

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | FRIDAY 21 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 32°C
Min: 25°C
Rainfall: 6%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 7
Tithi: Navami
Star: Pooram
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon
Yamagandam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.28 am
Luhar: 12.10 pm
Asar: 3.23 pm
Maghrib: 6.27 pm
Isha: 7.43 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.39 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.59 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.50 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 3.09 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,50,960)	(+3,955)
2,60,22,499	2,91,112

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+35,579) 397
TN: 17,34,804 19,131

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,59,54,760

DEATHS

34,38,690

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES 219

uorlometers.info

Twitter starts verification process for 'blue tick'

San Francisco: Twitter will start rolling out its verification application process from Thursday after which approved user accounts can sport the 'blue verified badge'. Twitter had paused its public verification programme a few years ago. However, last year, Twitter said it would re-launch the account verification process in 2021.

Biden to sign anti-Asian hate crimes bill

Washington: United States President Joe Biden has announced that he will sign the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act on Thursday, paving the way for the legislation to stop hate crimes against Asian Americans that have occurred since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Biden announced his decision on a Twitter post, saying that 'hate has no place' in the country. 'Hate has no place in America — and I look forward to making that clear this afternoon by signing the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act into law,' he tweeted.

COUNTER POINT



Our kids are having enough milk... they are using only our urine and dung!



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One more leader bids adieu to Kamal



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EU finalizes Pfizer deal for 1.8 billion vax doses

SPORT | 8

Dravid to coach India on SL tour



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Record data on Covid-19 among youngsters: Modi

■ **Be better prepared for future, PM tells officials**

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 20

In the backdrop of reports that a third wave of the pandemic Covid-19 could affect the youth and children more, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday directed officials to record the spread of coronavirus infection and its seriousness among the youth and children.

The Prime Minister, in his interaction with district magistrates and field officials, said there are concerns about the infection spreading among the young generation due to mutations in the virus and asked officials to analyse the statistics in their districts. They will have to be better prepared for the future, he said.

There have been reports that the virus may hit the young generation, a demography which has so far not been affected hard as the adult population with people in the older age bracket being seen more susceptible.

Cautioning that that the challenge posed by Covid-19 will remain as long it is present even at a "minor scale" in the country, Mr Modi told officials to work to ensure that people continue to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour.

The challenge remains as long as the infection is

Why Modi feels so insecure: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 20

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday directly accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of barring her and other chief ministers from speaking up for their demands on Covid-19 pandemic at a virtual meeting he chaired.

This was also the first time the Trinamul Congress supreme came face to face with Mr Modi officially after her party came to power for the third consecutive time in the state by defeating the BJP in the assembly elec-

present even at a minor scale, he said.

Asking officials to analyse data separately for urban and rural regions besides those for tier 2 and 3 cities, Modi said it will help them prepare their strategy accordingly.

The officials, who interacted with Modi via video-conferencing, were from Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry,

tion.

Tearing into Mr Modi, Ms Banerjee alleged, "Ten chief ministers including me were present with some district magistrates there. We however did not allow the DMs from our state to attend it since a CM, if present, gets the priority over them. In a federal structure, though the CMs were invited, they were not allowed to speak of their public demands. They were made to sit like puppets and bonded labourers. Only the PM kept talking all through without giving us a chance even. It was just a casual and superfluous meeting." ■ **P4**

Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. He had spoken to a group of field officials on Tuesday too.

Speaking on the vaccination programme, the Prime Minister said suggestions from states and other stake-holders have been incorporated and added that the Union Health Ministry is informing states about the availability of jabs for 15 days in advance.



People wait for their turn as vaccination for people aged between 18 and 44 was underway at a camp at Kolathur on Thursday. — N. Sampath

Aerosols can travel up to 10 metres

New Delhi, May 20: Nasal droplets fall within 2 metres from a Covid-19 infected person and the aerosols can travel in air up to 10 metres, the office of the principal scientific adviser to the Union government said on Thursday, adding that proper ventilation can decrease the risk of transmission.

In its advisory "Stop the Transmission, Crush the Pandemic — Masks, Distance, Sanitation and Ventilation to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2

virus", the office of the PSA noted that "well-ventilated spaces play a crucial role in diluting the Covid-19 viral load of infected air and help in decreasing the risk of transmission from one infected person to the other."

"Saliva and nasal discharge in the form of droplets and aerosols carry the virus from one person to another. Larger size droplets fall to the ground and on surfaces, and smaller aerosol particles are carried in the air

to greater distances," the advisory said.

In closed un-ventilated indoor spaces, droplets and aerosols become quickly concentrated and greatly increase the risk of transmission to people in the area, it said.

"Droplets fall within 2 metres from an infected person and aerosols can be carried in the air up to 10 metres," it said.

The earlier protocol was to maintain six feet (1.8 metres) distance to prevent the spread of the

novel coronavirus infection. There have been instances of people taking to social media to express their anguish that they were infected despite not coming in contact with outsiders.

Earlier this year, a study done by the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad and the Institute of Microbial Technology (IMTech), Chandigarh found that the infection can be transiently airborne. — **PTI**

Summer surprise



Chennai was in for a summer surprise as there was a heavy spell of convective rain on Thursday evening. It was so heavy in some parts of the city that it led to water logging as on the Pallavaram flyover. — E.K. Sanjay

CM asks President to free all 7 convicts in Rajiv case

C CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 20

A day after sanctioning one month parole for A.G. Perarivalan, one of the seven convicts languishing in prison in connection with the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday urged President Ram Nath Kovind to release all the seven.

In a letter to the President on Thursday, Mr Stalin said Perarivalan, S. Nalini, Murugan, Santhan, Jayakumar, Robert Payas and P. Ravichandran had been "undergoing agony of imprisonment for about three decades".



Majority of the political parties had sought the remission of the remaining term in the life sentences that the seven persons were now undergoing and had wanted their immediate release, Mr Stalin said, adding that it was also the will of the people of the state. Recounting the developments in the issue, Mr Stalin explained that tho-

ugh the Tamil Nadu government had recommended the release of the seven persons to the Governor on September 9, 2018, it was not done citing the pendency of investigation by the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) of the CBI as the reason.

Later, despite the Centre and the CBI clarifying in the Supreme Court that there was no connection between the MDMA's probe into the Rajiv Gandhi assassination and remitting the life sentence of the convicts, the Governor referred the matter to the President, saying that he was the competent authority. ■ **P2**

Educate Covid orphans: Sonia

New Delhi, May 20: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide free education in Navodaya Vidyalayas to children orphaned due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In her letter, Ms Gandhi said the nation owes it to children to give them hope and provide them a robust future after their tragedy.

"I am writing to request you to consider providing free education at the Navodaya Vidyalayas to children who have lost either both parents or an earning parent on account of the Covid-19 pandemic," the Congress chief said. "I feel that as a nation, we owe it to them to give them hope for a robust future after their tragedy."

The BJP, however, took a swipe at the Congress chief, saying her idea of looking after kids orphaned during the pandemic is "outdated and copied".

"Several state governments are already doing it except perhaps those run by the Congress. Instead of writing to the PM, she should have written to Amarinder Singh and

COVID CASELOAD, ACTIVE CASES, DEATHS DROP

New Delhi, May 20: With 2,76,110 new coronavirus infections being reported in a day, India's tally of Covid-19 cases climbed to 2,57,72,440 while the daily deaths were recorded below 4,000 after four days, taking the toll to 2,87,122, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

A total of 3,874 fatalities due to Covid-19 were registered in a span of 24 hours. The active cases have further reduced to 31,29,878, comprising 12.14 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 86.74 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed. — **PTI**

Ashok Gehlot, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi shared Ms Gandhi's letter on Twitter and said it is high time the government of India listened to the suggestion. — **PTI**

I-T RETURNS CAN BE FILED TILL SEPTEMBER 30

New Delhi, May 20: The government on Thursday extended the due date of filing income tax returns for 2020-21 for individuals by two months till September 30.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30.

As per the income tax law, for individuals whose accounts are not required to be audited and who usually file their income tax return using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms the deadline to file ITR is July 31. The deadline for taxpayers, like companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31. In a circular, the CBDT said an extension of time limits is being given for certain tax compliances "to provide relief to taxpayers in view of the severe pandemic". Also, the deadline for issuing Form 16 by employers to employees has been extended by a month till July 15. — **PTI**

PINARAYI, 20 MINISTERS TAKE OATH IN KERALA

Thiruvananthapuram, May 20: CPM veteran Pinarayi Vijayan, who led the Left Democratic Front (LDF) to an unprecedented consecutive victory in the April 6 assembly polls, was on Thursday sworn in as chief minister of Kerala for the second term.

Governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oath of office to Mr Vijayan and 20 of his cabinet colleagues in a low-key function at the Central Stadium here, which was held completely in adherence with the Covid protocol. — **PTI**

Navy confirms death of 37 on board barge; rescue ops to continue

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 20

The Indian Navy on Thursday confirmed the death of 37 personnel onboard barge P305 with the recovery of their bodies. Barge P305 went adrift and sank in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai coast during Cyclone Tauktae and search operation for at least 36 missing personnel is still on. A total of 188 of the 261 onboard have already been rescued by Indian Navy and Coast Guard.

The barge sank 35 nautical miles off Mumbai as Cyclone Tauktae battered India's west coast. P305 was amongst the four barges that suffered during the cyclone. The other three were Gal Constructor and Support Station-3 -- deployed by the engineering firm Afoons for its ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) contract.

"In one of the most challenging SAR Ops in the aftermath of #CycloneTauktae, 325 survivors have been rescued &

37 #BNV recovered off Mumbai & Gujarat Coasts. Vigorous SAR efforts continue for the missing crew of Barge P305 which sank off Mumbai with five IN ships, aircraft and helos deployed," the Indian Navy spokesperson tweeted on Thursday.

The Navy is leading a massive, round-the-clock rescue effort that includes several of its ships, P-81 reconnaissance aircraft and Sea King helicopters, as well as Coast Guard and ONGC vessels, to detect survivors from the

sunken barge and other vessels stranded or affected by the storm.

Indian Navy Commodore Ajay Jha said the Navy on Thursday morning launched a fresh aerial search and rescue mission, deploying helicopters and Naval ships through the night, to trace any movement in the dark waters to look for survivors. According to him the search operations would continue for another three days at least.

The Directorate General

of Shipping had already ordered an investigation into the deaths. Now the Mumbai Police has also announced a probe into barge P305 remaining in the area despite storm warnings. An ADR (accidental death report) was registered Wednesday in connection with the deaths.

On Thursday morning the Coast Guard said another missing tug -- Sangeeta, with a crew of 10 -- had been located about 10 nautical miles west of Maharashtra's Tarapur.



Indian Navy rescues 137 crew of GAL Constructor which ran aground off Mumbai. — **PTI**

OTHER STORIES

CM urges Prez to release Rajiv convicts from jail

From P1

The Chief Minister also recalled how the death sentence of Nalini was commuted under Article 161 of the Constitution and referred to the Supreme Court commuting the life sentences of three others.

Now that the seven persons have undergone incarceration for three decades and in the context of the courts recognising the need to decongest prisons, Mr Stalin urged the President to accept the recommendation of the state government and release all of them from jail.

State receives one lakh doses of Covishield

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 20

Tamil Nadu on Thursday received one lakh doses of Covishield. These one lakh doses of Covishield, that arrived from Mumbai in nine parcels via Indigo Airlines flight on Thursday evening at Chennai the airport is to be administered to the people to safeguard them against Covid-19.

The State government ordered more of the life-saving vaccines for the state, as the second wave of coronavirus is spreading fast, these vaccines arrived here. Health department officials received the vaccine and it was taken to the vaccine storage Centre at the DMS complex in the city.

TN gets consignment of medical oxygen from Odisha

Coimbatore, May 20: Tamil Nadu received its 10th consignment of medical oxygen on Thursday by rail from Odisha, amid the COVID-19 surge in the southern state.

An Oxygen Express train carrying 29.24 metric tonnes of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) arrived at Madukkarai Railway station near here from Rourkela in Odisha, a railway division release said.

Tamil Nadu has received 584.45 MT of oxygen, delivered through 11 trains, so far.

In its fight against the pandemic, Indian Railways helps in transporting the life saving gas to various states to provide treatment to Covid patients.

So far, the Railways has delivered nearly 12,630 MT of LMO in more than 775 tankers to different states across the country which includes Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. — PTI

Scheme to ramp up hosp infra with donations in Pondy

Puducherry, May 20: A scheme envisaging liberal contributions from philanthropists and enterprises to ramp up infrastructure in hospitals to better fight the fast spreading COVID-19 pandemic in the union territory was launched here on Thursday by Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan.

The 'Uyir Kaatru' (breath of life) scheme aimed at the donors playing a pro-active role to contain the virus that would help the affected recover faster, she said.

The Lt Governor said the Union Territory was now in a 'very difficult predicament' with the spike in the number of cases and was leaving no stone unturned to check the spread.

She said private hospitals were also augmenting oxygen beds in their premises to cater to the needs of the patients.

— PTI



HR&CE minister P.K. Sekar Babu and Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi inspect corona care centre in a school at Kolathur on Thursday.

— DC

Kanchi vegetable market temporarily shifted

P.A JEBARAJ | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 20

The bus bays and platforms at the Kanchipuram bus stand were converted into stalls for the vegetable vendors from Thursday.

The vendors, who had shopped at Kanchipuram Rajaji Market, shifted to the bus stand to ensure social distancing among sellers and customers in wake of the situation arising out of the coronavirus outbreak.

Social distancing is one

Social distancing is one of the many measures which can help people avoid catching the highly contagious virus

of the many measures which can help people avoid catching the highly contagious virus.

The district administration had taken efforts to decongest the vegetable markets in the city as a precautionary measure against the spread of

COVID-19 and allotted space at the bus stand for the vegetable traders.

According to the sources, retail selling of fruits, vegetables and flowers has been completely banned at the bus stand. Only wholesale selling of vegetables will be permitted in the Kanchipuram bus stand. The public (retail buyers) cannot visit the market in person. Kanchipuram Collector Maheshwari Ravikumar inspected the arrangement on Thursday.

Result of Covid test should be declared expeditiously: HC

J. STALIN | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 20

The Madras high court has said every endeavour should be made by the testing centres in the state to declare the results as expeditiously as possible so that a person who is affected by the Corona virus can immediately quarantine himself if he is asymptomatic and the further spread may be arrested.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy gave the above directive in response to the complaints that some of the test results are being announced on a day-after or several days-after basis. It was also complained that if a person finds that he has tested positive four days back, he would have been a super-spreader in the interregnum.

Passing further interim orders on a suo motu proceedings and a batch of PILs, the bench said the figures furnished by both the State of Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry reveal that



despite the increased number of positive cases, the rate of increase has fallen over the last seven days or so. In addition, there has been an augmentation of facilities and, by and large, those affected by the virus were receiving some form of treatment, which could, however, be better, the bench added.

The bench said the central government has filed a report, but there was no indication of the allocation of any drugs or vaccine in the near future or of any plan which was in place. "It is hoped that a more detailed report as to a centralised plan of action to deal with the emergency would be filed by the Centre when the matter is taken up next on

May 24, 2021", the bench added.

The bench said as to the supply of oxygen, the report of the Health secretary reveals that the daily 100 MT allotment from the eastern corridor has not been delivered on a regular basis. However, there were oxygen generators and concentrators which have been pressed into service and the supply of liquid oxygen was restricted for use of patients who were in critical care. There has to be an increase in the supply of oxygen to both the State and the Union Territory. Puducherry says that its daily demand may go up to 65 MT though the supply at present was adequate and manageable. Indeed, previous orders have recoded that the State may require 800 MT of oxygen on a daily basis. It was hoped that by now the Centre would have augmented the supply of oxygen so as to ensure equitable distribution and enhanced supply to all States and Union Territories, including these two, the bench added.

The bench said the sil-

huge revenue, he said.

He said while the wholesale rate of toor dal is less than Rs 100 per kg, Christys group Rasi Nutri Foods and societies such as NACOF and Kendriya Bhandar, acting as frontals of Christy group, quoted more than Rs 143 kg in the tender opened on May 5. The difference would have resulted in a loss of almost Rs 80 to Rs 100 crores to the exchequer.

In the complaints filed on May 17 and 18, the NGO had

sought cancellation of the tender and modification of conditions of all future tenders to break the Christy cartel and action against officials.

He also claimed to have evidence of how the tender for corona relief kit for 2.11 crore ration card holders was also fixed. "We have appealed to the government to blacklist the Christy group and also file criminal cases against all those involved in the scam" he added.

Dean denies black fungus death in T'kudi hospital

DC CORRESPONDENT
THOOTHUKUDI, MAY 20

The widespread news that Mucormycosis (black fungus) claimed its first casualty in the state at Kovilpatti in Thoothukudi district was denied by Dr. Revathy Balan, dean, Thoothukudi Medical College Hospital (TMCH), who said the deceased, Soundarrajan, 58, died of Covid-19.

Welder Soundarrajan of Kovilpatti, who was diagnosed positive for Covid-19, was admitted at a private hospital in Kovilpatti on May 10.

According to Soundarrajan's son Vijayaraj, his father underwent treatment at the private hospital for seven days and complained of puffy and watery eyes. Suspecting it to be Mucormycosis, Soundarrajan was referred to TMCH on May 17, where he succumbed around 2.30 am on May 20.

As the RT-PCR test result came negative for Soundarrajan a day before his death, his family members and relatives believed that Soundarrajan died of Mucormycosis, which is allegedly affecting patients who recovered from Corona.

The doctors who treated Soundarrajan at TMCH said the cause of his death was Covid and not black fungus.

TN seeks 5K anti-fungal vials from Centre

From P1

He said the state government has requested the Centre for the allocation of 5,000 vials of anti-fungal injection Amphotericin B. "With this we will be able to deal with the disease," he said.

The health secretary said there was no need to panic about the infection. "There are only nine cases identified in the state so far, out of which six cases are old and three patients are diabetic," he said. "This is not a new disease, and is curable. We have found that a lot of misinformation is doing the rounds on social media. People are requested not to believe in such fake information."

Apart from Tamil Nadu, the Telangana government also declared Black Fungus a notifiable disease under Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 on Thursday.

All government and pri-

vate health facilities shall follow the guidelines for screening, diagnosis and management of black fungus issued by the Union ministry of health and family welfare (MoHFW) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). "This fungal infection is leading to prolonged morbidity and mortality amongst Covid-19 patients," said Lav Agarwal, joint secretary, MoHFW in a letter to the states.

The treatment of this fungal infection requires a multi-disciplinary approach by a team of doctors consisting of eye surgeons, ENT specialists, general surgeon, neurosurgeon and dental maxillofacial surgeon, among others, and administration of Amphotericin-B injection as an antifungal medicine.

Dr. S. Soundari, head of medical services, Dr. Agarwal Eye Hospital,

Chennai, said mucormycosis infection affecting eyes can be treated using medicines or through surgery.

"Medical professionals treating Covid patients must avoid or reduce the use of steroid and immunomodulating drugs," she said.

Considering the strong and growing Covid-19-eye connection, people should come forward to use goggles and facial protection while following other standard Covid-19 appropriate behaviours, she said. "However, our immunity is our best defence against all infections. Hence, make no compromise on good food and sleep. Staying hydrated, exercising regularly and cultivating a stress-free mind are all important. Those with diabetic conditions need to keep an eye on their blood glucose level."



— DC



A biker and a cyclist ride in incessant rain that lashed Chennai and its surrounding areas on Thursday evening.

A water-logged Kamaraj Salai under Pallavaram flyover.

— DC

Shower pours as big relief to Chennaiites

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 20

In a big relief to residents, heavy rains lashed several parts of the city on Thursday evening.

Though it was a hot day till around 5 pm, the sky turned overcast, leading to a sudden spell of pouring for over an hour. According to the weather experts, the city, which is grappling with soaring mercury for several weeks, may experience light showers in some areas till Saturday.

The city weather stations including Nungambakkam and Meenambakkam had recorded a day temperature of around 37 degree Celsius.

Officials of the meteorological department said a brewing weather system over the North Andaman Sea as well as east-central Bay of Bengal influenced thunderstorms over the state. A low pressure likely to form by Saturday would intensify and become a cyclonic storm

Two flights delayed at Chennai airport due to bad weather

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 20

Two flights were delayed at the Chennai domestic airport on Thursday evening due to rains and thunderstorms.

Chennaiites on Thursday evening saw mild rains in several parts of the city, accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning. According to the airport sources, an Indigo airlines flight that was scheduled to depart from here to Madurai at 4: 20 pm and another 4: 45 pm Indigo flight to Bengaluru were both delayed to take off due to the bad weather condition. The flights took off an hour later, sources said. Similarly, a Chennai-bound Tuticorin flight was unable to land on time at the Chennai Airport. The aircraft that was to land by 5. 05 pm, descended here after 30 minutes. A thunderstorm is more likely to delay your take-off or landing than it is to cause turbulence at cruising altitude or cause the aircraft difficulty during its climb or descent.

by May 24 and reach the Odisha-West Bengal coast by May 26. Thursday's thunderstorm was caused due to a convective activity resulting in coastal areas and Puducherry

likely to get light rains till the weekend. Apart from Chennai, Kachirayapalayam in Kallakurichi district registered 10 cm rain during the past 24 hours.

Address vax hesitancy, ramp up vaccination



B. Vijayalakshmi

Viewpoint

With Tamil Nadu emerging as the state with the maximum number of active cases of Covid-19 in the country, it is time the government pulled out all the stops to ramp up vaccination in the

state. Health authorities are struggling to allay fears of residents and combat rumours that trigger vaccine hesitancy in the state. Fighting misinformation on vaccines continues to be a challenging task and it has

to be managed with facts and in a systematic manner, say experts. Efforts must be made to spread awareness, sensitise residents and remove any fears regarding side-effects of the vaccine. Information blitzkrieg on vaccination will lead to course-correction in people's behaviour.

The Greater Chennai Corporation is trying numerous ways to speed up the vaccination process. Fever surveillance workers have been visiting houses and apartments to collect data on the number of people

yet to be vaccinated.

The civic body has opened bulk vaccination registration for residents' welfare associations, big companies, NGOs and communi-

ties. Residents' welfare associations also have been working with the civic body to organise special vaccination camps in their places and help senior citizens and others above 45 years take their first/second doses.

Such special vaccination camps organised in residential areas including the suburbs, and in gated communi-

ties and apartments have evoked good response. The move has ensured hassle-free vaccination as people don't have to worry about travelling to get vaccinated.

With vaccination for 18 years and above opened in the state, the civic body must expand vaccination drives and inoculate the maximum number of people every day. Addressing vaccine hesitancy, ensuring steady vax supplies and speeding up vaccination will help in flattening Covid second wave curve in the state.

SHORT TAKES

POLICE THRASH WOMAN FOR NOT WEARING MASK

Sagar, May 20: A woman was allegedly beaten up and dragged by some police personnel on a road for not wearing a mask while going out to buy vegetables amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar district.

After a video of the incident, which took place on Monday in Rahli town, went viral, a police official said the woman allegedly hit a female cop first.

The woman and her daughter were stopped by police around 11 am on Monday for not wearing masks.

The police tried to take them away in a jeep to an open jail as punishment, but the duo resisted and allegedly hit a police-woman.

In the video, some police personnel, including a female cop, were seen beating up the woman, pushing her down and dragging her by her hair.

They were trying to shift her in the police jeep while she was resisting it and in the process, they thrashed her.

However, Rahli's sub-divisional officer of police Kamal Singh said the "video showed only half of the incident".

"The woman hit a female cop first and the latter had bruises on her face of an injury caused by nails," he said.

ONE DETAINED FOR REMDESIVIR BLACK MARKETING

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 20

Driver of spouse of a minister in the Shivraj Singh Chouhan was on Thursday detained in Indore for interrogation in connection with the alleged black marketing of life saving drug Remdesivir.

Govind Singh Rajput, driver of wife of state irrigation minister Tulsi Silawat was picked up by police in Indore for interrogation after Punit Agrawal, driver of a local government doctor, dragged him in the case.

Govind was, however, let off after interrogation.

"Govind denied his role in the black marketing of the life saving injection. The driver said he had procured two Remdesivir injections from Punit after he tested positive for coronavirus.

"He, however, did not use the injections since he had recovered from Covid-19 and returned the two injections to Punit", a senior police officer of Indore told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted in the interest of investigation in the case. "We may call him again for interrogation if needed", he indicated. Earlier on Monday, Punit, driver of local government doctor Poornima Gadhia, was 'caught red handed' by police while selling Remdesivir injections at inflated prices in Indore.

Interestingly, Punit told the reporters in Indore while being produced in the local court on Tuesday that he had procured Remdesivir injections from Govind.

SONIA URGES MODI TO HELP OUT COVID ORPHANS

New Delhi, May 20: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide free education in Navodaya Vidyalayas to children orphaned due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In her letter, Sonia Gandhi said the nation owes it to children to give them hope and provide them a robust future after their tragedy.

"I am writing to request you to consider providing free education at the Navodaya Vidyalayas to children who have lost either both parents or an earning parent on account of the Covid-19 pandemic," the Congress chief said.

"I feel that as a nation, we owe it to them to give them hope for a robust future after the unimaginable tragedy that has befallen them," Sonia Gandhi said.

The BJP, however, took a swipe at the Congress chief, saying her idea of looking after kids orphaned during the pandemic is "outdated and copied".

"Several state governments are already doing it except perhaps those run by the Congress. Instead of writing to the PM, she should have written to Amarinder Singh and Ashok Gehlot," BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi shared the letter on Twitter.



Mass cremation of Covid-19 victims at a crematorium set up on the outskirts of Bengaluru on Thursday.

—PTI

Vaccine will be available for all by December: Nadda

India conducts 20.55 lakh Covid-19 tests in single day

Jaipur, May 19: BJP president J P Nadda said on Wednesday the coronavirus vaccine will be available for all in the country by December.

He also accused the Congress of spreading anarchy at the time of the pandemic.

Nadda was reviewing the COVID-19 situation in Rajasthan in a virtual interaction with BJP state president Satish Poonia and party MPs from the state, a party statement said.

Nadda said the prime minister had warned the chief ministers of the states in March itself and asked them to be prepared for the second wave of coronavirus.

"India developed two

indigenous vaccines for the first time in just nine months, which have been administered to 18 crore Indians so far. By the end of December, the vaccine will be available to all and its calendar has been set," he said.

Nadda said the Modi government at the Center has ensured the availability and supply of oxygen and medicines to all the states. He said that real face of the Congress has been exposed after revelation of its tool kit".

Even at the time of the pandemic, the Congress is trying to spread anarchy in the country and is working to destroy the morale of the people by spreading confusion among them, he alleged.

Besides Poonia, Union ministers Arjunram Meghwal, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Kailash Chaudhary, MPs P P Chaudhary, Narendra Kumar, Manoj Rajoria, Jaskaur Meena, Swami Sumedhanand and Ranjita Koli joined the meeting.

New Delhi, May 20

More than 20.55 lakh COVID-19 tests were conducted in a span of 24 hours, the highest-ever conducted in a single day in India, while the daily positivity rate stands at 13.44 per cent, the Union Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulatively, 20,55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country. India's daily COVID-19 recoveries outnumbered

the daily new cases for the seventh consecutive day. A total of 3,69,077 patients recuperated in a span of 24 hours as against 2,76,110 infections being reported during the same period, the ministry said.

India's cumulative recoveries have reached 2,23,55,440.

Besides India recorded less than 3 lakh new cases for four consecutive days now.

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana reported 77.17 per cent of the 2,76,110 new cases registered in a span of 24 hours.

Tamil Nadu has reported

the highest daily new cases at 34,875, followed by Karnataka with 34,281 new cases.

The ministry said India's total active cases have decreased to 31,29,878 with a decline of 96,841 cases being registered in the total active caseload in a day.

It now comprises 12.14 per cent of the country's total cases.

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh cumulatively account for 69.23 per cent of India's total active cases.

The National Mortality Rate currently stands at 1.11 per cent, the ministry said.

—PTI

NDRF to set up unit to deal with pandemics

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

Learning from the experience of the devastation caused by Corona, Home Ministry plans to set up a highly specialised Division within the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to deal "exclusively with pandemics."

As of now the mandate given to NDRF allows it to deal with all "natural and manmade disasters" like cyclone, floods, earthquake, chemical or gas leakage, building collapse etc. The NDRF is a highly specialised force and has been fully trained and equipped to deal with such disasters.

But now the Home Ministry is planning to set up a high specialised unit within the NDRF which will also deal with pandemics like Corona or other diseases. This will not only allow NDRF to have specialised medical teams but also the necessary infrastructure to set up health facilities at a short notice.

Home Ministry sources said they were examining the proposal right now and looking into the legality whether it will have to approach the Union cabinet for the sanction or the new Division can be set up through an executive order itself.

Senior officials said the devastation caused by

Corona's second wave has also been a huge learning curve for Central agencies. Shortage of oxygen, critical medicine, ventilator and hospital beds had led to a massive health crisis across the country as Corona cases registered a massive surge during the second wave.

So what the Home Ministry now plans is to put in place what's is being described as a "modern and professional unit" that can deal with all health related pandemic in future.

Even now both central para-military forces and defence forces had worked over time in setting up temporary hospitals and health care facilities, transporting oxygen and other essential items. But now the government proposes to have a dedicated agency which will anticipate, prepare and provide all necessary assistance during the such health crisis.

Senior Ministry officials argued that NDRF is an extremely competent agency with tremendous experience of dealing with natural or manmade disasters. Now with additional resources in terms manpower and equipment, the Force will be able to handle these health crisis now and Home Ministry has started working in that direction, officials said.

Abducted ONGC employee to be released by Ulfa-I

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MAY 20

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that if Ulfa-I chief Paresw Baruah comes out with a formal proposal for peace talks, he was confident that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah would reciprocate it positively.

Mr Sarma, who addressed his first official press conference, also made an appeal for the release of the ONGC employee to Ulfa-I commander-in-chief Paresw Baruah to which he reciprocated within a few minutes by announcing that the outfit has decided to release the abducted ONGC employee, Ritul Saikia, and in next two or

three days he will be with his family. The ONGC employee was abducted by Ulfa-I rebels and is in the captivity of the outfit in Myanmar.

The Ulfa chief called up the editor of local news channels to say that he was responding to the appeal of the chief minister and had decided to release ONGC employee Ritul Saikia in the next three days. The editor claimed that Mr Barua was very happy that Assam has finally got a chief minister who is prepared to take responsibility for taking maximum benefit from oil companies for the welfare of the state's people. It is significant that the response of Ulfa-I chief came before the chief minister's press conference was over.

Demand for dispatch of vaccine not met by Centre: Mamata

From P1

She claimed, "We were astonished at the bulldozing of the federal structure by an arrogant PM as if martial law has been imposed in the country. We felt insulted and humiliated. It happened one way I think all the non-BJP ruled states should form a team to lodge a protest against the BJP at the Centre."

The TMC chief wondered, "Why is the PM feeling so insecure and scared? Why is he fleeing away? In his speech, he claimed that Covid-19 deaths are decreasing.

Then why are so many deaths there? Why are bodies being thrown away in the river? Namami Gange has now become Mrityupuri Gange."

Ms Banerjee also pointed out that her demand for the dispatch of three crore vaccines was not met by the Centre. According to her, even if she gets the doses now, her government would complete the drive in the next three months.

Ms Banerjee later wrote a letter to Mr Modi to send more vaccines to the state for the central government employees working on essential services.

Navy confirms death of 37 onboard barge

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 20

The Indian Navy on Thursday confirmed the death of 37 personnel onboard barge P305 with the recovery of their bodies. Barge P305 went adrift and sank in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai coast during Cyclone Tauktae and search operation for at least 36 missing personnel is still on.

A total of 188 of the 261 onboard have already been rescued by Indian Navy and Coast Guard. The barge sank 35 nautical miles off Mumbai as Cyclone Tauktae battered India's west coast. P305 was amongst the four barges that suffered during the cyclone. The other three were Gal Constructor and Support Station-3 - deployed by the engineering firm Afcons for its ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) contract.

Pofma against Kejriwal: India mum on Singapore media reports

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

New Delhi on Thursday evening refused to react to media reports that quoted Singapore's High Commissioner to India Simon Wong as saying that his country reserves the right to invoke its anti-misinformation law POFA (Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act) against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for his recent comments that had alleged there was a Singapore variant of the Covid virus and that flights from Singapore to India should be stopped. Asked about the Singapore High Commissioner's comment, MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said his

ministry "does not have anything to add" other than the statements already issued by the MEA earlier on Wednesday on the entire controversy.

Indian media reports quoted Mr Wong as saying, "Prominent political office holders must have a responsibility not to propagate falsehoods. ... In Singapore, we have Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). It is meant to mitigate the spread of misinformation, so we reserve the right to invoke POFMA on some of the comments and assertions made by the honorable chief minister on this topic".

Singapore had on Wednesday summoned India's High Commissioner

there and lodged a strong protest against a recent tweet by the Delhi Chief Minister that claimed there was a Singapore variant of the Coronavirus that was harmful to children, following which the Indian High Commissioner promptly told Singapore authorities that the Delhi Chief Minister had "no competence to pronounce on Covid variants or civil aviation policy".

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had also then swiftly "clarified" that "the Delhi CM does not speak for India". Lauding Singapore's despatching of military aircraft with oxygen supplies recently to help India battle the second Covid wave, EAM Jaishankar—in a thinly-

veiled barb at Mr. Kejriwal—had lamented that "irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships". Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan—who had lambasted Mr. Kejriwal and asked him to "stick to facts"—then thanked EAM Jaishankar for the clarification.

Mr. Kejriwal's tweet earlier on Tuesday when he called for a ban on flights from Singapore to India had led to a furore in the tiny nation which is an important member of South-east Asian grouping ASEAN as well as an important partner of India in the region with close ties to New Delhi.

FIGHTING COVID

Scientist Vidyasagar also urges people to follow Covid protocols

3rd wave possible if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist

New Delhi, May 20: If the vaccination drive against coronavirus is not ramped up and COVID-19 appropriate-behaviour is not maintained, there is a possibility of a third wave of the pandemic in 6-8 months, said M Vidyasagar, a scientist involved in the Sutra Model which uses mathematics to project the trajectory of COVID-19.

He, however, stressed the Sutra Model has not predicted any third wave and it is working on it.

The Indian Institutes of Technology-Hyderabad professor cited a paper by Italian researchers on infected people with decreasing antibodies,

which give some sort of immunity, in six months.

"If the antibodies are lost, then there is a chance of immunity going down. In this case, vaccination has to be ramped up and COVID-19 appropriate-behaviour must be practiced. If not then there is a possibility of a third wave in 6-8 months," Vidyasagar said.

"We are also adding the aspects of immunity and vaccination in our model for our future forecasts," he added.

According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with COVID-19 for

at least eight months after they were infected.

A recent sero-survey by the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) suggested that the neutralising antibodies declined significantly after five-six months, making people prone to reinfections.

The coronavirus cases in the country peaked in September 2020 and there was a nationwide decline of new cases starting in October.

Using more stringent measures (more than 30 per cent inhibition of surrogate receptor-spike protein binding), the loss of neutralisation may be even higher.

"We speculate that this may be related to recurrence of outbreaks in March 2021, after the peak in September 2020," the IGIB paper said on the second wave that started raging from late March and has claimed thousands of lives since then.

K VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, had said on May 5 that as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves.

Two days later, he said there may not be a third wave of coronavirus in the country, if strong measures are taken and effectively implemented at the

state, district and city-level.

"If we take strong measures, the third wave may not happen in all places or indeed anywhere at all. It depends on much how effectively guidance is implemented at the local level in the states, districts and cities everywhere.

"The guidance about precautions, about surveillance, about containment, about treatment and about tests. This insidious asymptomatic transmission can be stopped if we follow the guidelines. This sounds difficult, it is difficult and we can and must do it," VijayRaghavan had said in a press briefing.

—PTI



Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visits Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed Medical College & Hospital to review treatment facilities for Covid in Barpeta.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

BANDITS KILL 11
IN NORTHERN
NIGERIA

Kano, May 20: Gunmen on Wednesday killed 11 people in two attacks in Nigeria's Kaduna state, the government said, in the latest violence in an area wracked by cattle rustlings and kidnapping.

In the first attack early Wednesday, the gunmen known locally as bandits, invaded Ungwan Gaida village in Chikun district, killing eight people, said state internal security commissioner Samuel Aruwan.

"Eight residents have been confirmed killed in this attack", his statement said, adding that a church and "several houses" were burnt.

Aruwan said on the same day three herders were killed by bandits who attacked Marra-ban Jos village.

KEY ARREST IN BID
TO ASSASSINATE
MALDIVES EX-PREZ

Male, May 20: Police arrested a key suspect in the attempted assassination of Maldives ex-president Mohamed Nasheed, officials said Thursday as the well-known climate change campaigner recovered in a German hospital.

The unidentified man, reportedly a known Islamist extremist and the fourth person to be arrested, parked the motorcycle rigged with a bomb that exploded in Male on May 6, police sources said.

Nasheed, 54, who famously held an underwater cabinet meeting to highlight the dangers of rising sea levels for his low-lying nation, was flown to Germany last week following 16 hours of emergency surgery.

A ball bearing in the bomb missed his heart by a centimetre (0.4 inches), and shrapnel was removed from his lungs, liver and limbs.

He now appears to be on the mend, posting photos on social media of himself walking outside the medical facility in Germany and tucking into a Sri Lankan meal sent by Colombo's envoy in Berlin.

WWII BOMB IN
FRANKFURT
DETONATED

Frankfurt, May 20: A massive World War II bomb found in Germany's financial capital Frankfurt was safely detonated in the early hours of Thursday, the city's fire service said, allowing tens of thousands of evacuated residents to return to their homes.

The 500-kilogram unexploded bomb was unearthed during construction work on Wednesday in the densely populated Nordend area of the city, a location firefighters said made it a "particular challenge" to remove. *The Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper reported the ordnance had been discovered right next to a children's playground at a depth of about two metres (6.5 feet). Its report said the controlled blast, which happened just after midnight, "sounded like thunder rumbling" and left a hole three metres deep and ten metres wide. Firefighters said that they had covered the bomb with 40 truckloads of sand before detonating it, in order to minimise damage to the surrounding buildings.

TEXAS EXECUTES
INMATE WHO
KILLED GREAT AUNT

Huntsville (US), May 20: A Texas man convicted of fatally beating his 83-year-old great aunt more than two decades ago was executed Wednesday evening without media witnesses present because prison agency officials neglected to notify reporters it was time to carry out the punishment.

Quintin Jones received the lethal injection at the state penitentiary in Huntsville for the September 1999 killing of Bert-hena Bryant, agency spokesman Jeremy Desel said about 30 minutes after Jones was pronounced dead. Desel never received the usual phone call from the Huntsville Unit prison to bring reporters from *The Associated Press* and *The Huntsville Item* to the prison.

He and the media witnesses were waiting in an office across the street. "The Texas Department of Criminal Justice can only apologise for this error and nothing like this will ever happen again," he said.

He said the execution, the first in Texas in nearly a year, included a number of new personnel who have never participated in the process. "Somewhere in that mix there was never a phone call made to this office for me to accompany the witnesses across the street into the Huntsville Unit," Desel said.

Vaccines stop variants but
overseas travel unsafe: WHO

Agency's Europe director: Pockets of increasing transmission can spread

Copenhagen, May 20: Progress against the Coronavirus pandemic remains "fragile" and international travel should be avoided, a World Health Organisation director warned Thursday, while stressing that authorised vaccines work against all variants of concern.

"Right now, in the face of a continued threat and new uncertainty, we need to continue to exercise caution, and rethink or avoid international travel," WHO's European director Hans Kluge said, before adding that "pockets of increasing transmission" on the continent could quickly spread.

The so-called Indian variant, which might be more transmissible, has now been identified in at least 26 of the 53 countries in the WHO Europe region, Kluge said during his weekly press conference. But he said that authorised vaccines are effective against the new strain.

"All Covid-19 virus variants that have emerged so far do respond to the available, approved vaccines," Kluge said, adding that all Covid-19 variants can be controlled with the same public health and social measures used until now.

In the WHO's Europe region, which covers part of central Asia, the weekly number of new cases fell by 60 percent in a month, from 1.7 million in mid-April to 685,000 last week.

Although the Indian strain is still being studied, "it is able to spread rapidly" and replace the dominant lineage in Europe, Kluge said.

Variants are "not in themselves dangerous, but they can be if they change the behaviour of the virus," the WHO said in a note published on its website, adding that further lockdowns might become necessary to stop a new strain spreading out of control.

So far only 23 percent of people in the region have received a vaccine dose, with just 11 percent having had two doses, Kluge said, as he warned citizens to continue to exercise caution.

"Vaccines may be a light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot be blinded by that light," he said.

— AFP

SHOOTING:
TWO KILLED
IDENTIFIED

Oakland (US), May 20: Relatives of two people killed after shooters opened fire on a party bus driving on a San Francisco Bay Area freeway have identified them as two teenagers who were celebrating a friend's 21st birthday.

Alayasia Thurston, a 19, of Oakland, and Zoey Hughes, 16, of Modesto, died after at least two shooters opened fire on the bus around 12.20 am on Tuesday on Interstate 580 as it was returning to Oakland from San Francisco. Another five women were wounded.

— AP

FOSSIL | STUDY

The team reconstructed the region's evolutionary history by carbon dating the remains
Colonists drove mass reptile extinction on Guadeloupe

Washington, May 20: The arrival of European colonists led to a mass extinction of between 50 to 70 percent of the snake and lizard populations of the Guadeloupe Islands, according to a large fossil study published Wednesday.

The paper, which appeared in the journal *Science Advances*, highlights human impacts on animals that are often seen as less "charismatic" and therefore neglected in scientific study, its authors wrote.



A health worker takes a swab sample from a resident to test for the Covid-19 in Shenyang, in northeastern China's Liaoning province on Thursday.

— AFP

Nurse who cared for Boris
quits, criticises UK govt

London, May 20: A nurse who cared for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson in intensive care when he contracted Covid-19 has resigned, criticising the government's handling of the deadly pandemic and saying that nurses were not getting the "respect" and "pay" they deserve.

Jenny McGee, originally from New Zealand, said the pandemic that has claimed over 120,000 lives in the UK, has proved the toughest year in her career. "We have put ourselves

on the line and we have worked so incredibly hard, and there's a lot of talk about how we're all heroes and all that sort of stuff. But at the same time, I'm just not sure if I can do it. I don't know how much more I've got to give to the NHS (National Health Service)," she said in a Channel 4 documentary titled 'The Year Britain Stopped'.

"We're not getting the respect and pay that we deserve. I'm just sick of it. So I've handed in my resi-

gnation," She was quoted as saying in the *BBC* programme. The government has proposed 1 per cent pay rise for NHS staff this year. McGee also told the programme, which will be broadcast on May 24, that "a lot of nurses" felt the government "hadn't led very effectively" and that there had been "indecisiveness" and "so many mixed messages". The infection has so far infected 4,468,366 people and claimed 127,956 lives in the UK.

— PTI

EU finalizes Pfizer deal
for 1.8 billion vax doses

Brussels, May 20: The European Union's executive arm on Thursday finalised a third vaccine contract with Pfizer and BioNTech through 2023 for an additional 1.8 billion doses of their Covid-19 shot.

The European commission said the deal, which was agreed on behalf of all 27 EU countries earlier this month, will allow the buying of 900 million doses of the current shots

and of a serum adapted to the virus variants, with an option to purchase an extra 900 million shots.

The signature of the agreement comes less than a week before a court hearing in Brussels pitting the Commission against the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, which is accused by the EU of failing to deliver the promised number of doses of its own vaccine.

The Commission said that the deal with Pfizer-BioNTech stipulates that the production of doses must be based in the EU and that essential components are sourced from the region. "From the start of the supply in 2022, the delivery to the EU is guaranteed," the EU said. AstraZeneca's contract with the EU foresaw an initial 300 million doses.

— AP

Navalny health improves: Aide

Moscow, May 20: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has recovered after he ended a 24-day hunger strike last month demanding proper treatment behind bars for back pain and numbness in his limbs.

● **THE 44-YEAR-OLD** opposition figure went on hunger strike at the end of March demanding proper treatment behind bars for back pain and numbness in his limbs.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's best known domestic critic, is serving two-and-a-half years in a penal colony outside Moscow on old fraud charges he says are politically motivated. The 44-year-old opposition figure went on hunger strike at the end of March demanding proper treatment behind bars for severe back pain and numbness in his limbs. He ended the protest on April 23 after receiving treat-

ment at a civilian hospital.

His last public appearance was by video link in court during an appeal hearing at the end of April, where he appeared thin and said he had started eating a couple spoonfuls of porridge a day.

On Thursday, news agency TASS quoted the head of Russia's Federal Prison Service, Alexander Kalashnikov, as saying that Navalny "has recovered,

more or less".

"His weight is already up to 82 kilograms (180 pounds), I think," Kalashnikov told journalists.

The prisons chief, who has been sanctioned both by the US and the EU over the treatment of Navalny, added that the Kremlin critic is "eating normally". The director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), Ivan Zhdanov, confirmed his health was improving.

"His condition is now more or less normal. The recovery process is indeed underway," Zhdanov said on Ekho Moskvy radio.

Navalny's allies said that he weighed 93 kilograms (205 pounds) when he arrived in prison in

February, but that the figure had already fallen to 85 kilograms (187 pounds) by the time he launched his hunger strike.

His wife Yulia in mid-April said that his weight was down to 76 kilograms (167 pounds). The update on Navalny's health comes as Russia moves to outlaw his movement.

Next month a court will begin hearing whether to add his network of regional offices and the FBK to a list of "terrorist and extremist" organisations.

Russia's lower house of parliament on Tuesday approved legislation in a first reading that would ban members of "extremist" organisations from becoming lawmakers.

— AFP

Seven beheaded
in Guatemala
prison clashes

Guatemala City, May 20: At least seven inmates were killed, most of them beheaded, in clashes between rival gangs at a prison in western Guatemala on Wednesday, officials said.

Hundreds of police have been deployed to restore order at the Candel prison, which houses inmates from both the Mara Salvatrucha gang and their sworn enemies, the Barrio 18.

"Preliminarily, the death of seven inmates is known," the Ministry of the Interior (Interior) said in a statement, describing the situation as a "riot".

The figure was confirmed by the Prosecutor's Office, whose staff managed to gain access to the prison, located 205 kilometres (125 miles) west of the capital.

A spokesman for the National Civil Police, Jorge Aguilar, earlier said that the violence was caused by a confrontation between two gangs, and that at least six prisoners had been beheaded. Authorities suspect one of the gangs attacked the other in retaliation for an incident that took place several days ago, Aguilar

● **HUNDREDS OF** police have been deployed to restore order at the Candel prison, which houses inmates from both the Mara Salvatrucha gang and their sworn enemies, the Barrio 18.

● **AUTHORITIES SUSPECT** one of the gangs attacked the other in retaliation for an incident that took place several days ago

added. Gang violence and riots are common at the Candel prison, which has been condemned by human rights groups for its grim conditions.

Built to house five hundred inmates, it is currently home to over four times that number, police said. Guatemala's feared and violent gangs are known for their extortion rackets, in which they force businesspeople and bus operators to pay them protection money or face execution.

Gangs are responsible for nearly half of the 3,500 violent deaths a year in Guatemala — one of the highest death rates on earth.

— AFP

Apple CEO Cook
to testify today

San Ramon (US), May 20: Apple CEO Tim Cook will take the witness stand this Friday in a high-stakes courtroom battle over the lucrative commissions the iPhone maker has been raking in from its mobile app store.

The timing of Cook's highly anticipated testimony was confirmed Wednesday when a federal judge granted Apple's request to allow the 60-year-old executive to be the first witness sworn in Friday morning during a trial that has been unfolding in an Oakland, California, courtroom since the beginning of this month.

The trial revolves around an antitrust lawsuit filed last year by Epic Games, the maker of the popular video game Fortnite. Epic is trying to prove that commissions rang-

ing from 15 per cent to 30 per cent on transactions in apps installed on iPhones, iPads and iPods are part of a monopoly that Apple has created around a fortress blocking other payment options on its mobile devices.

Apple has brushed off the allegations as a desperate attempt by Epic to boost its own profits by breaching a contract covering a system that requires a small portion of the 1.8 million apps in its store to pay the commissions on transactions.

Apple says the commissions help it pay for the technology powering its products, including the security and privacy protections that has helped make iPhone so popular. Cook will be taking the stand as Apple prepares to wrap its case.

— AP

Court tells Ghosn
to repay salary

Amsterdam, May 20: A Dutch court on Thursday ordered fugitive former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn to repay nearly 5 million euros in salary to an Amsterdam-based alliance between Nissan and Mitsubishi, and rejected his claim for millions in compensation for wrongful dismissal.

The ruling came in a case in which Ghosn sought to have his 2018 sacking from Nissan-Mitsubishi B V overturned and demanded 15 million euros (\$16.5 million) in compensation. The court in Amsterdam rejected his claims, saying he did not have a valid contract with the company at the time.

The salary he was ordered to repay covers payments made to him by the Dutch joint venture from April until Novem-

ber 2018. The Dutch case stems from Nissan's decision to fire Ghosn after he was accused of financial misconduct in Japan. The former high-flying automotive executive skipped bail in Tokyo in 2019 and fled to Lebanon, where he grew up.

Ghosn, who was first arrested in November 2018, has said he is innocent of allegations in Japan that he under-reported his future income and committed a breach of trust by diverting Nissan money for his personal gain. He says the compensation was never decided on or received, and the Nissan payments were for legitimate business purposes. Ghosn, who has French, Brazilian and Lebanese citizenship, was sent by Renault in 1999 to salvage Nissan.

— AP

● **THE DATA** also revealed that tree-dwelling species were less impacted

disappearance of Guadeloupe's indigenous people within 20 years.

"We observed no extinction in the Amerindian time," said Bochaton.

The fossil record also showed reptile species were able to survive the climate transition at the end of the last Ice Age when this region became warmer and wetter.

As to what led to the eradication of species such as the curlytail roquet and the Marie-Galante Boa, the authors believe the colonists' cats,

mongoose, raccoons and even rats were mostly to blame.

Smaller reptiles fared better than the larger ones, which could be indicative of the invasive predators' preferences.

Their data also revealed that tree-dwelling species were less impacted — which Bochaton said might be down to the role of agriculture in the destruction of the ground-dwellers' habitats.

Bochaton said the work highlighted the importance of using fossil data

to determine how humans impacted a region's biodiversity. In the case of Guadeloupe, the transformation was so fast and so violent it occurred before contemporary naturalists had time to document the fauna. The research also comes at a time of increasing recognition that reptiles — long victims of "taxonomic chauvinism" in science — have an important role to play in ecosystems, from seed dispersal and pollination to important ecosystem engineers.

— AFP

DECCAN
Chronicle
21 MAY 2021

Govt must act fast to beat Covid's spread in villages

The stringent lockdown declared in several states to contain the spread of coronavirus seems to be paying some dividend as is evidenced by the gradual decline of the daily caseload numbers, from a daily average of four lakh or above a week ago to below three lakh now. However, the daily death toll has shown no signs of easing; it hovers around 4,000 steadily for more than a week now.

It is in this background that we must see reports about the second wave targeting India's villages, as admitted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting with state chief ministers a week ago. "I want to warn you about corona. The infection is spreading fast in villages," the Prime Minister has been quoted as telling the chief ministers. And all the anecdotal evidence available points to the fact that rural India is finding it difficult to cope with it as everything is in short supply; the bodies that floated on river Ganga was an indication of the crisis that has gripped the villages.

It is going to be a long and tough game to play the virus in rural settings as every single factor is in its favour. Compared with the urban settings, the rural areas lack a health infrastructure. Testing hesitancy, which is proving to be a major hurdle in the path of the health workers to identify the trouble spots, is on the rise in the villages due to many factors. The lack of awareness about the fatal nature of the infection and the trust in quacks and their home remedies are going to be major obstacles in the efforts to contain the pandemic in rural areas. Taking these factors together, the recent fall in numbers gives a realistic person very little reason to be optimistic about it.

The government will have to quickly roll out a programme for the rural areas, and the lack of health infrastructure is going to be a major issue there. However, no challenge is insurmountable if there is political will. The government must consider the suggestion as it has little choice if it wants to save its massive rural population from falling victim to the virus.

The government must use all the tools available with it to convince the people into dropping their testing hesitancy and joining the governmental efforts. This is easier said than done but people following Covid protocol would be the most cost-effective and efficient line of defence against the pandemic. There are experts who warn of a more fatal third wave; but the government must find ways to manage the wolf which is already at the door.

The WhatsApp conundrum

The Indian government has told WhatsApp once again to withdraw its new privacy policy while giving it seven days to respond to the notice. India is taking this up as a serious issue that concerns its sovereign laws and it would be up to Facebook-WhatsApp to determine whether it needs its Indian presence. The problem is, of course, bigger for WhatsApp as some of its two billion users are leaving the app in droves because they are fed up with its ham-handed and obstinate handling of issues over sharing data with its principal Facebook, which is often described as the world's greediest data harvesting machine.

Any user of the Internet should know the minute he signs up for a free site like the messaging platform WhatsApp that his privacy has already been compromised. In Facebook's case, it stood exposed by rivals, including Apple, that it collects much more data — device ID, user ID and contact info — of a user than is really required for offering its secure messaging. Encryption of messages is still its best feature as all individual user's conversations are secure and no one has access to them unless they are leaked by other users in a group. However, the reason for collecting excessive data is hard to understand.

Being a free platform, WhatsApp was at liberty to base any advertising fed to the user on the basis of the data collected. But it was not free to share some data with Facebook, whose last quarter of 2020 revenues were upwards of \$28 billion. Facebook did clarify that its change of terms would only enable its business customers to communicate to WhatsApp users who allow access. A user can now turn off, in WA settings, access to anyone who is not on his/her contact list.

Facebook-WhatsApp's performance during this privacy storm was never transparent enough and it exacerbated the situation by warning users now to sign up under new terms or face cuts in access to full functionality. It is now up to users to decide whether to stay on or switch off and look for alternatives.

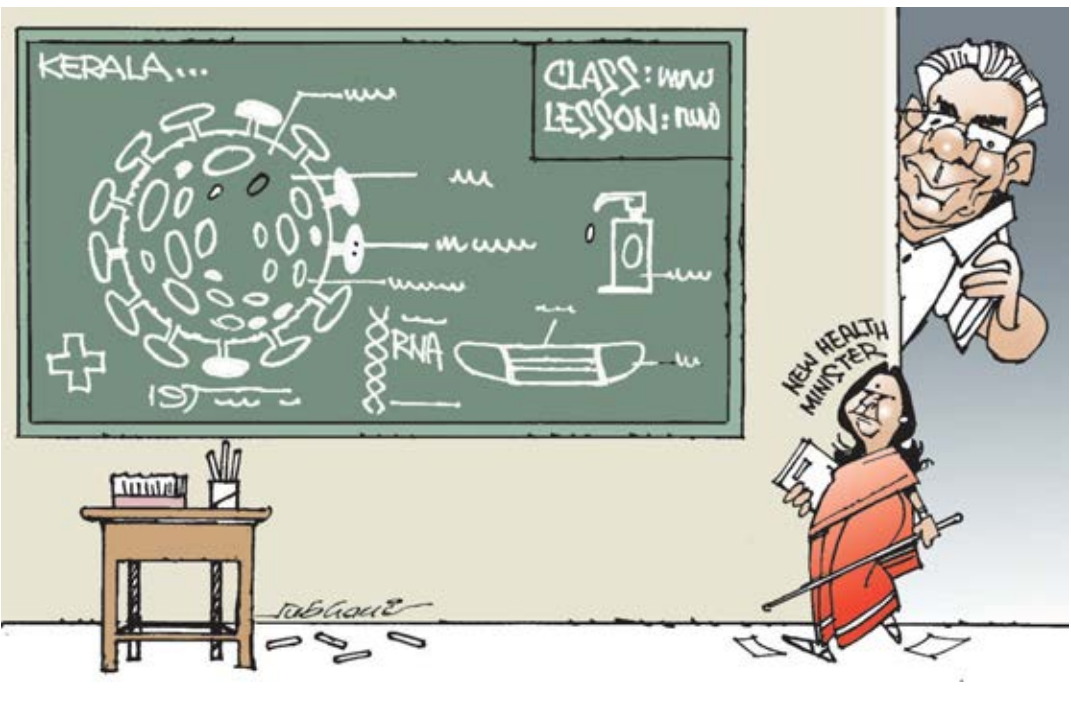
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Thiruvananthapuram: St Joseph Press Thycaud post, Cotton Hills, Thiruvananthapuram-14, Ph: 0471-2735105/67, Fax: 0471-4016112 Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08ss

Subhani



RSS & BJP: Is there a shift in the equation?



Anand K. Sahay
Far & Near

Some recent observations on India's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic emanating from the highest levels of the RSS — praised by many as a selfless, nationalist outfit doing social service, and denounced as a "fascist" or "militarist" body by a range of critics — have left the country mystified. This is because the RSS is the inspiration behind the founding of the BJP.

The RSS can obfuscate — speak assertively, but also as a ventriloquist, when needed. It works in a bamboo curtain kind of inner culture. As with China's power pyramid, words coming out of the RSS's Nagpur headquarters lend themselves to multiple plausible meanings.

This is probably because the organisation was suppressed in certain periods like after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, but also because before the BJP's rise to power, it sought to play down its ambition that its creation should proceed to capture power.

Now that the BJP is at the pinnacle of political power and not any rival, the RSS should no longer have to deploy the artifice of stealth in negotiating relations with the holders of national power. But here lies the irony: though the BJP, the election-fighting instrument it created, is in power in New Delhi, the RSS still appears to be careful in the way it says things out aloud. The reasons are up for speculation.

However, in the context of the Narendra Modi government's conspicuous failure to tackle Covid-19's second wave, as well as its striking failure to offer the country hope — with crematoriums and graveyards becoming increas-

ingly out of reach, oxygen, medicines and hospital beds running short, and hundreds of (presumably Hindu) corpses floating downstream from UP in the holy Ganga — RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's piercing words, although couched in calm delivery, may give the government cause for anxiety.

On May 15, winding up the "Positivity Unbound" lecture series sponsored by the RSS, Mr Bhagwat gave a pep talk on "collectively" facing the present "difficult" times, when there might be a death in every family one knows, and go into a fightback mode against the virus. But he also said: "The people, administration, government each got into *gaflat*!" In other words, they goofed up; they failed to gauge the situation and respond appropriately.

These may have been the words of an Opposition leader, except that they weren't. The RSS no doubt intends that the Modi government regain its composure and is ready to help. But perhaps there is also something else implied here: there is no immediate rush. But should there be a run on the bank, the RSS may prefer to be forearmed.

Some Assembly elections are due next year, including in Uttar Pradesh, the nation's biggest state where the BJP did far from well in the recent panchayat polls. If popular disenchantment surfaces in a big way in voting behaviour in the Assembly election early next year, UP, which sends up the largest contingent of BJP MPs, the RSS is unlikely to settle down to regard the situation with equanimity.

And the way to prepare for any eventuality may

be to start cultivating the ground from now to be able to guide key changes in the government's top tier if push came to shove. All of this must be done in good time and none of this can be spelt out. But it is hard to miss that a new particle now hangs in the air.

Through one policy disaster after another — demonetisation, GST rollout, the sapping farmers' agitation (which continues), the disconcerting unemployment graph, the RSS stood foursquare behind the government. But the Covid-19 disaster, with corpses floating down the holiest river for Hindus, is a different matter — indeed a different kind of matter.

In a recent newspaper article, a senior RSS figure, Ram Madhav, who until recently was a BJP general secretary, asked the "political leadership" — meaning the top government leadership — to show "a little more transparency, a little more engagement with the public, and a little more openness to constructive criticism and enlightened expert opinion from outside the government... After all, the lives of millions are at stake". It does seem the RSS is signalling that all is not well.

Wearing BJP colours, two RSS "pracharaks", or full-time volunteers dedicated to the spread of Hindu nationalism in a country of many religions and spiritual mores, have made it to the top. But Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi had framed a very different relationship with the mother organisation, the RSS, upon becoming Prime Minister.

Mr Modi has been on the whole solicitous, his

BJP predecessor in office was more correct, rather than deferential. A part of the reason may have been that Vajpayee's government had to depend on a host of secular coalition partners for survival. Speculation still abounds on this issue, but it's evident the relationship between the BJP and RSS is not a carefully studied subject.

While well-known research studies exist on the RSS itself, the sociology of the organisation, its inner workings, and the way it seeks to articulate power in relation to the BJP (earlier Jan Sangh) and influence in Hindu society more generally, has not been adequately studied. The literature is mostly in the nature of self-serving propaganda, hagiography, or trenchant criticism from critics.

The Jan Sangh was created under the RSS's aegis in 1951, and the BJP in 1980. Both were the same thing in spirit. However, at no point did the Jan Sangh wield national power or become a mass party. The RSS, its creator, was the shadow that loomed over it. The spirit of the RSS is the fountainhead of the culture and organisation of the BJP too. But the BJP has become something of a mass party. It has secured power at the Centre for which it doesn't depend on allies. Therefore, its government and leadership may not be a pushover if the RSS showed displeasure.

On the other hand, the BJP can't fail to notice that it's the spread of the RSS itself in a communalised polity that ineluctably promoted the BJP's rise as a mass party. At every level of the party and government, the levers are in the hands of RSS personnel. It's evident that the RSS-BJP leadership is shot through with contradictions. What factors give one the upper hand and not the other, at a time when the BJP holds national power, is a complex subject and needs attention. Which entity will prevail is a matter of great interest to the entire country.

The spirit of the RSS is the fountainhead of the culture and organisation of the BJP too. But the BJP has become something of a mass party.

LETTERS

WORKING WOMEN'S WOES

First and foremost is women's sense of self-worth, which goes a long way in building confidence among women of this generation. Women are not caged parrots as in the olden days and they are free to go around and achieve things in various fields with confidence and conviction. Women rule the roost in the offices, companies and at the same time make our dream come true in our household as well. Women are confident and they will work and achieve targets in the stipulated time. But in the present-day pandemic situation, the position is changing and the will to work for women is diminishing slowly and steadily. To tackle the realities of workplace bias, business leaders need to embrace an innovative proven approach.

Accelerating gender equality matters now more than ever, with the pandemic hitting women harder. It's time to act — failure to do so would threaten to push the gender equality timeline by more than 50 years.

M.R. Jayanthi,
Coimbatore

MISUSE OF CBI

The arrest of leaders who were recently sworn in as state cabinet ministers and belonging to ruling Trinamool Congress party in West Bengal in the five-year-old Narada sting operation case by CBI has raised the political heat in the state, besides casting a shadow on the credibility of the country's premier investigation agency. It is nobody's case that the arrested leaders who were purportedly caught on camera accepting and negotiating bribes in a sting operation can go unpunished. However, the fact that several erstwhile TMC leaders who switched loyalties to BJP before the recently held state assembly polls but stand as accused in the same case has not yet been arrested by CBI goes to prove that it acts in partisan manner and at the behest of its political masters at the Centre. Using CBI to settle scores with opposition ruled states does not augur well for our federal structure.

M.Jeyaram,
Sholavandan



Mahir Ali

Killings don't end; but America's love affair with Israel is slowly withering

Well before he plucked up the courage to timorously call for a ceasefire, Joe Biden has been echoing the mantra recited by a long line of his predecessors: Israel has the right to defend itself. That discredited framework glosses over pertinent questions, such as: does that entail the right to slaughter children, including infants? Ignoring the scale of the carnage in Gaza, the predictable riposte would be: well, Israeli children have also been killed, and remain at risk. Besides, Hamas invited the retaliation.

That's not an absurd argument. Hamas could not possibly have been unaware that its largely ineffective rockets would elicit a brutal response. And Israeli kids obviously have as much right to safety as Palestinian children.

But that is not how the moral calculus operates in that part of the world. Much of the mainstream Western media has no qualms about implying some kind of equivalence between the supposed combatants. Notwithstan-

ding the extreme imbalance of military power, there's a kind of unacknowledged truth in there: if Hamas can be framed as a terrorist organisation, the Israeli state qualifies for that accolade many times over.

That is borne out by its behaviour both historically and in the present instance, where the ratio of casualties is already roughly 1:20, and destined to grow even more disproportionate. All too often, the crude missiles lobbed by Hamas and its allies land in the desert. Sometimes they pose a hazard for Palestinians. Israel claims that 90pc of the rest are intercepted by its Iron Dome defences. That's worth bearing in mind when reading about thousands of Hamas rockets heading into Israel.

Yes, they are 'indiscriminate'. The Israel Defence Forces, on the other hand, are extremely discriminating in aiming their attacks. Hospitals, schools and towers housing media offices all fall in the category of military targets. If entire families are slaughtered in the process, that's always 'inadvertent'.

As a senator in 1988, Biden declared that if Israel did not exist, America would have been obliged to invent it as a means of defending US interests in the Middle East. For 'interests', read 'oil'. The significance of that fossil fuel has been diminishing in recent years, but the ardency of the fossilised fools remains intact.

Biden faces a somewhat tougher task in this context than most of his Democratic predecessors. The Democratic establishment's hitherto more or less unconditional allegiance to Israel is no longer going unquestioned. Most Democratic senators, including several prominent Jews, were calling for a ceasefire long before the president chimed in, after his administration resisted efforts to produce a UN Security Council statement. Of course, Israel is in no way obliged to heed such requests, regardless of their source, because it knows there will be no price to pay. Key UNSC resolutions have remained unheeded.

It's unlikely the UN could make much difference, but the US can.

Apart from the dogged moral support it proffers, the nearly \$4 billion it unconditionally provides every year offers substantial scope for leverage. That subsidy feeds directly into the client state's fascist tendencies.

That grotesque US-Israel love affair now faces a threat, with a growing number of American Jews wearying of the Zionist project, particularly its manifestations under Benjamin Netanyahu's reign. Netanyahu, though, is merely a symptom of the problem which has been writ large since the days of David Ben-Gurion. The Zionist project wasn't incompatible with 19th-century European imperialism, but something of an anachronism in the postwar 20th century, when the broad trend was towards liberation rather than colonialism.

In the wake of the horrendous Holocaust, the biggest global powers found Israeli exceptionalism acceptable. The consequences for the land's indigenous inhabitants were barely taken into consideration. The plethora of potential risks involved in implanting a mainly European-run

entity in the Arab world were mainly ignored. The ethnic cleansing of 1948 elicited no Western opposition: there was no alarm over certain Nazi tendencies being echoed by their victims.

The Arab world too has frequently filtered in its (often foolish) response to Israeli power. Lately, much of it has abandoned the pretence of caring for the plight of dispossessed Palestinians. Last weekend, the hashtag "Palestine is not my cause" reportedly circulated in the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait. It never was, frankly, but one must be grateful to the over-privileged Gulf Arabs for admitting as much. Israel, on the other hand, will never admit that it encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood precursors of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to set up shop in the occupied territories as a counterweight to the broadly secular Fatah. The project was a success: where would Netanyahu and his ilk be today without Hamas? As for how long this dance of death can be sustained, the answer is still blowing in the wind.

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,564.86	-0.68
Nifty 50	14,906.00	-0.83
S&P 500*	4,161.83	1.12
Dollar (₹)	73.10	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.23	0.39
Euro (₹)	89.09	0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,994.237	0.49
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.37	-1.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.968	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.642	-0.041

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sugar exports subsidy cut to ₹4,000/ tonne

The Centre slashed subsidy on sugar exports from Rs 6,000 per tonne to Rs 4,000 per tonne with immediate effect in view of firm global prices. For the ongoing 2020-21 marketing year (Oct.-Sept.), the government had fixed a subsidy of Rs 6,000 per tonne to facilitate exports. Sugar mills were mandated to export 6 million tonne of sugar in the current year. So far, 5.7 million tonne of sugar has been contracted for export.

Bosch Q4 net jumps six-fold to ₹482 crore



Auto component major Bosch posted a six-fold increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 482 crore for the fourth quarter, from Rs 81 crore a year ago, driven by robust sales. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 3,218 crore from Rs 2,237 crore. For FY21, Bosch reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 481 crore against Rs 650 crore in 2019-20. Revenue from operations stood at Rs 9,716 crore as compared with Rs 9,842 crore in FY20.

Mindtree to buy L&T's NxT Digital Business

Mindtree said it will acquire the NxT Digital Business from Larsen and Toubro for Rs 198 crore, a move that will enable the mid-sized IT firm to capture opportunities in the IoT and Industry 4.0 space. The total consideration for the deal was "Rs 198 crore including earnouts.", Mindtree said in a filing. L&T is the promoter/holding company of Mindtree with a 61.03 per cent stake in the Bengaluru-based company.

Nucleus Software gets Bank of Sydney contract

Nucleus Software, a provider of lending and transaction banking products, said Bank of Sydney has chosen its lending solution, FinnOne Neo, to accelerate its digital lending transformation strategy. Bank of Sydney wanted a sophisticated lending solution to automate and digitize the origination processes for mortgages and credit cards. With FinnOne Neo, Bank of Sydney will be able to launch new products faster, it said.



₹250 kit to give result in 15 minutes Covid home test kit to hit market next week

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 20

A Pune-based research laboratory's indigenously developed self-use rapid antigen test (RAT) kit called CoviSelf, which enables Covid-19 test at home for as little as Rs 250, would be available across pharmacies from next week.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the nodal body in the fight against the tricky virus, on Wednesday officially approved the test kit, India's first such.

"This test at home will take just two minutes and results will be available in 15 minutes flat," Sujeet Jain, director at Mylab Discovery Solutions, told Financial Chronicle.

"The CoviSelf test kit will be priced Rs 250 inclusive of taxes," Jain said, adding that the firm was ready to produce 10 lakh test kits every day and the production would be ramped up to 15 lakh units daily within 15 days.

He said the kits would be available by the end of next week in more than seven lakh pharmacies and the company's online pharmacy partners across India.

"After meeting the needs of our country, we will also export the kits," he said, adding that about 40 scientists and technicians had worked on the project for about five-six months to develop the kit.

Jain said the firm had spent over Rs 150 crore on the product in capex and on operating expenses.



"This test is for self-use. If you test positive via this there is no need for RT-PCR test, as per ICMR. Any adult can use this kit by reading our manual," he explained.

The kit has been designed in a way that it is extremely simple to use and it is not a biohazard. There is a disposal bag that comes along for safely disposing off the items after use.

Meanwhile, the ICMR said only symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of people who have tested positive in laboratory-conducted tests should use this kit. "Indiscriminate testing is not advised," the top medical body said while issuing detailed guidelines on the kit's use.

"All symptomatic individuals who test negative by RAT should get themselves immediately tested by RT-PCR," the ICMR said.

The testing will be monitored using Mylab's mobile phone application, through which users are

advised to click a picture of the test strip after completing the test procedure.

"This easy-to-use test combines with Myab's AI-powered mobile app so that a user can know his/her positive status, submit the result to ICMR directly for traceability, and know what to do next in either case of result," Jain said.

Data transmitted by the phone will be centrally captured in a secure server that is connected to the ICMR's Covid-19 testing portal, where all data will be eventually stored.

Experts say these home-based tests are useful when a runaway infection pattern is observed.

"These tests are used in developed countries such as US and UK. Since these tests have high specificity, it can be used at places where positivity rate is high so as to be able to detect cases early. Positive cases through RAT are mostly true positives," Dr G.C. Khilnani, former head, pulmonology department at AIIMS, Delhi, said.

HOME LOAN MARKET GROWS 9.6%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 20

The home loan market grew 9.6 per cent in the December 2020 quarter over the year-ago period despite the pandemic impact.

With a 9.6 per cent growth, the home loan market made a recovery towards pre-Covid December 2019 level, when the growth was 10.4 per cent. Active housing loan borrowers' base as of December 2020 stood higher than pre-pandemic levels in December 2019, with a yearly growth of nearly 5 per cent, as per the data from CRIF High Mark.

The affordable housing segment constituted 60 per cent of the market by value and nearly 90 per cent by volume. Tier-II and III geographies witnessed a higher annual growth rate in home loan book compared to metros, with a large part of the growth coming from the affordable and mid-market segment.

Visakhapatnam and Coimbatore were among the top 10 cities, having the largest yearly growth of over 10 per cent.

BANKS MAY SHIFT ABOUT 80 LARGE NPA A/Cs TO NARCL

New Delhi, May 20: Banks are likely to transfer about 80 large NPA accounts for resolution to the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL), expected to be operational soon.

NARCL is the name coined for the bad bank announced in the Budget 2021-22. A bad bank refers to a financial institution that takes over the bad assets of lenders and undertakes resolution.

The size of each of these NPA accounts is over Rs 500 crore and the banks have identified about 70-80 such accounts to be transferred to the proposed bad bank, sources said. NPAs of over Rs 2 lakh crore could move out of the books of the banks to the bad bank.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget 2021-22 announced that the high level of provisioning by public sector banks of their stressed assets calls for measures to clean up the bank books. — PTI

FY21 ITR filing deadline extended till Sept. 30

New Delhi, May 20: The government on Thursday extended the due date of filing income tax returns for 2020-21 for individuals by two months till September 30.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies to a month till November 30.

As per the income tax law, for individuals whose accounts are not required to be audited and who usually file their income tax

Gold to gain from crypto fall, dollar weakness

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 20

The fall in the value of cryptocurrencies and a subdued dollar index will be supportive of gold. Once the speculative money starts moving from cryptocurrencies to gold, the yellow metal prices are likely to touch fresh highs.

"Cryptocurrency is neither a currency nor an asset class. But we have seen enormous amounts of speculative money going into them in the past one year as Bitcoin value moved up from \$8,000 to \$60,000 levels. Single day drop of 40 per cent has made investors realise that cryptocurrency movement has been just speculation," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

According to him, the movement of speculative money into cryptocurrencies had led to sluggishness in gold in the past few months despite strong fundamentals. However, now the trend shall see a reversal and this has been evident from the gold price movement in the past few sessions.

"Gold prices in the international markets have gained by around 11 per cent while on the MCX futures it has gained by around 10 per cent between March 8 and May 19," said Prathamesh Mallya, AVP-research, non-agri



commodities and currencies, Angel Broking.

Analysts at JPMorgan Chase too have found that large institutional investors are dumping bitcoin in favour of gold. The bank in January had predicted that bitcoin could conceivably become an alternative to gold, hitting \$146,000 in the long term.

The fall in the value of the dollar in recent weeks also increased optimism in gold prices. The dollar index on May 19 came down to 89, lowest level in a year.

Mallya expects gold prices to move higher towards Rs 51,000 per 10 gm mark in a month. According to Kedia, it will take at least a month's time for the speculative money to move into gold. Once this happens, international prices can move towards \$2,100 per ounce in a couple of months.

New investment projects down 68%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 20

Despite the recovery seen during the second half of the year, new investment projects declined by 68 per cent in FY21. Government share in the new projects came down to 32 per cent last fiscal.

In FY21, new investment projects aggregated to Rs 5.18 lakh crore against Rs 16.28 lakh crore in FY20. This was also the lowest since FY04, when total investment projects stood at Rs 4.73 lakh crore. Since FY05, new investment projects were always above Rs 10 lakh crore each year with seven of them witnessing above Rs 20 lakh crore, as per data from Care Ratings.

New investment projects had stood at Rs 2.92 lakh crore in FY03 and it steeply went up to Rs 27.07 lakh crore in FY09. A trough was witnessed in the FY12-FY14 period when there was an increase in NPAs of banks and subsequently the quantum of stalled

projects increased.

Until FY17, government companies dominated the mix with a share of 58 per cent. This has been coming down since then and in FY21 it was 32 per cent from 49 per cent in FY20.

The fall in investments in FY21 can be primarily attributed to the lockdown. The capacity utilisation rate had fallen sharply in June 2020 to 47.3 per cent and since then recovered to 63.3 per cent and 66.6 per cent respectively in September and December 2020.

Lower investments also indicate the increased borrowings witnessed last year was for working capital and refinancing purposes. Of the Rs 5.18 lakh crore, metal and metal products, electricity and chemical products accounted for major share of the new investment projects.

Investment is a concern because the gross fixed capital formation rate has been falling from 34.3 per cent in FY12 to 28.8 per cent in FY20.

THAILAND PRIORITISES WORKERS FOR JOBS TO REVIVE ECONOMY

RANDY THANTHONG-KNIGHT MAY 20

Thailand is adding workers to the front of the vaccination queue in an effort to buttress the economy as a raging Covid outbreak threatens to delay plans to reopen borders for foreign tourists.

Millions of employees under the social security programme in Bangkok, the nation's capital and financial hub, and nine provinces with large economies will get their shots along with other priority groups, according to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha.

"This group is an important engine to the nation's economy," Prayuth said.

— Bloomberg

BADGE OF HONOUR Verification application to appear in Account Settings tab

Twitter starts verification for blue tick

New Delhi, May 20: Twitter will start rolling out its verification application process from Thursday after which approved user accounts can sport the 'blue verified badge'.

Twitter had paused its public verification programme a few years ago. However, last year, Twitter said it would re-launch the account verification process in 2021.

On Thursday, Twitter highlighted that it has also started automatically removing the verified badge from those accounts that no longer meet the updated criteria.

We're excited to share that starting today, we'll begin rolling out our new verification application process and reviewing

public applications for verification on Twitter. Today's application rollout marks the next milestone in our plans to give more transparency, credibility, and clarity to verification on Twitter, Twitter said in a blog.

Verified accounts that repeatedly violate the Twitter Rules are subject to have the blue badge removed, it added.

The microblogging platform said over the past several months, it has been working to bring clarity to the verification eligibility criteria and has launched a new policy shaped by public feedback.

Twitter highlighted that it has also started enforcing that policy by automatically removing the verified



badge from accounts that no longer meet the updated criteria for verification, such as those that are inactive or incomplete. The coveted 'blue badge' is one of the ways Twitter helps people distinguish the authenticity of accounts that are of high public interest, and gives Twitter users more context about who they're having

conversations with.

With today's application launch, we're also introducing new guidelines for verified accounts on Twitter. These verification guidelines are intended to encourage healthy conversations for the betterment of the Twitter community overall, the US-based company said.

To qualify for verification, users must belong to one of the six categories—government; companies/brands/organisations; news organisations and journalists; entertainment; sports and gaming; and activists/organisers/other influential individuals.

Twitter pointed out that it is planning to introduce more categories later this

year, such as those for scientists, academics, and religious leaders.

It said users must also provide a profile name, a profile image, and either a confirmed email address or phone number. The account must also be active within the last six months and have a record of adherence to the Twitter Rules.

Over the next few weeks, everyone on Twitter will start to see the new verification application directly in the Account Settings tab, Twitter said, adding that once the application is submitted, users will get an emailed response. If the application is approved, users will see the blue badge automatically on their profile. — PTI

DBS HAS FUNDS TO BUY CITI INDIA UNIT: BERNSTEIN

CHANYAPORN CHANJAROEN MAY 20

DBS Group Holdings Ltd has sufficient capital to bid for Citigroup Inc's consumer assets in India valued at \$82.7 billion (\$2 billion) without needing to raise additional funds, Sanford C. Bernstein & Co analysts said.

It's a case of "either go big or go home" for DBS to further expand in India where the Singapore-based bank also acquired Lakshmi Vilas Bank Ltd in November, Bernstein analysts led by Kevin Kwek wrote in a report on Thursday. DBS chief executive officer Piyush Gupta last month said he is interested in the US bank's assets that are for sale in the South Asian country, as well as in China, Taiwan and Indonesia.

A takeover of Citi's India unit would be DBS's largest acquisition since 2001, when the Singapore firm spent \$5.4 billion buying the Hong Kong unit formerly known as Dao Heng Bank Group Ltd. Among the US bank's assets for sale, India stands out as "the crown jewel," Kwek wrote. Its credit card and wealth business would be attractive to any bidder given the country's economic growth rate and population size, he added.

DBS has pledged to make more income outside its home turf, where the bank derived 70 per cent of its \$84.7 billion profit in 2020.

DBS remains very disciplined on acquisitions and wouldn't be drawn into any "bidding frenzy," Gupta said April 30 when asked about his interest in Citi's asset sale.

Citi plans to exit retail banking in 13 markets across Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, as part of a strategy by CEO Jane Fraser, who took over in March.

In April, DBS said it would pay \$81.1 billion for a 13 per cent chunk in China's Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank Corp., and Gupta has indicated an interest to raise the size of that stake.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Legendary Milkha Singh is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh has tested positive for Covid-19 and is in isolation at his Chandigarh residence.

The 91-year-old, popularly known as Flying Sikh, is asymptomatic and claims to be in "high spirits". "A couple of our helpers earlier tested positive and so all the family members did the tests. Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha said.

"I am fine and there is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," he added.

None of the other family members, including Milkha's wife Nirmal Kaur, a former India volleyball captain, returned a positive test. — PTI

Shooting coach Monali dies at 44

New Delhi: In a big loss to the Indian shooting fraternity, coach and technical official Monali Gorhe died of mucormycosis on Thursday. She was 44 and is survived by her mother and a sister. Monali was admitted to a hospital after being diagnosed with Covid-19 but was discharged, only to get re-admitted to treat mucormycosis.

Many people recovering from Covid-19 have of late been afflicted by black fungus — or mucormycosis — disease. It is a fungal infection that affects the nose, eye and sometimes the brain.

A few hours before her death, her father Manohar Gorhe too succumbed to Covid-19.

Monali was the coach of the pistol core group. She had also served as the national coach of the Sri Lankan shooting team. — PTI

Bhuvneshwar's dad passes away

New Delhi: India pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar's father, Kiran Pal Singh on Thursday died at his Meerut residence after battling liver cancer for the last eight months.

He was 63 and is survived by his wife Indresh Devi and son and daughter Bhuvneshwar and Rekha respectively.

According to *ESPNCricinfo*, Singh was first detected with the illness in September last year when Bhuvneshwar was playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in UAE for the IPL. "It is understood that Bhuvneshwar's return from the IPL in UAE, where he was representing Sunrisers Hyderabad, was mainly due to his father's health condition," the report said. Singh was undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy, at the All Institute of Medical Science here after consulting doctors in the UK. — PTI

Archer doubtful for India series

London: England pacer Jofra Archer will undergo a surgery on his right elbow on Friday, which could effectively rule him out of the first part of the five-match Test series against visiting India beginning on August 4. Archer is already out of the upcoming two-match Test series against New Zealand and this will be his second surgery after being operated upon on his right hand. "Jofra has been reviewed by a medical consultant in respect of his right elbow soreness. He will now proceed to surgery tomorrow," the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said in a tweet. — PTI

Medical insurance for sportspersons

New Delhi: The government has decided to widen its medical insurance cover for sportspersons by increasing the number of beneficiary athletes and including contractual coaches and support staff from this year in the wake of the pandemic. The Sports Authority of India on Thursday said that with this decision, the coverage would increase to more than 13,000 athletes, coaches and support staff. Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said the well-being of athletes, coaches and support staff are his ministry's priority. — PTI

REJUVENTUS

Dethroned as league champs, Juventus claw back to claim Italian Cup

Reggio Emilia (Italy), May 20: Dethroned league champions Juventus beat Atalanta 2-1 to win the Italian Cup for the 14th time on Wednesday as fans returned to the stadium for the first time in over a year.

Goals in either half from Dejan Kulusevski and Federico Chiesa gave coach Andrea Pirlo his second second trophy of the season after the Italian Super Cup, on the day he turned 42.

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was denied a first trophy of his coaching career, and Atalanta's second trophy after the 1963 Coppa Italia.

It was a boost for Juventus who go into the final weekend of the season with their Champions League qualification going down to the wire after Inter Milan ended their nine-year league reign. Gianluigi Buffon was in the Juventus goal for the final time in his career and the veteran keeper was solid on the night winning his sixth Coppa Italia 22 years after his first with Parma.

The veteran pulled off a big save just after kickoff at the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia.

Duvan Zapata had pulled back for Jose Luis Palomino with 43-year-old Buffon using his legs to stop the ball.

Despite the Bergamo side's early domination Juve made the breakthrough after half an hour. Cristiano Ronaldo went down but amid a scramble in front of goal Weston McKennie sent the ball across to Kulusevski who curled into the net.

But ten minutes later Ruslan Malinovskyi blasted in the equaliser.

Pierluigi Gollini denied Kulusevski a second just before the hour after good work from Chiesa.

Chiesa then clipped the post after latching onto a Ronaldo backheel flick. But the former Fiorentina forward made no mistake with quarter of an hour remaining after combining with Kulusevski to beat Gollini. — AFP



Juventus' Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (centre) holds the winners trophy as his teammates celebrate winning the final of the Italian Cup (Coppa Italia) match against Atalanta at the Citta del Tricolore stadium in Reggio Emilia on Wednesday. — AFP

Liverpool move into top 4; Spurs' Euro hopes dented

London, May 20: Liverpool set up a dramatic final-day battle to qualify for the Champions League with a vital 3-0 win at Burnley, while Tottenham's bid to reach the Europa League suffered a blow in a 2-1 defeat against Aston Villa on Wednesday.

Jürgen Klopp's side moved into fourth place in the Premier League thanks to goals from Roberto Firmino, Nathaniel Phillips and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.

Liverpool are above fifth-placed Leicester on goal difference, with the Reds on +24 and the Foxes on +20. If Liverpool win

their final game at home to Crystal Palace on Sunday, they should finish in the top four and salvage a difficult campaign that saw them tamely surrender the title to Manchester City. Leicester host Tottenham on Sunday, while third-placed Chelsea travel to Aston Villa.

Firmino put Liverpool on course for their fourth consecutive victory with a clinical finish from Andy Robertson's 43rd minute cross. Phillips got the second goal in the 52nd minute with a header from Sadio Mané's cross for his first goal for the club. Oxlade-Chamberlain lashed in Liverpool's

third in the 88th minute.

Fifth and sixth place finishes secure a spot in next season's Europa League, while seventh place brings entry into a play-off for the new Europa Conference League.

Tottenham will have to wait until their last game of the season to discover of their European destiny.

A second defeat in their last three games left them in seventh place, level on points with eighth-placed Everton and three points behind sixth-placed West Ham.

They will have to beat Leicester and hope West Ham lose to Southampton to pip their London rivals on goal difference. — AFP

MBAPPE DAZZLES AS PSG CROWNED WITH FRENCH CUP

Paris, May 20: Paris Saint-Germain have a domestic double in their sights after they won the French Cup by beating Monaco 2-0 in Wednesday's final at the Stade de France.

Goals from Mauro Icardi and Kylian Mbappe won a largely uninspiring final for PSG who now go into the weekend's final round of French league fixtures with 10th league title still a possibility. PSG have now won the French Cup six times in the last seven seasons having reached the final every year since 2015. It was also the second trophy of coach Mauricio Pochettino's managerial career. — AFP



Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate with the trophy after winning the French Cup final match against Monaco at the Stade de France stadium in Saint Denis, North of Paris, on Wednesday. Paris Saint-Germain won 2-0. — AP

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM AWAIT COVID TEST RESULTS AFTER REACHING DOHA

Doha, May 20: The Indian football team players underwent Covid-19 tests on arrival and are waiting for results before starting their preparatory camp ahead of the joint Qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup. The 28-member squad and support staff landed here on Wednesday night from New Delhi.

"The 28 players and the support staff are in compulsory quarantine till they receive the test results of the conducted RT-PCR tests in Doha," the All India Football Federation said in a release.

The squad will, thereafter, be allowed to kick-off their preparatory camp as part of their preparation for the

matches," it added.

The team, bolstered by the return of Sunil Chhetri, will have a preparatory camp inside a bio-bubble here before its first match on June 3 against hosts Qatar. The round of matches are being played in Doha in view of the pandemic which doesn't allow the original format of home and away matches. — PTI

PEREZ LEADS 1ST PRACTICE SESSION, HAMILTON FIFTH

Monaco, May 20: Red Bull driver Sergio Perez clocked the fastest time Thursday during the first practice session for the Monaco Grand Prix.

Perez had a best lap of 1 minute, 12.49 seconds on the sinewy 3.4-kilometre circuit that snakes around the picturesque Principality. Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz Jr. and Max Verstappen, Perez's teammate, were next.

AlphaTauri driver Pierre Gasly had the fourth fastest time. He was followed by F1 champion Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

Hamilton is 14 points ahead of Verstappen in the standings after they finished 1-2 in the first four races. Hamilton will be aiming for his 101st career pole position on Saturday and his 99th win on Sunday. — AP

Dravid to coach India on SL tour

New Delhi, May 20: National Cricket Academy chief and former India captain Rahul Dravid is set to be the head coach of the Indian white-ball squad that will tour Sri Lanka in July.

Dravid, who stopped travelling with the India 'A' and U-19 teams after taking over as NCA head in Bengaluru, will be the head coach of the second-string side in the absence of Ravi Shastri, who will be busy with the Test side in England at the same time.

"He will travel with the team to Sri Lanka in all likelihood," a BCCI source said.

It was reported on May 17 that Dravid was being considered for the assignment.

Bowling coach Paras Mhambrey will also be a part of the support staff.

India are expected to play three ODIs and as many T20s in Sri Lanka in July though the schedule has not been announced yet.

The squad will have plenty of fringe players and some established white-



Rahul Dravid

● **Rahul Dravid will be the head coach of the second-string side for Sri Lanka tour in the absence of Ravi Shastri, who will be busy with the Test side in England at the same time.**

ball specialists.

Hardik Pandya, Shikhar Dhawan and Shreyas Iyer are in the running for captaincy.

It remains to be seen if Iyer recovers in time from his shoulder surgery to play in Sri Lanka. — PTI

4,000 FANS TO BE ALLOWED FOR INDIA vs NZ WTC FINAL

Southampton, May 20: The World Test Championship final between India and New Zealand in Southampton will be held in the presence of 4000 spectators, Hampshire County Club head Rod Bransgrove has said.

The Covid-19 situation has improved in the UK and around 1500 people were allowed to watch the county game between Leicestershire and Hampshire at the Aageas Bowl, which hosts the WTC final from June 18.

"We're staging a four-day county game from today and for the first time since September 2019 fans were allowed for a cricket match in England. The other county games of this round will begin tomorrow and those games too will see crowds," Rod Bransgrove, the head of Hampshire County Club said.

Bransgrove told the website that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the ICC are permitting a crowd of "4000 people" in the eagerly-awaited clash.

"I understand 50 per cent of the permitted crowds will be taken by the ICC for its sponsors and other stake holders and we will be selling the rest 2000 tickets. We have already received more than double applications from the fans," Bransgrove said.

"It is a high interest game and there is a good demand for it," Bransgrove added.

The Indian team, currently quarantining in Mumbai for two weeks, depart for the UK on June 2. — PTI

India not safe for T20 WC: Hussey

Sydney, May 20: Former Australia batsman Mike Hussey, who tested positive for Covid-19 in IPL's bio-bubble, has advocated moving this year's T20 World Cup from India to the UAE as he feels teams will be "nervous" to travel there because of the raging pandemic.

Batting coach Hussey was among three members of the Chennai Super Kings contingent who contracted the virus during the IPL, which had to be suspended after cases were detected in four teams.

"I think it's going to be very difficult in my view to play that tournament in India," Hussey told *Fox Cricket* upon his return to Sydney.

Hussey had also spent two weeks isolating in India after testing positive for the virus in Delhi from where he was transported to Chennai in an air ambulance.

"We're talking about eight teams in the IPL. I think there are probably similar number, maybe more teams coming in from overseas (for the T20 World Cup), there'd be more venues. As I said ear-

I think it's going to be very difficult in my view to play that tournament in India. I think they'll have to look some pretty big contingency plans, perhaps looking at the UAE or somewhere like that that could host the World T20.

— **MIKE HUSSEY**
former Australia player

lier, if they're playing in different cities, that is when the risk goes up.

"I think they'll have to look some pretty big contingency plans, perhaps looking at the UAE or somewhere like that that could host the World T20. I think there will be a lot of cricket boards around the world that'd be pretty nervous about going back to India for a cricket tournament," said Hussey.

UAE has already emerged as the back up venue and the ICC is likely to take a call on the tournament on June 1. Talking about his ordeal in India, Hussey said he had symptoms but he never feared for his life. — PTI

There's got to be much more to the ball-tampering story



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

Cameron Bancroft wittingly or otherwise has etched his name in the annals of cricket history. The Australian opener who has yet to score 500 runs in 10 Test matches so far in his career, was caught by the television cameras trying to rough up one side of the

cricket ball in the third Test between the Aussies and South Africa in Cape Town in 2018. The sorry tale shook up Australian cricket with skipper Steve Smith and David Warner getting one year bans and Bancroft being out for nine months. Just when people thought the water had

flowed under the bridge Bancroft opened the can once again when, in an interview, he hinted that more players were aware of what's called 'sandpaper gate.' The interview pointed fingers at the bowlers who most former players believe were equally conscious that a foreign substitute (sandpaper) was being to tinker with the ball in the Test.

While Cricket Australia (CA) said that the incident was thoroughly investigated and they had reached out to Bancroft to see if he was willing to speak fur-

ther, many believe that whole affair was brushed under the carpet which, now was showing a bump on the far side. Former Aussie skippers Ian Chappell and Michael Clarke have stated that there had to be more people involved (than the punished trio), with Clarke questioning the integrity of the bowlers saying: "Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it?"

Ball management, on the field of play, is as old as the game. Picking the seam

with a overgrown thumb-nail to help movement or using foreign substitutes from bottle caps to strips laden with Vaseline is a been-there, done-that situation, if one peeks into the history of cricket.

The Aussie pack of bowlers in the Cape Town Test including Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins seem to have smoked the peace pipe with Bancroft.

The incident when looked at from a practical cricketing perspective makes no sense. One cannot imagine a bowler playing at a serious level not

knowing if the ball has been played around with. The new episode in this saga brought back a memory which goes to show that not just the bowlers but even the batsmen can tell from the changing pattern of the ball.

As a schoolboy one was privy to an episode which involved Mansur Ali Khan, a.k.a. Tiger Pataudi. While playing against us (schoolboys) in a Sunday friendly in 1974-75, Tiger showed us kids his remarkable knowledge and understanding of the game. Getting out in the first

over post a hearty lunch, the former Indian skipper gently asked if the ball had been changed? No, said the vehement umpires and yes, said the bowler who had quietly replaced the ball during the break as he couldn't get a decent grip on the old one.

It was just the feel of the ball on his bat that prompted Tiger to raise a doubt. What the most iconic cricketer of that era could surmise in a minute with one good eye, international bowlers couldn't do at Newlands, Cape Town — hard to believe!