carry RT-PCR negative report, which is not older than 72 hours prior to boarding," Banerjee said.

SHORT TAKES

HC QUASHES FIR AGAINST WOMAN FOR ONLINE POST

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday quashed the FIR against Navi Mumbai resident Sunaina Holey, booked for promoting enmity between different groups on the grounds of religion. The HC observed that as per complaint no community or religion was named in the tweet.

Holey had approached the high court with three petitions seeking to quash three separate FIRs filed against her.

Apart from the FIR quashed on Wednesday, two more FIRs have been registered against her in connection with her tweets against Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and cabinet minister Aaditya Thackeray.

Even though Holey's counsel Abhinav Chandrachud on Wednesday assured the court that she would refrain from tweeting about the pending petitions till they are disposed of, soon after Wednesday's decision Holey in her tweet termed Uddhav Thackeray government as "fascist".

"And we won! Sunaina Holey vs State of Maharashtra, we defeated fascist @OfficeofUt.. Thanks to each one of you for standing with me... much Love" read her tweet.

And when someone tagged her tweet to Mumbai police in another tweet she said, "Can you let people breathe? What's the point in tagging @MumbaiPolice? Is it a crime to call @OfficeofUT a fascist? Why don't you tag police when left calls @narendramodi Ji fascist. Sudhar jaao.. Respect Constitution at least!"

LABOUR MIN GETS OKAY TO SEEK AADHAAR DETAILS

New Delhi, May 5: The ministry of labour & employment has now been mandated to seek the 12-digit unique identification number Aadhaar from people like employees and unorganised sector workers seeking registration, benefits, availing services or receiving any payment under various schemes under the Social Security Code 2020.

Aadhaar would not be made mandatory for delivery of services under various social security schemes under the purview of the ministry because Social Security Code 2020 has not been fully implemented so far.

The rules under the Code are finalised by the ministry but those rules are yet to be notified. The main purpose of the latest mandate given to the ministry is to facilitate database creation, mainly covering people in informal sectors like migrant workers.

"Now, we will start asking for Aadhaar numbers from beneficiaries under the Social Security Code. This is also required for our database for unorganised sector workers, including migrant workers. However the delivery of services under various social security schemes would not be denied due to non-submission of Aadhaar," Labour Secretary Apurva Chandra said.

HC REFUSES TO ORDER FIR AGAINST BJP MP

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court on Wednesday refused to direct registration of FIR against BJP MP Dr Sujay Vikhe Patil for allegedly illegally procuring Remdesivir vials and asked the petitioner to first approach the concerned police station and file a formal complaint.

Four agriculturists and former politicians had filed a plea in the Bombay High Court against Vikhe Patil for the alleged unauthorised procurement and distribution of Remdesivir injections. Vikhe Patil brought the vials to Shirdi in a chartered flight.

A division bench of Justices Ravindra Ghuge and J.B.U. Debadwar said that they were concerned with every vial of Remdesivir injection being utilised for saving lives. "We have no hesitation in observing that any person, be he a man from the lowest strata of the society or a high office occupied by a public officer, would not be above law if it is noticed that he has violated the law," said the bench adding that if after investigation, it is noticed that Dr Patil has violated the law, he would not be treated above the law, and the law would not permit him to extricate himself from the law.

BJP national president J.P. Nadda addresses party workers regarding the incidents of post-poll violence in the state, in Kolkata on Wednesday. — *PTI*

Mamata downplays post-poll clash as 'sporadic incidents'

Says first priority of state government is to control the Covid-19 surge

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 5

In a first, Mamata Banerjee and Jagdeep Dhankhar sparred with each other face to face at Raj Bhavan over the immediate priority of the new government — battling the Covid-19 pandemic or an end to the deadly post-poll violence — in West Bengal as soon the Trinamul Congress supremo was sworn in by the governor on Wednesday morning as the state's chief minister for third consecutive time. The simple ceremony was boycotted by BJP MLAs in protest over the alleged killings of their party cadres by TMC workers.

Standing next to Dhankhar, Banerjee prioritised the Covid-19 battle over tackling the post-poll violence, downplaying the deadly clashes as "sporadic incidents", orchestrated by a "political party", in her veiled reference to the BJP. Irked by her remarks, Dhankhar not only publicly differed with her but also said that ending the post-poll violence should be the top agenda of her new government.

The CM said: "Our first priority is to control the Covid-19. Reaching Nabanna (state secretariat) we will hold a meeting on this and inform everyone about our decisions. Second, I urge all political parties to maintain peace, order and harmony. Bengal does not like any unrest. I also do not like it. I appeal to all — Please take proper care so that no violence erupts anywhere. Post-poll, some sporadic incidents occurred. I will tackle law and order from today. I will deal with it with an iron hand. I will undertake some postings in law and order to avoid unrest. But I will not hold back myself from taking strong steps against anyone indulging in violence."

She added: "I just took the oath. You know the police personnel of this government worked under the Election Commission for the last three months. A political party unleashed atrocities in the seats that it won. We will ensure that no one is spared. I will create a new set up today itself because this was not mine in the last three months. Moreover, a lot of ineffectiveness and inefficiencies were there. I call upon all not to mete out retribution to anyone."

Congratulating Banerjee on winng a third term, Dhankhar told her: "I hope that governance will be according to the Constitution and the rule of law. India is a great democracy, where power emanates from the process of law. We are at the moment in a very difficult crisis. I am getting reports from within and outside the country. People are worried. I have been in touch with the honourable CM. She has taken steps when I indicated to her."

Post-poll clash: Blood on Didi's hands, says Nadda

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MAY 5

Indicting Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee of her direct role in the merciless killings of his party cadres in post-poll violence in West Bengal, BJP president J.P. Nadda on Wednesday ridiculed her of beginning her third term as Chief Minister of the state with the victims' "blood on her hands."

Nadda, who undertook a two-day state visit from Tuesday to meet the victims' families, put the saffron party workers' death toll at 14, which was nine earlier, while asserting, "We will fight it till the conclusive end."

He, however, rejected the demand by a section of his party including Rajya Sabha MP Roopa Ganguly for the Article 356 imposition by the Centre in the state.

The BJP chief alleged, "The way brutal killings of our party workers were carried and Mamataji remained silent for 36 hours despite being as a caretaker CM, it shows her role. Her silence speaks about her involvement. And she starts her third term with blood on her hands."

He also claimed, "the TMC targeted the grassroot level BJP workers and their families also. They also aimed at the women. Cases of molestation and rape have come to light. When I used to say during my poll campaign here that the women are the most unsafe, I was true. We respect a mandate. But a mandate can not hide the truth."

Nadda was referring to the wild claims of his party about the gang-rape of two of its female polling agents and random molestation of many others at Nanoor in Birbhum.

BJP supporters' kin from Bengal flee to Assam

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, MAY 5

Assam BJP president Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Wednesday rushed to western Assam's Dhubri district with relief material for more than 400 BJP workers and their family members who crossed over to Assam to escape post-poll violence in neighbouring West Bengal.

Informing that a team of BJP workers are accompanying him to look after the victims of Bengal violence, Assam BJP president Dass told reporters, "The BJP workers and their families from Bengal can live in Assam as long as they don't feel safe about returning to West Bengal. We are giving shelter and food to all those who fled their state."

The BJP has alleged that goons backed by the Trinamool Congress have killed their workers, attacked women members, vandalised houses, looted shops belonging to party members and ransacked party offices. The party has claimed that nine people have died in violence across six districts so far.

The exodus of BJP workers along with their families from West Bengal continued even on Wednesday due to post-election violence unleashed allegedly by TMC goons. Assam minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who regretted the incident on Tuesday claimed that around 300-400 people had entered Dhubri district in Assam from north Bengal.

Dass, accompanied by Assam MP Rajdeep Roy, visited the camps where the refugees have been kept and distributed relief material. Roy informed that around 600 people from Bengal have been given shelter at a camp at Agamoni in Dhubri. He added that most of the people in the camp are children and women, and that more such camps have been set up at other places in the district.

Roy also said that all the people who have entered Assam are from Cooch Behar district in West Bengal, where BJP won 7 out of 9 Assembly seats. "Can only imagine the condition of the districts where TMC has majority seats. This is what Mamata has reduced Bengal to. Really deplorable," he added.

The victims of Bengal violence who have fled to Assam told reporters that they were forced to flee after they were attacked by TMC workers. They said that they were beaten by the TMC goons, their women molested, the houses demolished, and their properties and livestock were looted.

Meanwhile, the district administration of Dhubri has informed the Cooch Behar district administration about the development. They have said that when someone fears for their life, they will flee to a place where they feel safe, and therefore the district administration is providing them shelter to stay in Assam for the time being.

Stalin to take oath as CM on Friday

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit appointed M.K. Stalin, who has been chosen as the Leader of the DMK Legislative Party, as Chief Minister on Wednesday and invited him to form the next government in the state. Stalin would be sworn in as Chief Minister along with his Ministerial colleagues on Friday 9 am at the Raj Bhavan in a simple function, which will be attended by just around 200 persons.

Earlier in the day, the DMK president, along with his party general secretary Durai Murugan, treasurer T.R. Balu, principal secretary K.N. Nehru and organisation secretary R.S. Bharati, called on the Governor at Raj Bhavan. Stalin handed over the resolution passed at the meeting of the DMK legislators on Tuesday evening at Anna Arivalayam, electing him as the leader, and also a list of some 28 ministers to be sworn in along with him. The Governor's office handed over a letter to him inviting him to form the government. Raj Bhavan officials have been coordinating with the state officials on the conduct of the swearing-in function.

The names of ministers chosen by Stalin became a matter of speculation that too many lists were making their rounds in social media with people making their own guesses and conjectures. Though the DMK cadre and functionaries would have preferred to have a gala function to mark the installation of the government at a public place in view of the party returning to power after 10 years, the decision to make it a simple affair was taken in view of the pandemic.

Stalin will be the third Chief Minister from the DMK to assume office after C.N. Annadurai, the party founder, and M. Karunanidhi. The party first captured power in the state in 1967. The DMK now has a combined strength of 133 MLAs – 125 DMK members and the rest members of alliance parties who contested in the Rising Sun symbol — in the 16th Assembly and thus is not dependent on other parties for a simple majority.

MAHA FILES PLEA IN HC CITING WRONGDOING IN DESHMUKH CASE

Mumbai, May 5: The Maharashtra government has filed a petition before the Bombay High Court alleging that some portions of the FIR registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation against former home minister Anil Deshmukh were intended to "destabilise" the Shiv Sena-led ruling coalition in the state.

The state has sought that the CBI be directed to remove the said portions from its FIR.

In its plea filed in the HC on April 30, the government claimed the CBI, in the FIR, had included the issue of last year's reinstatement of now suspended Mumbai police officer Sachin Waze, and transfers of some other police officers.

These issues were not part of the complaint registered against Deshmukh and former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh by lawyer Jaishri Patil, the state government said.

On April 5, the high court, while hearing a bunch of pleas, including one filed by Patil, had directed the CBI to initiate a preliminary inquiry into the allegations of misconduct and corruption made against Deshmukh by Singh. Patil had registered a complaint following the allegations and sought that the alleged roles of both Deshmukh and Singh be probed. — *PTI*

India strongly condemns terror attack in Logar province of Afghan

New Delhi, May 5: India on Wednesday strongly condemned the terrorist attack in Logar province in Afghanistan and renewed its call for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire in the conflict-ridden country.

Ministry of external affairs Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said there is a need to end the terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries which lead to attacks like the one in Logar.

MEA SPOKESPERSON Arindam Bagchi says India stands firm with the families of victims and with the people of Afghanistan in this hour of grief and reiterates urgent need for comprehensive ceasefire.

"India strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Logar province of Afghanistan in which 21 innocent people died and more than 100 were injured during the month of Ramadan," he said.

The terror attack in Logar came as the US has begun to withdraw its troops from the country after nearly two decades.

"India stands firm with the families of victims and with the people of Afghanistan in this hour of grief," Bagchi said.

He reiterated the urgent need for a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire that could lead to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

"India has been steadfast in its call to end the terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries which lead to attacks like these," Bagchi said.

"India stands with the people of Afghanistan and salute the courage of brave Afghan forces in their continued fight against terrorism," he added.

SAD | DEMISE

Jailed leader was a confidant of separatist patriarch Syed Ali Shah Geelani

Jailed Kashmiri separatist leader 'Sehrai' dead

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MAY 5

Kashmiri separatist leader Muhammad Ashraf Khan 'Sehrai' died in a Jammu hospital on Wednesday, a day after he was shifted there from a jail of garrison town of Udhampur.

77-year-old Sehrai who was a close confidante of separatist patriarch Syed Ali Shah Geelani and replaced him as the chief of Tehrik-e-Hurriyat (TeH), Jammu and Kashmir was arrested by the J&K police on July 12 last year and subsequently detained under the Union Territory's stringent Public Safety Act.

Dr. A.D.S. Manhas. Medical Superintendent of Jammu's Government Medical College Hospital said that Sehrai's rapid test for Covid-19 had come negative but his swab came positive for the pathogen after his death, local news agency GNS reported quoting official sources.

The hospital sources said that the oxygen level of Sehrai who was suffering from multiple ailments had dropped to 63 on Wednesday morning.

His family here claimed that despite its repeated requests to release him or, at least, shift him to a good hospital in view of his poor health he was left unattended in jail. "His health has only deteriorated in jail but he was left unattended by the authorities till his condition worsened on Tuesday," it said.

Muhammad Ashraf Khan 'Sehrai'

The TeH, virtually a breakaway wing of Sehra and Geelani's parent organisation Jamaat-e-Islami launched by them in 2004 after reaching an "agreement with the Jamaat, is the dominant constituent of the Hurriyat Conference faction which was until last year being led by Geelani.

However, feeling hurt at being sidelined in certain decision-making and underhand disparagement of his role within the amalgam, nonagenarian Geelani on June 29, 2020 announced his decision to quit the Hurriyat Conference. Sehrai was considered to be a strong contender to take over as chief of the Hurriyat Conference (Geelani) faction.

His son Junaid Ashraf, a divisional commander of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, was among two militants killed in a gunfight with security forces in Srinagar on May 19 last year. He had gone missing on March 23, 2018, days after his father had taken over as chairman of the TeH.

Sehrai's death in Jammu hospital has been widely condoled by Kashmir's mainstream and separatist parties and leaders alike, all urging the government to release all political leaders languishing in jails in and outside J&K in view of the alarming pandemic situation.

Former chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president, Mehbooba Mufti, tweeted, "Deeply saddened to know about Ashraf Sehrai Sahib's sudden death. Like him, countless political prisoners & other detainees from Kashmir continue to be jailed purely for their ideologies & thought process. In today's India one pays a price with his life for dissent."

She also said, "The least GOI can do in such dangerous circumstances is to immediately release these detainees on parole so that they return home to their families" .

The Hurriyat Conference faction led by Kashmir's chief Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq alleged that given his age and health condition and yet being incarcerated Sehrai has fallen prey to the "inhumane attitude of the authorities". It said, "We are pained by his demise. Despite repeated appeals to release political prisoners lodged in various jails on humanitarian grounds in view of the devastating Covid catastrophe, authorities are playing with their lives". The amalgam asserted that the people of J&K have lost a "sincere, able and an honest leader" in his death.

SHORT TAKES

COPS NAB 31 NDRANGHETA SUSPECTS

Rome: A joint Italian-German police investigation into the ndrangheta organised crime group led to the arrests of 31 people accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and "systematic" tax evasion on the part of Italian pizzerias and restaurants in Germany, authorities said on Wednesday.

Europol and Eurojust, which coordinate law enforcement activities in Europe, said more than 800 police officers and tax officials were involved in the operation in Italy and Germany.

Italian officials hailed what they described as a new model of cooperation and said experts from both countries formed a joint team to investigate the case, a job complicated by the encrypted phone systems the suspects used to communicate.

4 PAK SOLDIERS KILLED IN ULTRAS ATTACK

Karachi: Four Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack from Afghanistan while they were working on fencing the Pakistan-Afghan border in the restive Balochistan province on Wednesday, the Army said.

A team of paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) was targeted in Manzakai Sector located in the Zhob district of Balochistan province in the south-west of the country, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the military said in a statement. Four soldiers were killed and six others were injured in the incident, it said.

"Terrorists from across Afghanistan ambushed FC troops moving for fencing... FC troops responded promptly," the statement said. It did not confirm whether there were casualties on the Afghan side.

BLAST IN HEALTH VAN KILLS 1, HURTS 3 IN KABUL

Kabul: A bomb targeted a minibus carrying medical workers in the Afghan capital Wednesday morning, killing one person, a Kabul police official said.

Three medics were wounded and taken to hospitals by police, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief.

The bus was taking the doctors, nurses and other health workers from Kabul toward northern Panjsher province when it was attacked in the northern district of Kalakan in Kabul province, he added. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, and Faramarz said police were investigating.

The attack comes a few days after the remaining 2,500 to 3,500 American troops officially began leaving the country. They will be out by September 11 at the latest. The pullout comes amid a resurgent Taliban, who control or hold sway over half of Afghanistan. The top US military officer said Sunday that Afghan government forces face an uncertain future and possibly some "bad possible outcomes" against Taliban insurgents as the withdrawal accelerates in the coming weeks.

TORNADOES WREAK HAVOC IN MISSISSIPPI

Birmingham: Much of the South faced more severe weather Tuesday that has killed at least three people, spawned tornadoes Sunday night and Monday and damaged homes and uprooted trees from Mississippi to West Virginia.

Parts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, as well as corners of Arkansas and Georgia were at enhanced risk for the worst weather, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. That zone is home to more than 11 million people and includes the cities of Nashville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jackson, Mississippi, forecasters said. "We'll see all three threats as far as hail, wind and tornadoes on Tuesday," said Mike Edmonston, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Mississippi.

With warnings about possible tornadoes stretching from Louisiana eastward, dozens of school systems in Mississippi and Alabama dismissed students early so buses and cars would not have to be on the road during potentially violent weather.

Biden aims to vaccinate 70% of American adults by July 4

US is administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day

Washington, May 5: US President Joe Biden has set a new vaccination goal to deliver at least one shot to 70 per cent of adult Americans by July 4 as he tackles the vexing problem of winning over the "doubters" and those unmotivated to get inoculated. Demand for vaccines has dropped off markedly nationwide, with some states leaving more than half their available doses unordered. Aiming to make it easier to get shots, Biden called for states to make vaccines available on a walk-in basis and he will direct many pharmacies to do likewise.

His administration for the first time also is moving to shift doses from states with weaker demand to areas with stronger interest in the shots. "You do need to get vaccinated," Biden said from the White House on Tuesday. "Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk? It could save your life or the lives of somebody you love," he said.

Biden's goal equates to delivering at least the first shot to 181 million adults and fully vaccinating 160 million. It's a tacit acknowledgment of the declining interest in shots. Already more than 56 per cent of American adults have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and nearly 105 million are fully vaccinated.

The US is currently administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day — half the rate of three weeks ago, but almost twice as fast as needed to meet Biden's target. "I'd like to get it 100%, but I think realistically we can get to that place between now and July Fourth," Biden said of his new goal. He said the administration would focus on three areas as it tries to ramp up the pace of vaccinations: Adults who need more convincing to take the vaccine.

Those who have struggled or are in no hurry to obtain a shot. — Adolescents aged 12-15, once federal authorities approve vaccination for that age group. Acknowledging that "the pace of vaccination is slowing," Biden predicted the inoculation effort is "going to be harder" when it comes to convincing "doubters" of the need to get their shots.

He said the most effective argument to those people would be to protect those they love. "This is your choice: It's life and death, he said. Biden's push comes as his administration has shifted away from setting a target for the US to reach "herd immunity," instead focusing on delivering as many shots into arms as possible. Officials said Biden's vaccination target would result in a significant reduction in Covid-19 cases heading into the summer.

To that end, the Biden administration is shifting the government's focus toward expanding smaller and mobile vaccination clinics to deliver doses to harder-to-reach communities. — *AP*

Workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) suits extend the crematorium area next to funeral pyres of people who died due to Covid-19 coronavirus disease, at a cremation ground in Kathmandu on Wednesday. — *AFP*

G7 WORKS ON GLOBAL COVID VACCINE PLAN

London, May5: The Group of Seven wealthy democracies on Wednesday worked on plans to scale up global Covid-19 vaccinations, as calls mounted for a drastic increase in funding to help developing nations virtually shut out of early efforts.

Underscoring the challenges faced, the foreign minister of India— where Covid cases have soared in recent weeks — said he decided to participate in the London meeting virtually after potential exposure to the virus.

India was one of several nations invited by Britain for the first in-person G7 meeting since the pandemic began last year, in an effort to rally democracies in the face of a rising China and assertive Russia. The G7 opened its final day with a session focused on open societies before taking up Covid-19. — *AFP*

WTO mulls IP waivers for vax

Geneva, May 5: Ambassadors from World Trade Organisation countries on Wednesday resumed discussions on trade rules protecting the technological know-how behind Covid-19 vaccines amid growing pressure on rich nations to relax them — as a way to help poorer countries fight the pandemic.

The WTO's General Council was taking up a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections that South Africa and India first proposed in October.

The idea has gained support in the developing world and among some progressive lawmakers in the West. Authors of the proposal, which has faced resistance from many countries with influential pharmaceutical and biotech industries, have been revising it in hopes of making it more palatable. No consensus — which is required under WTO rules — was expected to emerge from the ambassadors' two-day meeting on Wednesday and Thursday. — *AP*

NEPAL EXTENDS LOCKDOWN IN KATHMANDU

Kathmandu, May 5: Authorities in the Nepalese capital on Wednesday extended the lockdown in Kathmandu and surrounding districts till May 12 due to the spike in Covid-19 cases. Nepal on Tuesday recorded yet another highest single-day rise of 7,660 new cases of the Covid.

The health ministry also confirmed 55 new deaths in the past 24 hours, which is so far the highest number of fatalities recorded in a single day. The local authorities have extended the ongoing prohibitory orders in the Kathmandu Valley till May 12. — *PTI*

India's US envoy meets Fauci, discusses on Covid-19 crisis

Washington, May 5: India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu held a virtual meeting with America's top public health expert Dr Anthony Fauci and discussed the current Covid-19 crisis in India, the efficacy of vaccines against the new strains and variants of the virus.

The meeting was part of the Ambassador's intensified and focused outreach to key stakeholders of healthcare and pandemic response in the US. This was for the first time that a top Indian government official had a meeting with Fauci, who is the top advisor to President Joe Biden on the pandemic.

During the meeting, Fauci expressed his solidarity and support with India in this hour of crisis. The meeting came a day after he termed the situation in India "very desperate" and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help with not only materials but also personnel.

During his talks with Ambassador Sandhu, the virus strains and variants in India, and the efficacy of vaccines against these came up for discussion. Fauci, who is also the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Health, offered American assistance, including in research and development. Discussed virus variants, vaccines, response mechanisms. —*PTI*

FB oversight board upholds ban on Trump

Washington, May 5: Facebook's independent oversight board on Wednesday upheld a ban on former US president Donald Trump while ordering further review of the case, in a decision with a potentially far-reaching impact on the regulation of online speech.

The board, whose decisions are binding on the leading social network, said Trump "created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible" with his comments regarding the January 6 rampage by his supporters at the US Capitol.

"Given the seriousness of the violations and the ongoing risk of violence, Facebook was justified in suspending Mr. Trump's accounts on January 6 and extending that suspension on January 7," the board said after its review.

But the panel also ruled that "it was not appropriate for Facebook to impose the indeterminate and standardless penalty of indefinite suspension." "Within six months of this decision, Facebook must reexamine the arbitrary penalty it imposed on January 7 and decide the appropriate penalty," said the board in its written opinion.

"It is not permissible for Facebook to keep a user off the platform for an undefined period, with no criteria for when or whether the account will be restored," it added.

The panel said Facebook "can either impose a time-limited suspension or account deletion."The case had been intensely followed for its repercussions for social networks seeking to curb misinformation and abusive content while remaining open to political discourse.

Trump was suspended from Facebook and Instagram after posting a video during the deadly storming of the Capitol by fired-up supporters challenging his election loss, in which he told them: "We love you, you're very special." Shortly after the board ruling,

Trump issued a statement reiterating his false claims that voter fraud caused his defeat in November, and urging his followers to "never give up." — *AFP*

Netanyahu again fails to form new Israeli govt

Jerusalem, May 5: Beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is Israel's longest-serving premier, has failed to meet a midnight deadline of forming a government, giving his rivals a chance to end his uninterrupted stint at the helm of politics since 2009.

Netanyahu, 71, who is facing trial on a series of graft charges, was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to put together a government on April 6 following inconclusive polls, the fourth in the last two years.

The mandate given by Rivlin to Netanyahu to form a government expired on Tuesday at midnight with no breakthrough in coalition talks, prolonging the country's political stalemate.

His Likud party emerged as the single largest party in the 120-member Parliament but did not have the necessary 61-member support to form a government.

Likud had won 30 seats in the general election in March. While tasking Netanyahu with the responsibility of forming the government, Rivlin said that he was doing so reluctantly and also mentioned his "moral dilemma" given the court proceedings and lack of enough support for the Likud leader.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing. President Rivlin's spokesman in a statement said: "Shortly before midnight, Netanyahu informed the President's Residence that he was unable to form a government and so returned the mandate to the president."

Rivlin on Wednesday contacted the parties represented in the Knesset (Israel's unicameral parliament) on the continuation of the process of forming a government. The President met with Yesh Atid party's chairman, Yair Lapid, and Yamina party's chairman, Naftali Bennett.

Both Lapid and Bennett reiterated their desire to be given the mandate to form the next government, press releases from the Presidency said. — *PTI*

India, UK deal to begin in autumn

London, May 5: India and the UK will begin negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from autumn this year after the Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) was formally signed between the trade ministers on both sides on Wednesday. Following a virtual meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss confirmed that the ETP agreed between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson at a virtual summit on Tuesday has been officially signed off.

The trade and investment agreement worth around 1 billion pounds has been pegged as aiming for a "quantum leap" in the UK-India relationship, with India elevating the status of its relationship with the UK to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership". "Today I signed the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership with my friend Piyush Goyal," Truss said on Twitter soon after her virtual meeting with the Indian Cabinet minister.

"Together, we have committed to: negotiating a comprehensive free trade deal, starting this autumn; more than doubling trade by 2030; and reducing barriers to trade in key industries," she said.

The sign off follows talks between Modi and Johnson, which culminated in the two leaders agreeing on a '2030 Roadmap' as a framework for strengthening ties across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is in London for the G7 Summit, said he joined those discussions and declared there was a "new energy and thinking" for UK-India relations visible at the virtual summit.

""We are at an inflection point in our contemporary relations. We have two Prime Ministers very determined to take the relationship to a high level," the minister said, during a virtual Global Dialogue Series. — *PTI*

Despite warning, GOP moves on voting bills

Austin, May 5: Republican lawmakers around the country are pressing ahead with efforts to tighten voting laws, despite growing warnings from business leaders that the measures could harm democracy and the economic climate.

More than 50 companies and business organizations, including some in Texas, released an open letter on Tuesday expressing opposition to "any changes" that would make it harder to vote in that state. The letter — signed by American Airlines, Microsoft Corp., HP Inc., Patagonia, Levi Strauss & Co. and others — comes amid votes on legislation that critics say would place disproportionate burdens on minority and disabled voters.

"We believe the right to vote is sacred. When more people participate in our democratic process, we will all prosper," the letter said. "The growth of free enterprise is directly related to the freedom of its citizens." The statement stopped short of stating opposition to the specific legislation proposed in Texas.

Nonetheless, it amounts to a cautious rebuke of lawmakers using former President Donald Trump's false claims about a stolen election to make it harder to vote. Texas is emerging as the next major battleground in the fight over voting laws.

The Texas House could vote, as soon as this week, on a bill that effectively targets Harris County, home of Houston and a Democratic hub, after officials there dramatically expanded voting options in 2020 amid pandemic.

The Texas Senate has advanced its own package, with the two chambers likely headed to a compromise committee that would fashion a final version. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has expressed broad support for the effort. — *AP*

EXPENSIVE | WINE

A bottle of Bordeaux spent 14 months in space station

Wine aged aboard ISS to sell for $1mn

New York YORK, May 5: If a bottle of Petrus 2000 that Christie's is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie's hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch $1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink matures in space.

The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon, Space Cargo Unlimited Nicolas Gaume said in a press release.

It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2021 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk's SpaceX.

Tests carried out in March by a wine science institute in Bordeaux found that the bottles "positively endured all the constraints of preparation, travel, and storage on the ISS," Christie's said in its press release.

At the end of a blind tasting, the researchers noted "remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components," between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth.

"The wines sampled were commended for their complexity and considered to be great wines," Christie's added.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine.

The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby's in New York for $558,000 in 2018.

The private sale means the buyer and price will remain confidential unless the buyer chooses to identify themselves publicly.

Proceeds will go towards funding future space missions focused on agricultural research.

Petrus, from the Pomerol region near Bordeaux, is considered one of the world's finest wines. A classic bottle of Petrus 2000, considered a great vintage, currently sells for around 4,500 euros ($5,400). — *AFP*

SHORT TAKES

TALIBAN TO ROLL BACK AFGHAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Washington, May 5: A return to Taliban rule in Afghanistan would risk undoing the gains made in women's rights since the group's ousting nearly two decades ago, US intelligence warned in a declassified report.

According to the two-page National Intelligence Council document, the insurgents' views have not changed since their time in power between 1996 and the US military's 2001 intervention.

At that time, the Taliban imposed their fundamentalist view of religion by prohibiting women from studying or working. The withdrawal of US and international forces, which is set to be completed by September, has raised fears the Taliban will return full force.

"The Taliban remains broadly consistent in its restrictive approach to women's rights and would roll back much of the past two decades' progress if the group regained national power," the report said.

PM Oli govt loses majority support

Maoist party withdraws support citing breach

Kathmandu, May 5: Nepal's embattled Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli-led government on Wednesday lost majority support in the House of Representatives after the CPN (Maoist Center) led by Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" officially withdrew support to it.

The party submitted a letter to this effect to the Parliament Secretariat, informing about its decision to withdraw support to the government, according to a senior leader of the party, Ganesh Shah. Chief Whip of the Maoist Center Dev Gurung handed over the letter to officials at the Parliament Secretariat, he said.

After handing over the letter Gurung told the media persons that the party decided to withdraw support to the Oli government as the government had breached the Constitution and the government's recent activities have posed threat to democratic procedures and national sovereignty.

After the withdrawal of support, the Oli government has lost its majority in the House of Representatives. The decision of the Maoist party to withdraw support to the government comes two days after Oli announced that he will seek a vote of confidence in Parliament on May 10.

The Maoist Center has a total of 49 lawmakers in the lower house. Since the ruling CPN-UML has a total of 121 lawmakers, Prime Minister Oli is short of 15 lawmakers to save his government in the 275-member House.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Oli on Wednesday visited the residence of main Opposition leader Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba at Budhanilkantha, 10 km North of Kathmandu, to seek his support to save the government. The two leaders discussed the latest political developments in the country, according to sources close to Nepali Congress. Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 last year after President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10 at the recommendation of Prime Minister Oli, amidst a tussle for power within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP).

Oli's move to dissolve the House sparked protests from a large section of the NCP led by his rival 'Prachanda', also a co-chair of the ruling party. In February, the apex court reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives, in a setback to embattled Prime Minister Oli who was preparing for snap polls.

A five-member Constitutional bench led by Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher JBR annulled the government's decision to dissolve the lower house of Parliament and ordered the government to summon the House session within the next 13 days. Oli repeatedly defended his move to dissolve the House of Representatives. — *PTI*

Selfie time

Scotland's First Minister and leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), Nicola Sturgeon (left) takes a selfie photograph with locals as she campaigns in Alford, Scotland on Wednesday, ahead of the Scottish Parliament election which is to be held today. — *AFP*

US, S.Korea, Japan pledge accord on North Korea

London, May 5: The United States, South Korea and Japan pledged on Wednesday to cooperate on North Korea as their top diplomats met in London, coming together despite renewed tensions between the Asian nations. Joined by aides, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken sat in the centre of a U-shaped table with his Japanese and South Korean counterparts Toshimitsu Motegi and Chung Eui-yong on each side in a hotel conference room on the sidelines of a Group of Seven meeting.

The State Department said the meeting was meant to "promote trilateral solidarity" and discuss a policy review by President Joe Biden that looks to resume diplomacy with North Korea.

Blinken and the two ministers "reaffirmed their commitment to concerted trilateral cooperation toward denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, as well as other issues of mutual interest," State Department spokesman Ned Price said.

The South Korean foreign ministry similarly said the three "reaffirmed the importance of the Korea-US-Japan trilateral cooperation" and committed to work "to promote peace, security and prosperity in the region".

THE STATE Department said the meeting was meant to "promote trilateral solidarity" and discuss a policy review by President Joe Biden that looks to resume diplomacy with North Korea.

The two Asian nations are both treaty-bound allies of the United States but have long had friction due to the legacy of Japan's harsh colonial rule over the Korean peninsula. South Korea last month voiced "deep disappointment" after Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga sent an offering to the Yasukuni shrine, which venerates war dead including convicted war criminals, although leaders in Tokyo have in recent years refrained from the more explosive step of visiting.

Relations deteriorated sharply in 2019, with South Korea pulling back at the last minute from terminating an agreement on sharing intelligence with Japan on North Korea. — *AFP*

NZ DECLINES TO CALL UYGHUR TREATMENT GENOCIDE

Wellington, May 5: New Zealand shied away from labelling China's treatment of its Uyghur Muslim minority genocide on Wednesday, once again leaving Wellington out of step with its more forthright Western allies.

Parliament unanimously passed a motion expressing "grave concern" at human rights abuses in Xinjiang province, but only after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's ruling Labour Party insisted any reference to genocide was scrubbed out.

Lawmaker Brooke van Velden said that, while allies such as the United States, Britain and Canada had called what was taking place genocide, it was "intolerable" that New Zealand refused to use the term to avoid upsetting its largest trading partner.

"The world is looking to us now to see what standard we are going to set — can the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) play us off as the weakest link in the Western Alliance," she said. "We may face the threat of loss if we speak our mind, but we face a much greater danger if we don't." — *AFP*

US former cop convicted of Floyd murder seeks new trial

Washington, May 5: Derek Chauvin, the white ex-policeman convicted of murdering the African-American man George Floyd, asked Tuesday for a new trial on claims of jury and prosecution misconduct.

The 45-year-old — who knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes -- faces up to 40 years in prison after being found guilty last month in a case that prompted a national reckoning on racial injustice and police brutality.

Chauvin's attorney Eric Nelson argued that his client did not get a fair trial due to publicity around the case, court and prosecution errors, as well as "race-based pressure" on the jury.

"The publicity here was so pervasive and so prejudicial before and during this trial that it amounted to a structural defect in the proceedings," Nelson wrote.

The filing came as the impartiality of a juror in the case has been brought into question after a photo surfaced of him at an anti-racism rally.

Legal experts had said Chauvin's defense attorney could potentially use the photo of juror Brandon Mitchell as grounds to appeal the verdict, though the matter was not mentioned in Tuesday's pleading.

In the photo, Mitchell, a 31-year-old person of colour, is wearing a T-shirt with a picture of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr on it, as well as the words "Get Your Knee Off Our Necks" and the letters "BLM" for Black Lives Matter.

Mitchell is one of only two jurors who have publicly identified themselves since the high-profile trial. In a questionnaire, potential jurors were asked if they had taken part in any of the protests against police brutality that followed Floyd's May 25, 2020 death.

Mitchell said he had not and could serve impartially. He told the Minneapolis Star Tribune that the photo was taken at a march he attended in Washington in August 2020 to mark the anniversary of Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. — *AFP*

Mexico govt vows full probe into metro crash

Mexico City, May 5: Mexico's president on Tuesday promised an in-depth investigation to find those responsible for the deaths of at least 25 people in the collapse of an elevated metro train line with a history of problems. The vow came as emergency services in the capital worked to retrieve the bodies of victims still trapped in the wreckage of the carriages that plunged to the ground Monday night in a cloud of dust that was soon filled by a rush of rescuers.

Dozens were injured in the accident, one of the worst ever to strike the Mexico City metro, raising questions about construction and maintenance standards on a network used by millions every day.

"A thorough investigation will be carried out... to know the truth," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said at his daily news conference, adding that independent international experts would assist prosecutors in the probe.

"We cannot get into speculation, much less blame the possible perpetrators without having proof," added the president, who has declared three days of national mourning.

The metro line, the city's newest, was built while Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard, a close ally of Lopez Obrador, was mayor of the capital from 2006-2012.

"For my part, I put myself at the full disposal of the authorities," said Ebrard, considered among the possible ruling party candidates for the 2024 presidential election.

In 2014, Ebrard's successor as mayor, Miguel Angel Mancera, suspended services at a dozen stations on the same metro line because repairs were needed due to excessive wear.

A study later concluded that there were problems with the design, operation and maintenance of the track. — *AFP*

GERMANY BANS MUSLIM GROUP OVER TERROR DONATIONS

Berlin, May 5: The German government on Wednesday banned a Muslim organisation that it alleged had supported "terrorism globally with donations."

Police raided buildings in 10 German states associated with Ansaar International, German news agency dpa reported.

The news agency said the money the organisation collected went to welfare projects but also to groups such as the Syrian al-Qaida affiliate known as the Nusra Front, the Palestinian group Hamas and al-Shabab in Somalia.

"The organisation Ansaar International and its suborganisations were banned. The network finances terrorism globally with its donations," a spokesperson for the German Interior Ministry tweeted.

The ministry quoted Interior Minister Horst Seehofer as saying, "When wanting to fight terrorism, one needs to dry out its money sources."

A man who answered a phone call to the organisation's headquarters in the western German city of Duesseldorf immediately hung up when *The Associated Press* called seeking comment. — *AP*

Egypt, Turkey meet for talks to reset ties

Cairo, May 5: Egyptian and Turkish officials met on Wednesday for talks aiming to reset ties between the two regional powers after years of enmity.

The two-day "political consultations" in Cairo are chaired by Hamdi Loza, Egypt's deputy foreign minister, and his Turkish counterpart Sedat Onal. Egypt's Foreign Ministry, which announced the meetings in a statement late Tuesday, described the talks as "exploratory discussions" that would focus on "the necessary steps that may lead towards the normaliSation of relations between the two countries, bilaterally and in the regional context."

The English-language version of Egypt's state-run Ahram daily quoted an unnamed Egyptian official as saying the talks came after a year of direct and indirect communications to avert a confrontation between the two US allies in Libya, where they back opposing side in the conflict. Egypt and Turkey have been at loggerheads since the Egyptian military's 2013 ouster of President Mohammed Morsi, who hailed from the Muslim Brotherhood group, supported by Turkey. Egypt has designated the group a terrorist organisation.

Recently, top Turkish officials signalled a warming of ties with Egypt, a shift from their previous, sharply critical approach to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi's government.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on March 12 that the two countries have had "intelligence, diplomatic and economic" contacts, adding that he hoped for "strong" ties between the two nations. Turkish Trade Minister Mehmet Mus said earlier this week that Ankara also wants to boost economic and trade ties with Cairo, which remains Turkey's biggest African trade partner, with a $4.86-billion-vlue in trade last year.

A week after Erdogan's remarks, his government asked three Istanbul-based Egyptian TV channels linked to the Brotherhood to soften their critical political coverage of the Egyptian government, according to editors at the stations. The TV channels promptly stopped broadcasting some political programmes.

Egypt welcomed the move, calling it a "good initiative from the Turkish side that establishes a favourable atmosphere to discuss issues of dispute between the two nations." — *AP*

ANCIENT | HERITAGE

70 percent of Iraq's industrial waste is dumped directly into rivers or the sea

Mesopotamian marshes threatened by pollutants

Chibayish, Iraq, May 5: In southern Iraq, putrid water gushes out of waste pipes into marshes reputed to be home to the biblical Garden of Eden, threatening an already fragile world heritage site.

In a country where the state lacks the capacity to guarantee basic services, 70 percent of Iraq's industrial waste is dumped directly into rivers or the sea, according to data compiled by the United Nations and academics.

Jassim al-Assadi, head of non-governmental organisation Nature Iraq, said the black wastewater poured into the UNESCO-listed marshes carries "pollution and heavy metals that directly threaten the flora and fauna" present there.

Once an engineer at Iraq's water resources ministry, Assadi left that job to dedicate himself to saving the extraordinary natural habitat, which had previously faced destruction at the hands of dictator Saddam Hussein and is further jeopardised by climate change.

The pollutants also "indirectly impact humans via the buffalo", fixtures of the marshes and known for the "guemar" cheese produced from their milk, he said.

According to Nader Mohssen, a fisherman and farmer born in the marshland's Chibayish district, "the buffalo are forced to go several kilometres (miles) into the marshes to be able to drink something other than polluted water".

And "around the sewerage pipes, most of the fish die", he added, gesturing to dozens of rotting fish floating on the marsh water surface.

Pollution is only the latest threat to one of the world's largest inland delta systems.

The rich ecosystem, nestled between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, barely survived the wrath of Saddam, who ordered the marsh be drained in 1991 as punishment for communities protecting insurgents. The

Dozens of rotting fish float on the surface of Iraqi marshes in the southern district of Chibayish in Dhi Qar province. — *AFP*

LIVE RICH
FINANCIAL Chronicle
HYDERABAD | THURSDAY | 6 MAY 2021

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,677.55	0.88
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.84
S&P 500*	4,186.67	0.53
Dollar (₹)	73.91	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.70	-0.19
Euro (₹)	88.72	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,382▼317	0.68
Brent crude ($/bbl)*	69.32	0.64
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.978	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.600	0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

S&P pegs GDP growth at 9.8% for this fiscal

S&P Global Ratings slashed India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year to 9.8 per cent saying the second Covid wave may derail the budding recovery in the economy and credit conditions. The US-based rating agency in March had a 11 per cent GDP growth forecast for India for the April 2021-March 2022 fiscal on account of a fast economic reopening and fiscal stimulus.

Services sector PMI at 54 in April amid Covid crisis

India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion and a score below 50 is contraction.

Finance majors rush with aid; Citi to donate ₹200 cr

Multinational financiers pitched in with relief efforts, led by a Rs 200-crore commitment by Citibank. The efforts of the financial sector MNCs—a majority of whom depend on Indian personnel to handle back-office work—were focused on providing immediate medical relief. Other financiers which offered support included Citi's US peer Wells Fargo ($3 million), Swiss bank UBS ($1.5 mn) and Apollo Global Management ($1 mn).

Infosys doubles Covid relief pledge to ₹200 cr

IT services major Infosys has doubled its commitment towards Covid relief efforts to Rs 200 crore that will be used to add hospital beds and augment the supply of oxygen concentrators and ventilators among other activities. In an email to employees, Infosys CEO hief Salil Parekh said, "We had committed Rs 100 crore last year...and have expanded our original commitment to Rs 200 crore for Covid relief efforts."

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■ Personal loans, business borrowings also eligible

RBI unveils loan recast plan for individuals, biz

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Responding to the second Covid wave, the RBI announced a slew of measures on Wednesday, providing relief and liquidity to a large section of customers. It provided loan recast for certain individuals and small businesses. A liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore has been opened for healthcare companies and patients, while small businesses can avail of Rs 10,000 crore credit from small finance banks.

As far as loan recast is concerned, individual borrowers, small businesses and MSMEs having aggregate exposure of up to Rs 25 crore and who have not availed of restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks are eligible for loan restructuring under Resolution Framework 2.0.

This is the second restructuring scheme announced by the central bank in less than one year, with the first unveiled in August last year.

Loan recast under Resolution Framework 2.0 can be invoked up to September 30, 2021 and has to be implemented within 90 days after invocation. The beneficiaries had to be classified as standard accounts as on March 31, 2021.

In the case of individual borrowers and small businesses which have availed of loan restructuring under last year's loan recast, their plans can be modified by increasing the period of moratorium or extending the residual tenure up to two years. Small businesses and MSMEs which have restructured their loans earlier also can get their sanctioned working capital limits reviewed as a one-time measure based on a reassessment of the working capital cycle, margins and the like.

Later in a notification, the RBI said individuals who have availed of personal loans, loans for business purposes and small businesses, including those engaged in retail and wholesale trade, other than those classified as MSME, are eligible for the loan recast.

However, compared to the blanket loan moratorium given last year, the proportion of restructured loans will be lower under Resolution Framework 2.0.

In order to provide further support to MSMEs and other unorganised sector entities, a special three-year long-term repo operations (SLTRO) of Rs 10,000 crore at repo rate will be conducted for the small finance banks (SFBs). Under this, fresh lending of up to Rs 10 lakh will be provided per borrower. This facility will be available till October 31, 2021. SFBs are also permitted to lend to smaller microfinance institutions under priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022.

"As in the recent past, the RBI will continue to monitor the emerging situation and deploy all resources and instruments..." said governor Shaktikanta Das.

Taking the country's healthcare infrastructure into consideration, RBI also announced an on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate for healthcare infrastructure and services companies till March 31, 2022.

The RBI has also decided on a second purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of Rs 35,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0 on May 20. It had bought government bonds worth Rs 25,000 crore on April 15.

GOVERNOR'S OBSERVATIONS

Shaktikanta Das

- The situation has reversed from being on the foothills of strong economic recovery to facing a fresh crisis.
- RBI will continue to monitor the situation, deploy tools at command to support businesses impacted by Covid.
- Covid-19 situation has altered drastically since March, India has been fighting a sharp rise in Covid cases in last few weeks.
- RBI is committed to using unconventional tools to tackle any Covid-triggered stress.
- To work with the government to ease stress faced by citizens. Will take big, small steps to tackle stress through the year.
- RBI stands ready to keep financial conditions congenial, markets continue to work efficiently.
- Global growth outlook highly uncertain, clouded with downside risk.
- Data shows persistence of input price pressures, normal monsoon forecast should help contain food price inflation.
- Small borrowers, MSMEs, individuals most vulnerable.
- India mounted a valiant defence, domestically and globally, to ramp up vaccines and medical support, and save lives.
- Immediate objective is to save lives, restore livelihoods.

KYC UPDATION EXTENDED TILL DECEMBER END

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the Covid situation, the RBI on Wednesday provided some relief to the customers by asking banks and other financial institutions not to impose punitive action against those who fail to update KYC. This relief is being provided till December end.

"Keeping in view the Covid related restrictions in various parts of the country, regulated entities are being advised that for the customer accounts where periodic KYC updating is due/pending, no punitive restriction on operations of customer accounts shall be imposed till December 31, 2021" the RBI said.

Customers can update their Know Your Customer details during this period. This facility is, however, not applicable if the customer is bound to update it due to any other reason or under instructions of any regulator/enforcement agency/court of law.

The central bank also extended the scope of video-based customer identification process, or V-CIP, for new categories of customers such as proprietorship firms, authorised signatories and beneficial owners of legal entities and for periodic updation of KYC.

Limited KYC accounts opened on the basis of Aadhaar e-KYC authentication in non-face-to-face mode can be converted to fully KYC-compliant accounts.

Cabinet nod for privatisation of IDBI Bank

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), on Wednesday, gave its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank Ltd. However, the CCEA led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi further said in a statement that the extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the Centre and LIC would be decided at the time of structuring the transaction in consultation with the Reserved Bank of India.

The Government of India and the Life Insurance Corporation of India together own more than 94 per cent equity of IDBI Bank, with GoI holding 45.48per cent and LIC 49.24 per cent stake. The LIC is currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with management control and the government of India is the co-promoter.

The LIC board has passed a resolution to the effect that LIC may reduce its shareholding in IDBI Bank Ltd by divesting its stake alongside strategic stake sale envisaged by the government with an intent to relinquish management control and by taking into consideration price, market outlook, statutory stipulation and interest of policy holders.

The decision of LIC's board is consistent with the regulatory mandate to it to reduce its stake in the bank. "It is expected that the strategic buyer will infuse funds, new technology and best management practices for optimal development of business potential and growth of IDBI Bank Ltd and shall generate more business without any dependence on LIC and government assistance/funds," the government statement said, adding that resources through strategic disinvestment of government equity from the transaction would be used to finance developmental programmes of the government benefiting the citizens.

The RBI, in March this year removed IDBI Bank from the Prompt Corrective Action framework after a gap of nearly four years on improved financial performance.

₹50K-cr on-tap loans for healthcare firms

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the massive healthcare infrastructure gap, which got exposed by the pandemic, the Reserve Bank will enable banks to lend Rs 50,000 crore to healthcare infrastructure and services companies.

This on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate will be available till March 31, 2022 for a tenure of up to three years. Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment.

In order to incentivise banks for quick delivery, the credit under the scheme has been classified as priority sector lending. These loans will continue to be classified under priority sector till repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier. Banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI.

Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment

Banks are expected to create a Covid loan book under the scheme. Such banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the Covid loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate or 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate.

"The RBI is now focusing on increasingly channelising its liquidity operations, especially at the grassroots level," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said.

"A new term liquidity facility for the healthcare sector at the repo rate will aid in ramping up Covid-related healthcare infrastructure and production and supply of essential healthcare products such as vaccines, oxygen and ventilators. It will also benefit patients burdened by unaffordable medical bills," said Aashit Shah, Partner, J. Sagar Associates.

"The RBI has incentivised banks to offer these facilities by including them within the PSL targets of banks, and also permitting them to deposit the surplus liquidity up to an amount equal to their "Covid Loan" book with RBI at a rate which is 40 basis points higher than the normal reverse repo rate. This will ensure that banks accelerate the provision of liquidity for emergency healthcare services so that India is better equipped financially to deal with the pandemic," he added.

Financials, pharma stocks gain

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The specific liquidity enhancing measures unveiled by the Reserve Bank for microfinance institutions and healthcare sector companies boosted market sentiments and led to sharp gains in financials and pharmaceutical stocks on Wednesday.

The Sensex gained 424 points, or 0.88 per cent, to close at 48,677 while the Nifty-50 gained 121.35 points, or 0.84 per cent, closing at 14,617.85.

"Pharma gained the most as relief measures announced by the RBI included provision of term liquidity facility of Rs 50,000 crore on priority basis for the healthcare sector. Apart from this, the announcements included a special Rs 10,000 crore long-term repo operation to support small finance banks on-lend to MSEs, and a resolution framework 2.0 for individuals, small businesses and MSMEs, which lifted the banking stocks," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The BSE Bankex gained 1.67 per cent and the Nifty Bank Index gained 1.59 per cent. The Nifty Pharma gained 4.12 per cent. The Nifty PSU Bank gained 1.47 per cent as yield of government securities softened after the RBI announced purchase of government securities worth Rs 35,000 crore on May 20 .

IDBI Bank gained 4.40 per cent after the Union Cabinet approved divestment of government and LIC's stake in the bank.

The pharma gainers on the NSE included Lupin (13.71 per cent), Aurobindo Pharma (7.08 per cent), Sun Pharma (5.87per cent), Cadila Healthcare (5.78 per cent), Torrent Pharma (4.66 per cent),Alkem Laboratories (3.98 per cent), Biocon (2.41 per cent) and Dr Reddy's Laboratories (2.01 per cent).

Pfizer gained 3.99 per cent as reports said Indian drug regulator had approved import of Covid vaccine by the company.

Foreign portfolio investors sold equities worth Rs 1,110.50 crore for the fourth session in a row.

CSR FUNDS CAN BE USED FOR GENERATING MEDICAL OXYGEN

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

In order to make companies spend towards mitigating the Covid situation, the government has notified that spending Corporate Social Responsibility funds towards generation of medical oxygen will be considered eligible as a CSR activity.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has clarified that spending of CSR funds for 'creating health infrastructure for Covid care', 'establishment of medical oxygen generation and storage plants', 'manufacturing and supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators, cylinders and other medical equipment for countering Covid-19' or similar such activities are eligible CSR activities under Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 relating to promotion of health care, including preventive health care, and, disaster management, respectively.

The Companies Act also considers contribution to specified R&D projects as CSR.

EMIRATES FITS A380S WITH UPSCALE COACH CLASS

LAYAN ODEH
MAY 5

Emirates will install premium-economy cabins in three of its existing Airbus SE A380 superjumbos as it prepares for an anticipated shift in demand once the airline industry emerges from the coronavirus crisis.

The world's biggest long-haul airline will retrofit the seats-which offer more room than coach at a cheaper price than business class-into planes supplied by Amedeo Air Four Plus Ltd, the leasing firm said in a statement on Wednesday.

The change should help adapt the Emirates fleet to a post-Covid travel market in which well-heeled leisure passengers may be prepared to pay more for extra personal space amid continuing health concerns, even as demand for business trips remains subdued or switches to less costly options.

Though Emirates, the largest A380 operator, had begun requesting premium economy for its last few new double-deckers, President Tim Clark only revealed last month that it would convert older ones amid strong demand.

Sill, the Dubai-based carrier has been a late convert to the class, which was first introduced at Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd and Taiwan's EVA Air in the early 1990s. Superjumbo operators, including British Airways, Singapore Airlines Ltd and Qantas Airways Ltd, have long offered the product on their planes, while Deutsche Lufthansa AG introduced it in 2015.

—Bloomberg

CIPLA TO SELL ROCHE'S ANTIBODY COCKTAIL

New Delhi, May 5: Drug firm Roche India on Wednesday said it has received Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) from the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation for Roche's investigational antibody cocktail used in the treatment of Covid-19.

The approval of antibody cocktail of Casirivimab and Imdevimab in India was based on the data filed for the EUA in the US, and the scientific opinion of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) in the European Union, Roche India said in a statement.

"This Emergency Use Authorisation will now enable Roche to import the globally manufactured product batches to India and will be marketed as well as distributed in India through a strategic partnership with Cipla Limited," it added.

The antibody cocktail is to be administered for the treatment of mild to moderate coronavirus disease in adults and pediatric patients (12 years of age or older, weighing at least 40 kg) who are confirmed to be infected with Sars-Cov2 and who are at high risk of developing severe Covid-19 disease, the statement said. It could significantly help these high-risk patients before their condition worsens, it added. *— PTI*

Amazon work rules govern tweets, body odour of contract drivers

JOSH EIDELSON & MATT DAY
MAY 5

The thousands of people driving those ubiquitous Amazon-branded blue vans aren't employed by the Seattle leviathan. They work for small, independent businesses with contracts to transport packages for Amazon. But that hasn't stopped the company from dictating the state of their fingernails-and a whole lot more.

"Personal grooming must be maintained at an acceptable level, including but not limited to prevention of unpleasant breath or body odour, modest perfume/cologne, and clean teeth, face/ears, fingernails and hair," Amazon.com Inc says in a recent version of its policies governing these small delivery companies, or what the company calls Delivery Service Partners. The document, reviewed by Bloomberg, also requires that drivers refrain from "obscene" social-media posts, undergo training programmes approved by Amazon, follow instructions from Amazon's delivery app and be drug tested whenever Amazon representatives ask.

The DSPs are required to adhere to Amazon's policies, which the company can unilaterally change whenever it wants, according to a recent contract also seen by Bloomberg. They also have to provide Amazon physical access to their premises and all sorts of data the retailer wants, such as geo-locations, speed and movement of drivers-information the company says it has the power to use however it wants.

For several years, Amazon has sought to bring order to its farflung delivery operations, which were plagued by accidents, complaints about thrown packages and infamous incidents such as the time a contract driver relieved herself in a customer's driveway. But in exerting more control over these workers, legal experts say, the company has created legal risks for itself. Amazon has chosen not to directly employ DSP drivers, an arrangement that shields it from costs and liabilities the work incurs. Amazon's growing sway over its delivery partners, however, could convince courts and government agencies that the company is actually a "joint employer" or "vicariously liable" party. *—Bloomberg*

SHORT TAKES

MacGill kidnapped and then released

Sydney: Former Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill was allegedly kidnapped from his home in Sydney and then released after an hour-long ordeal last month, New South Wales police said on Wednesday. Quoting Australian police, the country's media reported that four men were detained in connection with the alleged kidnapping following a raid. The incident took place on April 14 when he was bundled into a car and driven to a remote location, after which he was assaulted and threatened with a firearm. "I know it was only an hour that he was held but it would have been a horribly frightful hour to endure," NSW Police superintendent Anthony Holton was quoted as saying by the local media. New South Wales state police said an incident was reported to them on April 20. — *PTI*

Hockey coach Kaushik tests +ve

New Delhi: Former India hockey player and coach MK Kaushik has tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to a nursing home here. The oxygen saturation level of the 66-year-old, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, keeps fluctuating, according to his family. "He is suffering from COVID-19 and is hospitalized in a city nursing home here," his son Ehsan said. "He first developed symptoms on April 17 but RTPCR and RAT tests came negative. Then we did his CT scan on chest on April 24 and pneumonia due to Covid was detected. Since then he has been hospitalized and his condition is between, neither stable nor serious. His oxygen level drops drastically at night which is a major issue," he added. — *PTI*

Mary Kom to begin Games preparation

New Delhi: Six-time world champion MC Mary Kom, along with two other Olympic-bound boxers, will train at the Army Sports Institute in Pune leading up to the Tokyo Games after the national camp for women in Delhi had to be disbanded owing to COVID-19 cases among pugilists and support staff. Mary Kom (51kg) will join another Olympic-bound boxer Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who is already at the facility. Simranjit Kaur (60kg), also bound for Tokyo, will train there too but after completing the COVID-19 post-recovery isolation. The boxers will be placed in three separate groups with two sparring partners each to ensure that the risk of infection is minimal. — *PTI*

Sailors want Oz coach retained

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian sailors Varun Thakkar and KC Ganapathy want to continue training under experienced Australian coach Ian Stuart Warren, who helped the duo qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The duo said it will be "difficult" to push themselves to the next level and perform well at the quadrennial event if the Australian is not around in the next three months. — *PTI*

Brilliant chess at weekend

Hyderabad: The Brilliant Chess Academy is conducting the 180th Brilliant Trophy Open Chess Tournament online on Saturday and Sunday. A total of ₹10,000 prize money will be given to top 20 places in the Open category while special prizes will be given to top two places in the Under 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 age groups for boys and girls. Players should register their names before 1 pm on Saturday with J. Subrahmanyam, on phone number 9247399717.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Europa League (Semifinal, second leg): Roma vs Manchester United from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Arsenal vs Villarreal from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

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MAD SCRAMBLE

Left in lurch Aussie cricketers await flight to Maldives

New Delhi, May 5: The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as the now-suspended IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home assisted by the BCCI on Wednesday.

Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes. The league was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday after multiple COVID-19 cases in its bio-bubble.

England skipper Eoin Morgan, Dawid Malan and Chris Jordan are expected to board a flight to London within the next 48 hours.

(From left) Australia's David Warner, Tom Moody and Trevor Bayliss. — *IPL*

ENGLAND PLAYERS TO QUARANTINE IN LONDON

"I can confirm that 8 of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and wales Cricket Board spokesperson said.

"They will now quarantine in government approved hotels. The remaining three — Jordan, Malan, Morgan — should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added.

The Australians, on the other hand, were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives, where they will stay for a few days before flying home. The detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

Their Prime Minister Scott Morrison has refused to consider an exemption and Cricket Australia has also ruled out seeking one from the government.

"All Australians are assembling in Delhi and from there they will head to Maldives by a charter flight," a franchise said.

CA ACKNOWLEDGES BCCI HELP

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley said the BCCI is helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players, members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

IPL also featured cricketers from South Africa (11), New Zealand (10), West Indies (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

KIWIS TO FLY TO UK AFTER MAY 10

New Zealand's players association head Heath Mills told *ESPNcricinfo* that one group of Kiwis will head to the UK for an upcoming series but that would be after May 10, when the travel ban on flights from India is reconsidered there.

"Due to the UK border restrictions, that group cannot get into England until May 11. It is obviously challenging for them to wait for another few days," Mills said.

The ones headed for UK include Kane Williamson, Trent Boult, and Kyle Jamieson among others.

The ones who have to get back to New Zealand are Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, and Mike Hesson among others.

"The group going home to New Zealand is a real challenge. Might be one or two of the franchises might put them on a charter plane, which will be fantastic," Mills said.

"We'll have that confirmed in the next 24 hours," he added.

HUSSEY TO COMPLETE QUARANTINE IN DELHI

CSK batting coach Mike Hussey. will stay in India to serve out his quarantine while others head back in the next few days.

The 52-day 60-match tournament would have concluded in Ahmedabad on May 30. However, only 24 days of cricket was possible with 29 completed games before the virus halted proceedings.

India is currently recording over 3 lakh cases everyday and more than 3,000 daily deaths.

The unprecedented number of cases has severely burdened the country's health-care facilities causing an acute shortage of oxygen, hospital beds and crucial medicines. The gut-wrenching scenes at hospitals and funeral places have had an impact on the participating players as well. — *PTI*

Delhi hosted four IPL matches this season. — *IPL*

Bookies hired a cleaner at Kotla

New Delhi, May 5: The recently-suspended IPL witnessed potential corruptors plugging an accredited cleaner at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground for doing "pitch-siding" which helps ball-to-ball betting, BCCI Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabbir Hussain Shekhadam Khandwawala has revealed.

The new modus operandi was observed during one of the IPL games at New Delhi where a designated cleaner was using the time lag between actual match action and live TV coverage to help in ball-by ball betting, which is also known as court-siding or pitch siding.

Pitch-siding is the practice of transmitting information from sporting events for the purpose of gambling, or directly placing bets.

"One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police," Hussain, a former DG of Gujarat Police, said.

"We are thankful to Delhi Police that in a separate incident they caught two other persons from the Kotla on ACU tip-off."

The Delhi Police arrested two people with fake accreditation cards during the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and SunRisers Hyderabad on May 2.

> **One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police.**
>
> **— SHABBIR HUSSAIN**
> BCCI ACU chief

So how did cleaning staff come under the ACU radar? "He was standing (inside Feroz Shah Kotla premises) in a secluded area all by himself and so one of our officers approached and asked him 'What are you doing here?'

"He said:"Main apne girlfriend se baat kar raha hoon. (I am talking to my girlfriend).

"My officer then asked him to dial the number he was talking to and then asked him to hand over the phones. Just when he was going through the contents of his phone, the guy fled from the spot," Hussain revealed but did not divulge during which match the incident took place. — *PTI*

IPL could have tweaked a few things: Pat

Melbourne, May 5: Australia pacer Pat Cummins feels the IPL organisers, in hindsight, could have "tweaked a few things" after deciding to host the league in India amidst a raging Covid-19 pandemic.

Cummins, a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, said previous edition held in UAE was incredibly "well-run" and the organisers pushed it "little step further" by organising it at home this year.

The IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday, following multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

Last year, IPL was first postponed and then shifted to the UAE with India being in the grips of the first wave of virus.

"Last year we had the IPL held over in the UAE and that was an incredibly well-run tournament," Cummins told *Foxsports*.

"This year, they tried to push it that little step further and have it over here in multiple cities in India. I'm sure looking back they might have tweaked a few things."

Pat Cummins

Cummins, however, didn't specify what exactly could have been done differently in his comments which were made before the postponement of the league on Tuesday.

There were a lot of criticism for conducting the T20 league at a time when India was facing such a devastating health crisis.

"It's two different worlds. We're lucky, we're safe, we're comfortable and there's people just trying to get basic medical treatment," the Australian vice-captain said.

"First thing was to find out whether us playing the IPL was the right thing and basically everyone said, we would be lost without the IPL for three or four hours every night. I'm just trying to do my bit. India's been such a good country to me and cricketers."

With the T20 event being postponed, the Australian IPL players and support staff might fly off to Maldives in a bid to get home.

The Australian government had last week banned travellers from Covid-ravaged India till May 15 with the country's Prime Minister Scott Morrison making it clear that the IPL players will have to make their own arrangements. — *PTI*

ACA CHIEF SAYS PLAYERS UNDER ENORMOUS STRESS

Melbourne, May 5: Australian Cricketers Association chief executive Todd Greenberg has asked its players to do their "homework" and consider the risks involved before signing overseas T20 deals in the near future as the world grapples with an evolving pandemic. "I'm not sure it will create reticence (in the future) but it will ensure players do their due diligence before they sign agreements," Greenberg was quoted as saying *ESPNcricinfo*.

Greenberg acknowledged the Aussie contingent may be dealing with anxiety and stress at the moment, but promised help once they return to their country. "I was at pains to point it out during the week, the public will see our best Australian cricketers as almost superheroes, they're brilliant athletes, great cricketers, but they're human beings, some of them are fathers and husbands and they're under enormous amounts of stress," Greenberg, said. — *PTI*

Lewis Hamilton

Hamilton, Max to resume title battle

Madrid, May 5: The race for the Formula One title has quickly become a two-man show, and it's not expected to change when the circuit goes to Barcelona this week for the Spanish Grand Prix. At a track all teams know well, Mercedes and Red Bull are expected to continue to dominate with Lewis Hamilton and Max Verstappen separated by eight points after three races.

"The picture is starting to clarify. Red Bull and Mercedes are the two standout teams, and Lewis and Max are the two standout drivers," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said.

"If we get a pretty standard Barcelona, I think you'll get the four races and we can see where our strengths and weaknesses are. But what we can see is it's incredibly tight."

Hamilton, the four-time defending champion with Mercedes, has the edge over Verstappen after winning the season-opener in Bahrain and last week's race in Portugal.

But Red Bull has significantly closed the gap this season, with Verstappen picking up a win in Italy and a pole position in Bahrain. — *AP*

Smart City storm into final

Manchester, May 5: After a decade of disappointment, Pep Guardiola is back in a Champions League final and just one game away from delivering on his task to make Manchester City champions of Europe for the first time.

In the battle between two clubs with seemingly endless resources but no Champions League titles to their name, City kept their cool to beat Paris Saint-Germain 4-1 on aggregate as the French champions paid for losing their heads in both legs of the semi-final tie.

Riyad Mahrez, born and raised in Paris, scored twice to secure a 2-0 win for City in Tuesday's second leg before Angel di Maria's red card for lashing out at Fernandinho rounded off another miserable European exit for the French champions.

A first Champions League final for City, against Real Madrid or Chelsea in Istanbul, is the culmination of the club's rise since an Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008 transformed their fortunes.

In the coming days, they will seal a fifth Premier League title in the past 10 years.

Once dubbed the "noisy neighbours" by legendary former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, City are now not just the dominant force in Manchester but also in English football.

By the end of the month, the mix of Emirati wealth and Guardiola's coaching may have also conquered Europe.

"Of course we invest a lot of money since Sheikh Mansour took over, but it is not just this," said Guardiola. "It is a lot of incredible things behind the scenes.

"Reaching the final of the Champions League, helps us realise in the bigger picture what we have done in the last four years. What we have done these four years is incredible."

'Remarkable' consistency

Since a difficult first year in England, Guardiola has led City to four League Cups, an FA Cup and the brink of a third Premier League title in four seasons.

However, until now, that domestic success always came with the caveat of Champions League collapses.

Guardiola has won the competition twice before as a coach during his time at Barcelona, but not since 2011.

City did not even progress beyond the last eight in his first four seasons in charge.

Manchester City's Algerian midfielder Riyad Mahrez (left) vies with Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar during their UEFA Champions League second leg match in Manchester on Tuesday. — *AFP*

THE RESULT

Manchester City *(Mahrez 11, 63)*	**2**
PSG	**0**

City advance on aggregate (4-1)

It was a similar story for the Catalan in his three years at Bayern Munich between 2013 and 2016 as three Bundesliga titles were overshadowed by three semi-final exits to Spanish opposition.

"People believe because it happened in the past I have to arrive every year in the final of the Champions League," added Guardiola.

"This is a little bit unfair because the consistency these guys have shown in every competition these last four or five years is remarkable."

City exorcised many of their Champions League demons against PSG.

Missed chances, controversial refereeing decisions and sloppy defending frequently combined to cost them in recent seasons.

This time an early penalty awarded against Oleksandr Zinchenko was overturned after a VAR review, Mahrez was deadly with his two chances and City's much-improved defence withstood a first-half barrage.

"The first-half they were so good but we defended so well. We defend all together, helped each other," said Guardiola. — *AFP*

ARSENAL LOOK TO SET UP DATE WITH UNITED

London, May 5: Arsenal's season appeared to be ending with a whimper when they were reduced to 10 men after falling 2-0 behind against Villarreal in last week's first leg of their Europa League semi-final.

Instead, a precious away goal gave them hope they can finish an inconsistent campaign on a high by setting up a showdown in the Polish city of Gdansk against Manchester United. Arsenal are ninth in the Premier League table and are unlikely to qualify for Europe next year via that route but winning the Europa League would give them a ticket back to the Champions League.

Mikel Arteta's side won the FA Cup last season but have failed to build on that triumph and are on course for a fifth consecutive finish outside the top four in EPL. Standing in Arsenal's way is their former boss Unai Emery, who won the trophy three years in a row from 2014 when he was in charge of Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the 2019 final.

Villarreal have never reached the final of the Champions League or Europa League. They have put out a promotional video, with the message: "Let's flip the script... It's our time." — *AFP*