

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

KARIMNAGAR | SATURDAY | 8 MAY 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 37.1°C  
**Min:** 25.1°C  
**RH:** 35%  
**Rain:** Nil

**Forecast:** Rain likely in evening. Max/Min temp. 38/25°C

## ASTROGUIDE

**Plava:** Uttarayana  
**Tithi:** Chaitra Bahula Dwadasi till 5.22 pm  
**Star:** Uttarabhadra till 2.48 pm  
**Variyam:** 4.08 am (Sunday)  
**Durmuhurtam:** 5.50 am to 7.32 am  
**Rahukalam:** 9 am to 10.30 am  
**HJRI CALENDAR**  
**Ramzan** 25,1442 AH  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 4.41 am  
**Zohar:** 12.22 pm  
**Asar:** 4.39 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.43 pm  
**Isha:** 7.56 pm  
**SUNSET TODAY** 6.38 PM  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW** 5.47 AM  
**MOONRISE TOMORROW** 3.07 AM  
**MOONSET TODAY** 3.11 PM

**RAMZAN TIMINGS**  
**IFITAR:** 6.43 PM (TODAY)  
**SEHRI:** 4.18 AM (TOMORROW)



**He is staying in a bio-bubble these days!**

## SHORT TAKES

### Petrol at ₹102 in Rajasthan, MP

**New Delhi:** Petrol price on Friday scaled to ₹102 per litre in some parts of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh after rates were raised for the fourth straight day after ending of more than two-week-long hiatus during assembly elections in four states. On Friday, petrol price was hiked by a steep 29 paise per litre and diesel by 31 paise a litre.

### CoWIN introduces four digit code

**New Delhi:** The CoWIN system is introducing a new feature of four-digit security code from May 8 to minimise data entry errors about vaccination status. The health ministry said in some instances that citizens who had booked their appointment for vaccination did not make it to the vaccination centre but the system has recorded them having received the shot.

### Two elected UP village heads die

**Sambhal (UP):** Two recently elected village heads in Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls have died, officials said on Friday. Ambrish Kumar (45) and Dushyant Kumar (52), who were elected as village heads from Madhna and Rajha villages respectively, died due to breathing problems. The two had not tested positive for Covid-19, the officials said.

### Covid impact to be muted: FinMin

**New Delhi:** The impact of the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy is likely to remain muted as compared to the first wave, the finance ministry said in its report. "Learning to 'operate with Covid-19', as borne by international experience, provides a silver lining of economic resilience amidst the second wave," the report said.

## WORLD | 5

**US jets to guard Afghan pullout**

## SPORTS | 8

**Hardik left out of Test squad**

## TABLOID

**John outraged at cruelty to dog**



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## Ramzan prayers



Muslims offer Jumat ul Vida prayers on the last Friday of Ramzan, at the Macca masjid in Hyderabad on Friday. Id-ul-Fitr is likely to be celebrated on May 14.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

# TS to focus on 2nd Covid dose

**No first dose of vaccine will be given till May 12, says DME**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

The Telangana health department has announced that beginning on Saturday, only those eligible to receive their second dose of Covid-19 vaccination will be given shots. There will be no vaccination for those seeking their first dose, Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao announced on Friday evening.

Only those who got their first shot of Covishield or Covaxin will be eligible to get their second doses, provided they have completed six weeks, and four weeks, respectively, as on Saturday, from the date of the first shot. Both vaccines will be available at government vaccination centres

## Gatherings curbed, curfew extended

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Night curfew in Telangana has been extended till May 15 as per a state government announcement on Friday. The curfew was imposed two weeks ago in view of the rising Covid-19 cases. It is enforced from 9pm till 5 am the next morning.

The state prohibited with immediate effect all

and the eligible ones can opt for spot registration

gatherings related to politics, sports, entertainment, as also academic, religious and cultural events as part of the pandemic-control measures.

Weddings can have a maximum of 100 people. Such events must follow physical distance protocols and wearing of masks.

Only 20 persons will be allowed at funerals, where too Covid-19 safety protocols must be followed.

during the special drive, he said.

The special drive will end on May 12. There will be no vaccinations on May 9. The need for spot registrations arose because the Cowin portal where people can register slots does not have a provision for those seeking a second dose, he said.

The decision to restrict vaccination only for second dose was taken in view of the low allocation of vaccine till May 15, at 4.69 lakh of Covishield and 2.16 lakh of Covaxin doses. He said Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao had spoken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and requested that Telangana be provided a minimum of two lakh doses a day.

■ **Page 2: Have patience for 1st dose, people told**

# Stalin takes oath as Tamil Nadu CM

**Announces Covid relief to poor; insurance cover for treatment**

**G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC**  
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, who was sworn in along with his ministers on Friday, passed five orders relating to people's welfare on the first day in office, thus setting in motion the process of honouring the promises given during the elections.

He was sworn in as Chief Minister by Governor Banwarilal Purohit who administered the oath of office and secrecy in a simple ceremony at the Raj Bhavan here. The ceremony witnessed adherence to Covid-19 guidelines including wearing masks.

The five orders signed by the new Chief Minister includes paying a relief of ₹2,000 as first instalment to families holding ration



Newly sworn-in Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin affixes his first signature on a file, at his office in the Secretariat, in Chennai, on Friday.

— PTI

cards, reducing the price of Aavin milk by ₹3 a litre, making travel free for women in city buses, launching a department to look into the complaints of

people collected during the campaign and providing insurance cover for those taking treatment in private hospitals were the orders passed.

All the measures were promised to the electorate as part of the DMK's manifesto unveiled during the hustings.

Accordingly family card holders will be paid ₹2,000 now as part of the ₹4,000 payment to ameliorate their livelihood problems wrought by the continuing Coronavirus crisis.

Mrs Gandhi termed the Congress' losses in the recent Assembly polls as "very disappointing". Adding that the Congress Working Committee will meet soon to review the Assembly poll results.

"Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so," she said while concluding her speech.

"The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without

## MUSCLE | POWER

**Malla Reddy and aides are accused illegally building a temple in Annojiguda**

# Minister defies HC order to encroach public park

**HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

It seems nothing can stop Telangana labour minister Ch Malla Reddy from encroaching public properties. Neither the Supreme Court directives, High Court's stay orders nor his own government's rules come in the way of his misdeeds, if recent developments are of any indication.

If some of his moves are allegedly aimed at making monetary benefits, some others are said to be to retain power by impress-



Ch Malla Reddy

ing electorate including forcible construction of a place of religious worship in a public park in Annojiguda, Ghatkesar, on the city outskirts.

Victims of the minister's

misdeeds are inmates of a school run for orphans and underprivileged children besides the residents of the area who are deprived of a lung space. Needless to say, the local municipal, revenue and police officials maintain stoic silence over the gross violation of court directives by the minister and his followers.

Inquiries by this newspaper revealed that when efforts were made to build a temple in the public park in about 150 sq yds, the Jesus Way School, run by

Joint Christian Action Committee (JCAC), obtained a stay order against the construction from the High Court in 2013. "We are not against any religion. There are already several temples in the vicinity, and we have only been requesting the minister's followers to spare the lung space, which is increasingly becoming scarce in this concrete jungle," said Anita Sen of JCAC.

■ **Page 2: Temple is now being built in 1,000 sq yds**



The site where minister Ch. Malla Reddy and his aides are planning to build a temple at a public park, with government permission.

— DC

■ **Full report on Page 7**

# 3rd wave can be stopped: Centre

**Top adviser says proper precautions can prevent new surge in Covid infections**

**New Delhi, May 7:** 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, the country's top scientific officer said on Friday, two days after he warned that this wave was inevitable.

K. Vijay Raghavan, principal scientific adviser, said the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if the guidance about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing is followed.

"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,

■ **New opportunities for infection may arise if people become complacent or unprotected, assuming the surge is over.**

— **K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal scientific adviser, Govt of India**

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," he said in a press briefing.

On May 5, Vijay Raghavan said as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves.

He said it was not expected that the second wave would hit the country with

such ferocity. "Phase-3 is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur," he had said.

Responding to a question on when the second wave which has already infected lakhs and killed thousands, will ebb, Vijay Raghavan said it has already started declining in some places. "The number of cases and the positivity will decline and there will be a lag in hospitalisation and mortality," he added.

"There are other places of great concern all over the country. We must watch out and make sure that we take all steps to reduce and go up to the levels which are difficult to manage," he cautioned.

Infections rise when the virus has the opportunity to infect humans. When the virus runs out of opportunities, the infection falls, he said. — PTI

# Sonia asks PM to call all-party meet on Covid

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, lashing out at the Narendra Modi government while addressing a Congress Parliamentary Party meeting on Friday, said: "I say this categorically — India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country."

Mrs Gandhi said the government must urgently call an all-party meeting on the Covid-19 situation in India and added: "The Modi government has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people, the Centre has ignored warnings and alerts from the EGOM, National Task Force and the parliamentary panel."

Mrs Gandhi termed the Congress' losses in the recent Assembly polls as "very disappointing". Adding that the Congress Working Committee will meet soon to review the Assembly poll results.

"Most unfortunately, our own performance in all the states was very disappointing and if I may say, unexpectedly so," she said while concluding her speech.

"The CWC is meeting shortly to review the results but it goes without

■ **The Modi government has abdicated its fundamental responsibilities and duties towards the people, the Centre has ignored warnings and alerts from the EGOM, National Task Force and the parliamentary panel.**

— **Sonia Gandhi, Congress president**

saying that we as a party collective must draw the appropriate lessons from this setback in a spirit of humility and honesty," she added. The meeting was attended by its MPs and office-bearers.

The Congress has been repeatedly attacking the government for the last couple of weeks over its "mismanagement" of the Covid-19 crisis, which has been spiralling in the country, with a serious lack of medicines, oxygen, cylinders, hospital beds, ventilators and vaccines.

Referring to the letters written to the PM by Dr Manmohan Singh, the former PM, and by Rahul Gandhi, she said all these helpful initiatives had fallen on deaf ears as the government has made no meaningful response and continues to behave as if it alone has all the answers.

## SC REJECTS PLEA AGAINST DELAY IN HEARING ON CENTRAL VISTA

**New Delhi, May 7:** The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea against deferment of hearing on a PIL seeking direction to halt construction activity at the Central Vista Avenue Redevelopment Project during the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic but gave liberty to petitioners to approach the Delhi High Court for urgent listing of the matter.

The court was hearing the appeal against the May 4 order of the high court which had listed the PIL for hearing on May 17 saying it wants to first go through what the Supreme Court has deliberated in its judgement of January 5, giving a go ahead to the ambitious project.

The apex court asked senior advocate Siddharth Luthra to mention the matter before the High Court for urgent listing on May 10. — PTI

## NO DEADLINE FOR WHATSAPP PRIVACY POLICY

**New Delhi, May 7:** WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts. WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent company Facebook.

A WhatsApp spokesperson said that no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not accepting the policy update. "No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response.

The spokesperson said while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some haven't had the chance to do so. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

## Have patience for 1st dose, people told

**From Page 1**  
He appealed to people seeking to get their first dose shots to have some patience and wait as the government was making every effort to ensure everyone in Telangana gets vaccinated. The Chief Minister has allocated ₹2,500 crore for the vaccination programme and the government is exploring every avenue to get as many doses as are needed.

## CBI adjourned plea of YSRC MP

**Hyderabad:** A CBI special court at Hyderabad adjourned a petition of YSRC rebel MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju seeking cancellation of bail given to AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in his quid pro quo cases. The CM and the CBI sought time to file their contentions.

## VITEEE 2021 TO BE ONLINE FROM MAY 28-31

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Vellore Institute of Technology has on Friday announced that VIT Engineering Entrance Examination (VITEEE) 2021 will be conducted as “online remote proctored examination” from May 28-31 in view of surge in Coronavirus pandemic. The last date for submitting applications is May 20. Further details are available on Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) website [www.vit.ac.in](http://www.vit.ac.in).

## NEGATIVE RT-PCR FOR ENTRY TO WB, DELHI: RAILWAYS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

The Railways on Friday issued an advisory to passengers travelling to West Bengal and Delhi to carry RT-PCR negative certificate, obtained within 72 hours of their journey. Those travelling to the national capital from Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh by train shall have to undergo mandatory quarantine for 14 days. Railways advised its passengers to visit Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) website before commencing their journey about the protocol to be followed at any of their destinations.

## 73-YEAR-OLD KILLED IN ROAD ACCIDENT

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

A 73-year-old man got killed after the SUV he was travelling in turned turtle when it crashed into a road divider at PVNR Expressway in Rajendranagar on Friday afternoon. According to police, the deceased, Mohd Khaleel, was travelling in the car with four other family members. Driver of the car, who is yet to be identified as he is undergoing treatment for his injuries, was over speeding, lost control and rammed into a road divider near pillar number 292. Rajendranagar police reached the spot, pulled out the passengers.

## TECHIE HELD FOR BLACKMARKETING REMDESIVIR

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Hyderabad North Zone Task Force on Friday nabbed a software employee for black-marketing remdesivir injections. Police said, “Akula Mehul Kumar, 26, an employee of HSBC Bank in HiTec City and resident of Pan Bazaar in Secunderabad, realised the high demand for remdesivir while sitting in the medical shop run by his father. He then decided to illegally procure these vials at low rates from dealers and sell them at higher prices. Accordingly, he was buying each vial for about ₹4,000 and selling them for nearly ₹35,000.” Based on a tip-off, Mehul was tracked and caught red-handed while selling vials to a customer.

## Temple is now being built on 1,000 sq yards of land

**From Page 1**

After some lull, the construction resumed after Malla Reddy became MLA in 2018. Despite obtaining the stay order from the High Court and even initiating contempt proceedings, the construction went unobstructed and the area of encroachment spread to 1,000 sq yds, she said.

It must be recalled that in December 2012, the then state government had put curbs on building places of worship without the permission of district collectors, especially in rural areas. In a 2009 order, the Supreme Court had also asked the Centre to ensure that no temple, church, mosque or gurdwara was built on government land.

The school management accused the minister of visiting the school with scores of his followers, intimidating the staff and pressurising them not to object to the construction of the temple. “When we refused to give a ‘no-objection’ statement, Malla Reddy was



furious and threatened us with grave consequences. His aides even criminally trespassed

our school premises to threaten us,” said Bishop Mathew, who runs the school along with the



Top left: Large stones seen at the compound wall. Above: A vehicle appears to unload construction material at the work site. Left: Malla Reddy at a meeting

JCAC.

When this correspondent sought clarification from Rachakonda Police Commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat and local Inspector N. Chandrababu, both of whom received several complaints in the past, the former refused to speak about the case while the latter said it was sub-judice. Tehsildar P. Padma Priya also refused to respond to the

queries.

When contacted, the minister said a compromise had been worked out between the school management and Kondal Reddy, the Pocharam Municipality chairman, and his aides building the temple. “I have told both the parties not to interfere with each other,” he said and dismissed allegations of intimidating the school authorities.

## WAKF BOARD WARNS AGAINST KURMALGUDA LAND

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Telangana State Wakf Board cautioned against buying Wakf land attached to Dargah Mir Momin Chup in Kurmalguda village of Balapur mandal. Board officials said it was brought to their notice that some unscrupulous persons, claiming to be the attorneys of Syed Yade Ali Shah Quadri, the Mutawalli of Dargah Mir Momin Chup, are disposing of Wakf lands in Kurmalguda, Ranga Reddy district. These persons are claiming title to the said lands by virtue of Muntakhab No. 2031 of 1357 Fasil.

Officials said all the lands covered under the Muntakhab are Wakf lands and there was a gazette notification. They cautioned the general public to refrain from buying or dealing with any person pertaining to the lands covered under the said Muntakhab.

## Protest held at Malla Reddy hosp

**DC CORRESPONDENTS**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Telangana NSUI leaders including state unit president Balmoor Venkat on Friday held a protest in front of the Malla Reddy Hospital in Suraram. Wearing PPE kits, the protesters demanded that minister Ch. Malla Reddy should be sacked from the Cabinet as he had built the hospital by encroaching on lake lands and without complying with the buffer zone rules.

The police after receiving information from hospital staff went to the spot and detained the NSUI leaders at the Dundigal police station.

NSUI state president Venkat demanded that the hospital built on encroached land should be converted into a free hospital for Covid patients. He also demanded that Covid-19 should be included in the Aarogyasri scheme. He also said it was “very shameful” that



Fifty NSUI leaders, led by state president Venkat Balmoor, wears PPE kits and stage protest in front of Malla reddy hospital demanding that minister Ch. Malla Reddy be sacked from the Cabinet, on Friday.

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar had stated that the Covid-19 situation was under control.

Dundigal inspector A. Venkatesham said 50 NSUI members, headed by Venkat, barged into the hospital premises kits and raised ‘Malla

Reddy down down’. The police arrested 13 activists including Venkat.

“They barged into the place and held a protest without permission and also damaged property at the hospital while threatening the doctors working there. After

getting the situation under control, we received a complaint from the management and accordingly, cases were booked for trespassing, property damage and threatening doctors,” the Dundigal police said.

## 2 major cities get women mayors

## Sudharani is Warangal's first citizen, Neeraja sets a record in Khammam

**DC CORRESPONDENTS**  
KHAMMAM, WARANGAL, MAHBUBNAGAR, MAY 7

Punukollu Neeraja, corporator from 26th division of the TRS, was elected unanimously as mayor of Khammam Municipal Corporation on Friday. She was the choice of many TRS leaders including Satupalli MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiiah.

Neeraja and her husband Ramabrahmam hail from Krishna district and settled down in Khammam 35 years ago. Shaik Fathima Johara, corporator from 37th division was elected deputy mayor.

Key TRS leaders like transport minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, MLC Balasani Laxminarayana and Veeraiiah were not present at the event.

Minister for roads and buildings Vemula Prasanth Reddy and TRS



G. Sudharani  
Warangal mayor



Punukollu Neeraja,  
Khammam mayor

state general secretary Nukula Naresh Reddy, who stayed in a hotel, oversaw the mayor and deputy mayor election process.

They first talked to Neeraja and Fathima and later to other corporators. TRS corporators were told the two were selected by the party high command.

Mayor Neeraja said she has a desire to shape Khammam on par with Hyderabad with the help of all corporators. “I will try to make all the roads clean, in the minimum,” she promised.

In Warangal, Gundu Sudharani was elected unanimously as mayor of the Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation

(GWMC) and Rizwana Shameem as Deputy Mayor on Friday.

The election for the two posts were held after the oath-taking ceremony of the 66 newly elected corporators. Eight corporator-elects under home isolation took oath via video calls.

Prior to the oath-taking ceremony, ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Indrakaran Reddy convened a meeting with all the elected TRS corporators and declared the names of the chosen candidates.

Gundu Sudharani is state president of the TRS women's wing. She had also served as women's cooperative corporation chairman. The 57-year-old completed her MA in Public Administration and belongs to the Padmashali community. She had been chosen for the upper house by TD Chandrababu

Naidu in 2010 when she was a corporator. While holding the position, she joined the TRS in November 2015.

Her daughter-in-law Gundu Ashritha Reddy served as a corporator in the previous GWMC governing body from the 24th division.

Sudharani's spouse Prabhakar owns a hotel in Hanamkonda. Edla Narasimha Goud was unanimously elected municipal chairman of Achampet municipality. Presiding officer Pandu Naiku gave the oath of office to the newly elected ward members on Friday.

Parreddy Sailaja was elected as vice-chairman unanimously. In Jachcherla, Dorepalli Lakshmi and Paladi Sarika elected as chairperson and vice chairperson of the civic body. Presiding officer and additional collector Tejas Nandalal read out the oath of office to the 27 members.

## Owaisi scoffs at PM's 'self-reliant' claims

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Asaduddin Owaisi, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) president, said India had started accepting foreign aid after 17 years. A total of 17 foreign countries were providing aid to India, he said adding that it proved that the claims of ‘self-reliant Bharat’ by Prime Minister Narendra Modi were false.

Owaisi, in his online address on Youm-ul-Quran, said although the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) had already warned the government in March about the possible surge of the second wave of Covid-19, the government failed to chalk out a plan to tackle the situation, resulting in large number of people succumbing to the virus. In India, daily 3,500 people

were dying due to Covid-19 as per official records, while real figures were seven times more, the Hyderabad MP added.

He said the country had only 1,224 oxygen tankers with a cumulative capacity of 16,372 tonnes. If all of these tankers run and turnaround time was six days, then the daily supply would be 2,788 tonnes, which would not be sufficient for Delhi and Karn-

ataka, he said. “Five ‘Oxygen Express’ trains are being plied which transport 230 tonnes a day and this quantity is sufficient for Gujarat for only four hours,” he said and asked the supporters of Modi why the government did not enhance the oxygen generating capacity, while it got sufficient downtime.

Owaisi claimed that only two per cent of citizens have been vaccinated

so far. Scientists had advised that at least 20 crore people should be given vaccine per month, but the government allotted 50 per cent production of vaccine to the private sector, he said.

He appealed to the Muslims to follow Covid protocols while celebrating the festival and avoid crowds. He also appealed to devotees perform Id prayers in local masjids instead of idgahs.



Shops in Warangal district shut down voluntarily to curb the increase in number of Covid-19 infections in their area.

— DC

## Warangal villages go for self lockdown

**ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC**  
WARANGAL, MAY 7

With the state government being adamant in not imposing lockdown despite the growing number of Covid-19 positive cases, several villages in erstwhile Warangal district where cases are on the rise, decided to observe lockdown voluntarily.

While many villages remained unaffected during the first wave of the pandemic, they are badly affected during the second.

People are worried as at least 30 to 40 persons in each village are undergoing treatment for the disease. As a result, the village governing bodies are opting for self-lockdown in their areas to stop the spread of the virus and protect themselves.

As part of this, business establishments are allowed to remain open only during specific timings and the entry of outsiders into the villages is barred. A fine of ₹1,000 will be imposed on violators of these norms.

Asha workers and ANMs are providing isolation kits to those with symptoms. They are also conducting door to door surveys by checking residents' temperatures. If they have symp-

toms, they are being given medicine. If the symptoms are severe, they are referred to hospitals. Those who test positive are either home isolated or admitted to hospitals.

In Warangal Urban district, the village panchayat of Elkaturthy decided to allow businesses to run only between 5 am and 12 noon. The residents were asked not to step outside during the rest of the time until May 22.

The sarpanch of Kondaparthi Katkuri Rajamani declared that they would implement partial lockdown in the village according to which shops would be open between 6 am and 10 am and 5 pm and 7 pm.

“There are about 50 people who are suffering from Covid-19 symptoms in the village. That is why we have taken this decision,” she said.

In Mangapet village of Mulugu district, voluntary lockdown will remain in effect till May 20.

Village special officer Srikanth and the village panchayat governing council decided to allow business establishments to run between 6 am and 1 pm only.

## PIETY, COMPASSION MARK JUMAT-UL-VIDA

**ATHER MOIN | DC**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Jumat-ul-Vida, the last Friday of Ramzan, was observed with religious reverence and zeal under anti-Coronavirus standard operating procedures on Friday in several masjids.

Thousands of devotees offered Friday prayers at masjids as they are preparing to celebrate Id-ul-Fitr next week. Ramzan is likely to end on May 13 and Id-ul-Fitr would be observed on May 14, depending on the sighting of the moon. Imams and khatibs in their sermons

stressed upon Muslims to purify their souls through a greater dedication and prayer and being kind to fellow beings and help others in these days of troubles. The biggest congregation is witnessed at historic Macca Masjid, while large gatherings were witnessed at Shahi Masjid, Public Gardens, Jamia Masjid, Musheerabad, Azizia Masjid, umayyunnagar, Jamia Masjid Chowk and Qutub Shahi Masjid Paltan, Malakpet.

This time the faithful were not allowed to perform prayers outside the Macca Masjid.

## TS goes with cure first approach against virus

**BALU PULIPAKA | DC**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Telangana on Friday announced that it is going full steam with a ‘Treatment First’ plan to ensure people, who may have contracted Covid-19, do not develop moderate or serious symptoms, or complications that might require hospitalisation. With people lining up in front of hospitals and needing critical care which many hospitals are not able to provide because they are full, the health department said it had decided to consider individuals with early symptoms as Covid-19 positive cases.

The ‘treatment is more important than testing’ approach has resulted in identification of 19,099 people with Covid-like symptoms over the past three days, during the house-to-house fever survey and tens of thousands of people who were checked for their health at Covid-19 outpatient clinics at primary, urban primary, and community health centres across the state as well as at various other government run small and large hospitals.

All these people have been given medicine kits to start their immediate treatment, Director of Health Services Dr G. Srinivasa Rao said at a press conference. He said as many as 20,955 teams had been out in the field going house to house and that they had visited 11,22,369 houses so far as part of the survey to

find people with Covid symptoms. “Those who have been identified as having symptoms were checked at the out-patient clinics and given medications. Our staff will continue to monitor their health. They will keep track of these people and if required, will make arrangements to shift any individual needing more attention to a hospital in an ambulance,” Dr Rao said.

The state government is the first in the country to adopt such an approach to prevent worsening of health of those who caught Covid and to reduce burden on hospitals, he said.

Dr Rao also appealed to people not to pressurise healthcare staff taking part in these surveys across the state for Covid medicine kits, as a matter of precaution in case they catch the disease. “Only those who have symptoms must use the med kits. Do not insist on getting the kits. We have lakhs of them for distribution and anyone needing one, will be provided with it,” he said.

Urging people not to create an ‘artificial shortage’ of the kits, he said every person who received the medicine kit must stay isolated for two weeks. “Do not go out because you are taking medicines. Once medicines are taken, the body needs rest, good nutrition, and fluid intake. Take care of yourselves at home and the government is there to provide any additional help as needed,” he said.



## OTHER STORIES

## FLIGHTS TO SIX CITIES FROM HYD CANCELLED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

In view of the rising Covid-19 cases, at least 30 domestic flights from Hyderabad to Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru and Goa were cancelled from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) on Friday.

The airport authorities said that keeping in view the case-load of these cities, the decision had been taken. However, whether the orders will continue further will be decided later. The airport official said that they were monitoring the situation on a regular basis.

It is not clear yet as to how many passengers were affected due to the cancellation of flights.

## COVID IS MAIN ISSUE NOT POWER POLITICS: CPI (ML)

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MAY 7

CPI (ML) New Democracy state deputy secretary Potu Ranga Rao said that the people of Telangana are dropping dead like birds because of Covid-19 and the situation is not only alarming but also dangerous.

Ranga Rao shared his experience with the media persons on the deaths of Covid-19 patients. "I was called by the sons of Gandhamma, who is suffering with Covid-19 in the wee hours to get a bed in the hospital. I enquired on the availability of beds in various hospitals and I failed to get it."

He said that he called a doctor, who is suffering with Covid-19 and asked him to provide a bed.

"We tried a bed in a government hospital in Khammam and we were told to provide a bed after some time. We knew that two persons died due to Covid-19 just a few minutes ago," he said.

"Alarmingly, our patient was placed adjacent to a bed where a Covid-19 patient died. There is no other go to the hospital staff and they can place our patient only after shifting the body to the mortuary. There are tens of people waiting for the beds by the time," he said.

The CPI (ML) ND leader said that he narrated the scene of events not to fear the people and the government should know the dangerous situation taking place in Telangana.

"This is not the time to the power politics, elections, count lands, cash and hegemony tactics. The government should provide beds and extend treatment to the patients on the war-footing basis," he said.

## JAMAAT-E-ISLAMI SETS UP OXYGEN THERAPY CENTRE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Jamaat-e-Islami has set up an 'oxygen therapy centre' for Covid-19 patients on Pahadi Shareef road. Inaugurating the facility, education minister Sabitha Indra Reddy said that the state government is delivering quality medical services and improving infrastructure wherever required while doctors and para-medical staff are rendering great services. There is a need for everyone to come forward with support in the fight against Covid-19. She said that during the pandemic, the patient needs treatment as well as moral support. NGOs should come forward to end the stigma associated with the Coronavirus and spread awareness about the precautions. The minister appreciated the organisation for providing such a facility in her constituency.

Moulana Hamid Mohammed Khan, amir, Jamaat-e-Islami, Telangana, said the facility has been provided by Jamaat's Islamic Social Service Society. He said Jamaat rises to the occasion whenever a calamity strikes. Society secretary Hafiz Mohammed Rashaduddin said that with the help of Doctors Association for Relief & Education, they were able to set up the facility with 50 beds and 40 medical staff. They treat patients suffering from oxygen shortage. MIM president and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi also inspected the centre.

## Pvt hosps under-reporting Covid deaths in Adilabad

DMHOs reportedly not verifying data on deaths, cases

PILLALAMARRI  
SRINIVAS | DC  
ADILABAD, MAY 7

Mortality rate among Coronavirus patients in private hospitals of old Adilabad district is high, but their managements are not reporting all Covid deaths to medical and health departments of their respective districts.

Significantly, there has been news that as many as 26 Coronavirus patients died while undergoing treatment at a single private hospital during the last one month. Deaths due to the virus in other hospitals during the same period ranged from one to 10. But information about them is being suppressed to present a much better scenario, so that these hospitals could claim that most of their Covid patients are getting better treatment and recovering fully.

DMHOs of respective districts in old Adilabad are allegedly not verifying data on deaths and cases received from private hospitals, which have been approved to treat Coronavirus cases. There are allegations that officials have given a free hand to private hospitals on presenting their numbers owing to "an understanding" with managements of private hospitals.

There are also reports of some private hospitals blatantly violating Covid guidelines while treating patients, as they have the backing of political leaders and elected public representatives.

Many people have alleged that these private hospitals are charging exorbitant fees, sometimes running into lakhs, from Coronavirus patients, as the Medical and Health Department is not taking strong action against them despite complaints.

With the issue of high charges getting escalated, Adilabad's in-charge DMHO Narendar Rathod has held a meeting with doctors of Indian Medical Association (IMA), advising that only government-prescribed rates be collected from Saturday onwards. Otherwise, strict action would be taken.

● **SOME PRIVATE hospitals blatantly violating Covid guidelines while treating patients, as they have the backing of political leaders and elected public representatives. Many people have alleged that these private hospitals are charging exorbitant fees.**



Medical staff conduct Covid-19 tests at Kattarampur health center in Karimnagar on Friday. —DC

## Many Covid patients critical at Bellampalli isolation centre

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, MAY 7

Many Coronavirus patients are losing their lives while undergoing treatment at the Covid isolation centre in Bellampalli town of Mancherial district.

Sources at the centre have disclosed that as many as 19 Coronavirus patients have breathed their last at the government-run Bellampalli centre in the last 72 hours. Condition of many others is critical, several of them being on ventilators. Carers of patients admitted to the isolation and kin of those deceased have complained that there is shortage of oxygen at the town's Covid isolation centre.

Authorities are not sharing any information officially about deaths at the centre despite requests. They are, however, maintaining that there is no shortage of oxygen. Yet, the same officials are complaining that Coronavirus patients are being shifted to government isolation centres at the last minute after their condition is deteriorating while undergoing treatment at private hospitals. There is no ventilator facility at many private hospitals in Mancherial district.

Attendants of patients are also complaining that there is delay in giving Remdesivir injections to Covid patients undergoing treatment at the Bellampalli isolation centre.

## Shortage of drugs, medical devices worry patients in Nizamabad dist

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NIZAMABAD, MAY 7

Shortage of medicines and medical devices is worrying people in Nizamabad district during the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. Particular brands of medicines are unavailable in retail market. Medical devices like pulse oximeters and even thermometers are in short supply. Yet, wholesale and retail medical agencies and shops are doing brisk business.

There is huge demand for vaporisers, pulse oximeters and thermometers. Not only

Coronavirus-infected people, even others are buying these medical devices as a precautionary measure. Few people have also procured oxygen cylinders in case there is an emergency.

The second wave of the virus peaked in April month. The same trend is continuing during May first week too. As a result, very few patients have got Covid-19 kits from government hospitals. Most of them are forced to purchase them from the open market.

Many people in Nizamabad are preferring medicines and devices

## HELP IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19, MLA URGES PEOPLE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 7

Don't get carried away by false news that Covid-19 positive patients would die soon. Instead, face the situation bravely and help in conquering the virus, said Choppandani MLA, Sunke Ravi Shankar.

He inspected the Primary Health Centre (PHC) and enquired from health officials about the ongoing health survey in Choppandani mandal of Karimnagar district on Friday.

Speaking on the occasion, Shankar said that there are some misconceptions regarding the second wave of coronavirus and death of people testing positive.

There is a need to remove such beliefs among the people, he pointed out. He urged the officials to create awareness among the people and bolster the confidence of corona patients besides ensuring better medical services. There is a high percentage of recovery with the Corona medicine kits that are provided by the state government, he said.

Shankar appealed to the people to cooperate with health staff, who are conducting a survey by giving complete details of their health.

● **MLA SAID that there are some misconceptions regarding the second wave of coronavirus and death of people testing positive.**



## TRS closes in on ex-minister aides

PULI SHARAT KUMAR  
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 7

After targeting former minister Etala Rajendar, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) leadership is concentrating on his followers and officials supporting him so that they can corner him politically in Huzurabad Assembly constituency.

The party has prepared a list of leaders who are talking in support of Rajendar and against TRS. As part of the scheme, the party leadership provoked ministers and people's representatives from erstwhile Karimnagar district to counter-attack him. The leadership even made them lodge a complaint against Rajendar urging the speaker to suspend him from the MLA post.

In a related development, Rajya Sabha member Capt. Laxmikantha Rao was appointed as coordinator of Huzurabad constituency, whose responsibilities include speaking against Rajendar.

It may be recalled that there are political differences between Rajendar and Rao, as the latter had an enormous grip over Huzurabad constituency. But with the entry of Rajendar, the party gave preference to him.

Following the latest episode, Rao attacked Rajendar at a press conference and alleged that the former minister had tried to damage his family politically in the constituency. He said that it was because of the strong foundation laid by him that Rajendar was able to win. Sensing that some officials were

● **SENSING THAT some officials were supporting Etala and passing information from the Pragathi Bhavan to him, the party leadership began to zero in on such officials. It transferred Huzurabad ACP Srinivas Rao and replaced him with Venkat Reddy.**

supporting Etala and passing information from the Pragathi Bhavan to him, the party leadership began to zero in on such officials. It transferred Huzurabad ACP Srinivas Rao and replaced him with Venkat Reddy, the incumbent DSP in the CID unit.

The party has set eyes on Mada Sadava Reddy, a staunch follower of Rajendar and husband of Veenavanka ZPTC Mada Vanamala. It directed officer on special duty Sri Mala to issue notices for repayment of funds, which were 'misused' by the ruling body of Veenavanka PACS (Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society).

In his response, the CEO of Veenavanka PACS, Prakash Reddy conducted an inquiry and confirmed that around Rs. 16.06 lakh were misused by the ruling body of PACS from 2013 to 2018 when Mada Sadava Reddy was the chairman.

Meanwhile, Sadava Reddy alleged that the TRS was taking revenge on him as he was with Etala Rajendar for sometime now. It was only to exert pressure on him that the state government had issued notices to him, even though the case was already in court, he said.

## SIX EMPLOYEES SUBMIT FAKE AGENCY PAPERS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MAY 7

The Agency certificates produced by six staff of the forest and education departments are found to be false. The scrutinizing committee headed by collector enquired into complaints against six persons that they produced false agency certificates and obtained jobs under the Agency category.

They were working as either forest beat officers or as teachers.

The Centre had reserved all jobs in the Agency area to tribals. Poosam Sudhir, convener of the Adivasi Udyogula Samkshema Sangham complained against the seven by producing the related documents. The committee enquired into the background of the seven and the residential areas of their forefathers.

This probe found the certificates of six persons were arranged through back-door means. They came to the agency area after 1990.

As per GO 3, only tribals can be given government jobs in the agency area. Those who seek jobs should produce agency certificates.

The agency certificates are given by Mandal Tehsildars only to those who lived in their villages for the last three generations.

Poosam Sudhir, convener of Adivasi Udyogula Samkshema Sangam, said, "I submitted all the details against the seven persons working in the agency area in various departments."

"It is a crime to produce false agency certificates and the scrutiny committee should remove them from their jobs for submitting false certificates," he said.

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## SHORT TAKES

## TRIPURA: INPT TO MERGE WITH TIPRA

**Agartala:** A month after their alliance won the state tribal council polls, the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT), the oldest tribal party in the state, has merged with the Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) to achieve their "common goal of Greater Tripaland".

The merger was announced by TIPRA chairman Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman here on Thursday.

The TIPRA and the INPT had contested the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADDC) polls as alliance partners on April 6 and won 18 out of the total 28 seats.

The BJP secured nine seats and the other seat was won by an independent candidate.

In the 30-member tribal council, elections are held for 28 seats, and representatives in the remaining two seats are nominated by the governor on the advice of the state government.

TIPRA chairman Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman told reporters, the merger was a "post-poll unification to achieve the common goal of forming Greater Tripaland."

This merger is for the unity of the entire tribal community of the state. We want other tribal parties also to unite to achieve their common goal."

## U.P. POLL: WRONG CANDIDATES DECLARED WINNERS

**Gorakhpur (UP):** An FIR has been registered against a government official deputed as additional returning officer (ARO) in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls for allegedly giving winning certificates to candidates who lost, an official said on Friday. Additional returning officer (ARO) Virendra Kumar has been booked for cheating, forgery and fraud on a complaint from Returning Officer Sunil Kumar, a senior police official said.

On Wednesday night, there were incident of arson in Nai Bazar police outpost by the supporters of the candidates who alleged that they was not declared winner due to fraud committed by the official. Police have arrested 18 people and lodged four separate FIRs in connection with vandalism and arson of the police outpost.

After the counting of votes on Tuesday, Ravi Nishad, a candidate of district Panchayat ward number 60, and Kodai Nishad, of ward number 61, claimed they have won the election with over 2,000 votes, but the administration didn't give them certificate. On Wednesday morning, certificates of victory was given to Gopal Yadav for ward number 60 and Ramesh for ward number 61.

The supporters of Ravi and Kodai held a demonstration at Nai Bazar crossing, pelted stones, and also set ablaze the police post there.

## LION AT ETAWAH SAFARI PARK TESTS COVID-19 POSITIVE

**Bareilly (UP):** A lion at the Etawah Safari Park has tested positive for Covid-19 and another was suspected to have caught the infection, days after eight Asiatic lions in Hyderabad were found infected with the virus.

"Sixteen samples of 14 Asiatic lions at the Etawah Safari Park had been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) for RT-PCR tests for Covid-19. On Thursday, one lion tested positive for the virus, while another was considered as a suspected case. The remaining 12 lions have tested negative," IVRI Joint Director Dr KP Singh said.

He said the sample of a lion was also received from the Delhi zoo and its report came out negative on Friday.

He said the report of the samples of the lions is being sent to the government besides the safari park management.

The chain of transmission of the virus could have taken place through any asymptomatic human carrier, probably caretakers, working at the park, Dr Singh said. He said the safari park authorities have been advised to shift the infected animals in isolation.

The safari park has already been shut for public.

The CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology had on Tuesday said eight Asiatic lions in the Hyderabad zoo have tested positive for Covid-19.

## Centre has to supply oxygen to Delhi: SC

SC refuses to interfere with Karnataka HC order directing Centre to supply more O2

## Karnataka, Goa under lockdown

**Bengaluru, May 7:** Karnataka Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa on Friday announced lockdown like restrictions with more stringent curbs from May 10 to May 24 in view of alarming rise in Covid cases.

There was already a curfew in place in the state from April 27, which was to end on May 12.

"The second wave of Covid-19 is creating havoc across the state as the Corona curfew imposed in the state has not yielded the expected result in reducing the infection and death rate," the chief minister said.

"Therefore, the government has decided to impose a stringent measure to check the spread of the disease and death. Restriction will be imposed in the entire state from 6 am of May 10 to 6 am of May 24," he said.

All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs and bars will remain closed during this period, Yediyurappa said. Essential goods and services like food, medicine,

milk, fruits and vegetables, etc will be available from 6 am to 10 am, he added.

The Karnataka government has decided to cap the price of CT-scan and digital X-ray in private hospitals and labs at Rs 1,500 and Rs 250 respectively, Health Minister Sudhakar K. said on Friday. The Minister warned that strict action would be taken against hospitals and labs which violate rules and charge high prices.

The Goa government on Friday announced a 15-day curfew in the state from May 9 to contain the spread of coronavirus infection. In another decision, carrying negative Covid-19 test report or a vaccination certificate has been made mandatory for visitors from other states.

During the curfew period, grocery shops can remain open from 9 am to 1 pm while there would be no restrictions on pharmacies and other medical facilities, said Chief Minister Pramod Sawant.

— PTI



A family member mourns after the death of a relative due to Covid-19 at LLR Hospital, during the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, in Kanpur, on Friday.

— PTI

## India records 4 lakh+ cases; experts see peak in June

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 7

India on Friday scaled yet another height in terms of single-day Covid-19 cases with 4.01 lakh new detections and 4,191 fatalities in the last 24 hours. Rising number of infections continues to grip the population in fear which is still struggling hard to find hospital beds and oxygen to survive this second wave of pandemic. As per reports, the current wave is expected to peak by June end and thereafter there may be some respite. Dr K. Vijay Raghavan, chief scientific advisor, said on Friday that the third wave of the pandemic can be handled if stringent, necessary steps are taken on time.

Two days ago Dr Raghavan had said the third wave was "inevitable given the high levels at which this virus is circulating". He, however, did not give a timeline of the third wave. But on Friday he clarified that the third wave may not take place everywhere in the country if sufficient precautions are taken. "The pandemic has different peaks and falls across the country. The only condition for third wave waves is the presence of a susceptible population. If we take strong measures, the third wave of Covid-19 may not happen at all places or even

## NO CONGREGATIONAL PRAYERS IN J&amp;K MOSQUES ON LAST FRIDAY OF RAMZAN

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MAY 7

Jumat-ul-Vida or the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramzan was observed on a subdued note in Jammu and Kashmir, with no congregational prayers held in Srinagar's historic Grand Mosque, the Hazratbal shrine or any other major place of worship of the

Union Territory (UT) in view of the worsening Covid-19 situation.

The namaz was restricted to the residences or small gatherings took place in locality mosques with the worshippers maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks and following other Covid-19 necessitated Standard Operating Procedures and guidelines.

anywhere. It depends much on how effectively Covid guidelines are implemented at the local level, in the states, districts and in the cities everywhere," Dr Raghavan said.

Several states and UTs have imposed strict lockdowns to break the chain of transmission. Goa on Friday announced a 15-day curfew from Sunday during which only essential services, including medical supplies, will be allowed while grocery shops will be allowed to remain open only from 7am-1pm.

The Centre has said it has so far provided more than 17.35 crore vaccine doses to states/UTs and more than 90 lakh doses are still available with states/UTs to be adminis-

tered. It added over 10 lakh doses in addition will be received by the states/UTs in the next three days.

The Centre has decided to deploy AYUSH professionals to boost availability of medical personnel to fight Covid-19.

The Union health ministry said AYUSH doctors are institutionally qualified professionals, well-trained in various aspects of medical care and have proven their competence in various Covid-19 management roles in different institutions across the country. States/UTs have trained nearly 1.06 lakh AYUSH professionals in different aspects of Covid-19 management, and 28,473 professionals have been deployed for Covid-19 activities.

## RSS slams Bengal violence

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Condemning the "gruesome post-poll violence" in West Bengal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday said it appears to be "well conspired" and is against the spirit of democracy. The RSS also asked the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress to "effectively establish rule of law", act against the culprits and instill a feeling of safety and confidence among the affected people.

The RSS also reminded the ruling party of its duty in containing the post-poll violence unleashed against the Opposition party mem-

bers, in particular the BJP. It claimed that the state administrative machinery was "completely passive" and "remained mute spectators" during the violence and the "rioters seemed not to be afraid of anything".

In Bengal, the anti-social elements active in this abhorring violence, "misbehaved with women folk in the most barbaric and despicable manner; brutally killed innocent people and torched houses", the Sangh's general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said in a statement.

He also claimed that as a result of unabated violence, thousands of people, including a large number from the scheduled

● **RSS GENERAL secretary said that there is widespread "fear psychoses" among the common people of West Bengal.**

castes and tribes, were forced to go in search of refuge to save their lives and honour.

"It is our considered opinion that this post-poll result violence is contrary to the Bharatiya tradition of co-existence and respect to the opinion of all, as also it is totally opposed to the very spirit of democracy and one people enshrined in our Constitution," he said.

The "electoral victory belongs to political parties but the elected govern-

ment is accountable to the entire society", he said.

The RSS general secretary said that there is widespread "fear psychoses" among the common people of West Bengal.

The RSS demanded legal action should be taken against those involved in violence and should also make effort to "instill a feeling of safety and confidence in the minds of affected people and to take necessary steps for their rehabilitation." The RSS also urged the Union government to take necessary and all possible steps to establish peace in the state and to make the TMC government act in the above direction.

According to an NIA officer, the agency has not yet taken a decision on whether it will take over the investigation or not. However, since the matter is sensitive the central probe agency has sought

## NIA seeks uranium details from ATS

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 7

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has sought detailed information from the Maharashtra ATS about the seizure of over seven kg of natural uranium worth about Rs 21.30 crore. The ATS had arrested two persons on Wednesday night and seized 7.100 kg uranium from them.

According to an NIA officer, the agency has not yet taken a decision on whether it will take over the investigation or not. However, since the matter is sensitive the central probe agency has sought

details of the case from the ATS.

Following this the ATS on Friday gave a copy of the FIR to the NIA and provided necessary information related to the case.

After the two arrests, the DIG ATS Shivdeep Lande had said that in order to ensure if the seized substance was uranium it was sent to Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) at Trombay for analysis and after examination the officials there had confirmed that the seized material was natural uranium of more than 90 per cent purity and it was highly radioactive.

## HELP IN NEED

PM Modi thanks world leaders for aid extended to combat Covid-19

## UK dispatches largest Covid relief for India

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Britain loaded the world's largest cargo plane (the Russian-made Antonov 124 aircraft) through Thursday night to despatch a flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators for India on Friday from Belfast, Northern Ireland, the

British High Commission said on Friday, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison to thank him for Australian aid to India to battle pandemic. PM Modi has already thanked several world leaders including US President Joe Biden, British PM Boris Johnson and Russian President Vladimir Putin among

others for the aid extended by their respective countries to India which is currently being battered by a ferocious Covid second wave that is claiming thousands of lives every day.

In a statement, the British High Commission (BHC) said, "A flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators due to leave Belfast today in support of India's fight

against Covid-19. The World's largest cargo plane loaded through the night with life-saving oxygen equipment from UK. Each oxygen generator produces 500 litres of oxygen per minute and is the size of a 40ft shipping container."

Giving details, the BHC said, "The world's largest cargo plane will leave Belfast this morning, carrying three 18-tonne oxy-

gen generators and 1,000 ventilators as part of the UK's latest response to India's Covid-19 crisis. Airport staff worked through the night to load the life-saving kit, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, aboard the massive Antonov 124 aircraft."

The BHC added, "Each of the three oxygen generation units – the size of 40ft

freight containers - produces 500 litres of oxygen per minute, enough for 50 people to use at a time. They are expected to reach India on Sunday morning, where the Indian Red Cross will help transfer them to hospitals. This support, previously announced, is in addition to 200 ventilators and 495 oxygen concentrators, which the UK sent to India in late April."



## SHORT TAKES

NIGERIA: 10  
KILLED, STUDENTS  
ABDUCTED

**Lagos:** Ten people including two police officers have been killed and a number of students abducted in Nigeria's southeast, police said on Friday, in a region where separatist tensions are on the rise.

Dozens of security operatives have been killed during attacks by gunmen on checkpoints, police stations and prisons in the region in the past few months.

On Thursday, gunmen stormed Obosi police station in Anambra state but were engaged in a gunbattle by police officers on duty.

"Two police operatives paid the supreme price," state police spokesman Ikenga Tochukwu said in a statement, adding an investigation was under way to identify the perpetrators.

He said the gunmen also set part of the police station and two vehicles ablaze before fleeing.

29 PEOPLE FOUND  
FROM SEMITRUCK  
IN TEXAS

**San Antonio:** More than two dozen people were recovered from a big rig that was stopped near San Antonio, including one person who was taken to a hospital, a police official in Texas said.

A passerby called police Thursday to report a suspicious semitruck along Interstate 10, east of San Antonio, Lt. Jesse Salame told reporters. A San Antonio Park police officer initiated a traffic stop. As the officer approached the vehicle, the back door swung open and several people ran out, Salame said.

Authorities made contact with 29 of the people who had been in the semitruck. One person was taken to the hospital to be treated for dehydration, San Antonio Fire Department spokesperson Joe Arrington said. The traffic stop is being investigated for possible human smuggling, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement told KSAT-TV in a statement.

ISRAELI TROOPS  
KILL 2, INJURE 1  
PALESTINIAN

**Jerusalem:** Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the men opened fire on a Border Police base in the occupied West Bank on Friday, police said.

They said the three attackers opened fire on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier opened fire in response, killing two of the men and wounding a third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

The violence comes at a time of heightened tensions over east Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians are at risk of being evicted following a long legal battle with Israeli settlers. Palestinian protesters have clashed with police there on a nightly basis in recent weeks.

On Thursday, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian suspected of carrying out a drive-by shooting earlier this week in the West Bank that killed an Israeli and wounded two others.

GERMAN SPY  
AGENCY TO CHECK  
ISLAMOPHOBIA

**Berlin:** German intelligence services said on Wednesday that they would widen their surveillance of the Islamophobic protest movement Pegida in its home state of Saxony, as the group had become a "extremist" and "anti-constitutional".

While Pegida had previously attracted "heterogeneous" support and taken "moderate" positions, it had developed "an increasingly right-wing extremist orientation" Saxony's domestic intelligence agency LfV said in a statement.

"By regularly offering right-wing extremists a platform to propagate anti-constitutional ideologies, this movement acts as a hinge between extremists and non-extremists," said agency president Dirk-Martin Christian. He added that "all people and activities" within the group would now be put under surveillance, with the exception of those merely taking part in peaceful demonstrations.

Pegida, which campaigns against what it calls the "Islamisation of the West", was born in October 2014 with xenophobic marches every Monday evening.

## EU drug regulator taps new Covid pill

Begins accelerated authorisation process for sotrovimab to prevent deaths, hospitalisation

US favours freer  
flow of vaccine  
components

**Paris, May 7:** The new US position in support of lifting patents on Covid-19 vaccines has taken attention away from an equally significant change by Washington, which plans to open up trade in the raw materials used to make them.

After having recently taken heat for blocking such exports, Commerce Secretary Katherine Tai said Wednesday that the US government would "work to increase the raw materials needed to produce those vaccines".

The assertion was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on Covid-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries.

Long legal and economic policy debates likely lie ahead about waiving vaccine patents, particularly at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Meanwhile, the difficulties faced by some laboratories in obtaining components to manufacture vaccines look set to stymie the drive to ramp up production.

Two labs have recently spoken out about their difficulties, laying the blame at Washington's door.

Germany's Curevac said it could not secure supplies of certain materials from the United States.

Several days earlier, India's Serum Institute, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, called on U.S. President Joe Biden to step in.

"Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in

● **THE ASSERTION** was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on Covid-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries.

beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production can ramp up," the company's president Adar Poonawalla wrote on Twitter.

There is no actual embargo on exporting vaccine components. Instead, Biden, like his predecessor Donald Trump, invoked the Defense Production Act — which normally concerns wartime — to confront the pandemic.

While it does not explicitly ban exports, it puts the US government first in line to buy certain products made in the country.

US officials have previously played down the possible effect of the law on global vaccine production.

"There's just more global manufacturing happening everywhere in the world than suppliers can currently support," a US official told a White House briefing late last month on condition of anonymity. — *AFP*



French President Emmanuel Macron arrives for an EU summit at the Alameda do Porto Congress Center in Porto, Portugal, Friday. European Union leaders meet for a summit in Portugal, sending a signal they see the threat from Covid-19 on their continent as waning amid a quickening vaccine rollout. Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the Covid has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment. — *AP*

Australia: Travel ban on India  
returnees only till May 15

## OZ MIGHT CLOSE BORDERS TILL 2022

**Melbourne, May 7:** Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday said that the travel ban on Australians returning home from Covid-hit India will not be extended beyond May 15 and repatriation flights will commence soon.

The Australian government, for the first time in history, recently imposed a temporary ban on its citizens from returning home, if they have spent time in India up to 14 days before flying back. The government threatened to prosecute them with a possibility of five years of jail term or a penalty of 66,000 Australian dollars (USD 50,899).

The government's order on the matter is set to expire on May 15. Following the National Security Committee on Friday, Morrison agreed it saw "no need to extend it beyond that date". — *PTI*

**Sydney, May 7:** Australia is likely to remain shut to visitors until late 2022, the country's trade and tourism minister said on Friday, as another global Covid surge smashed hopes of a quick reopening.

Minister Dan Tehan said a wave of cases on the Indian sub-continent showed Australia's near blanket ban on arrivals was still essential to keep the country Covid-free. Since March 20, 2020, Australians have been barred from travelling overseas and a hard-to-get individual exemption is needed for foreign visitors to enter the country. It is "very hard to determine" when borders could reopen, Tehan told *Sky News*, "the best guess would be in the middle to the second half of next year". — *AFP*

**Beijing, May 7:** China has opened Mount Everest's northern slope to a few dozen mountaineers who will be tested for the Coronavirus and must keep their distance while ascending the world's highest peak.

Both Nepal and China closed the mountain to foreign climbers last year because of the pandemic. Nepal has allowed in foreign climbers this season despite a surging Covid-19 outbreak, and at least one climber, a Norwegian, confirmed last month he had contracted the virus.

Nepal mountaineering officials have denied any outbreak on the mountain, citing only altitude sickness and other ailments common in the cold, harsh, low-oxygen environment where climbers stay in close quarters. This week, the Himalayan nation halted all flights as part of a strict lockdown. — *AP*

## VACCINE MUST FOR SAUDI WORKERS

**Riyadh, May 7:** Saudi Arabia said on Friday that employees will only be allowed to return to their workplace in person once vaccinated against Covid. Vaccination will become a "mandatory condition" for the face-to-face return of public and private sector employees, the ministry of human resources and social development

said in a statement, urging workers to "begin the process" to get a jab.

The health ministry said it has administered more than 10 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

The kingdom has reported more than 423,000 Coronavirus infections. — *AFP*

## N-talks intensify in fourth round

**Vienna, May 7:** World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks on Friday in Austria aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.

The talks began in early April and Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that "the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process."

"The delegations seem to be ready to stay in Vienna as long as necessary to achieve the goal," he wrote. The US pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated.

The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks. Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal,



Deputy Secretary General/Political Director of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Enrique Mora (left) leaves the Grand Hotel Wien after the closed-door nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna on Friday. — *AFP*

which is intended to prevent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Iran began enriching uranium to a greater purity, stockpiling more than allowed and beginning to use more advanced centrifuges in an attempt to

pressure the world powers remaining in the deal — Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — for economic relief. U.S. President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but

that Iran needs to return to compliance. Iran, which insists it does not want to produce a nuclear bomb, has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must remove all sanctions imposed under Trump. — *AP*

## BUG | INVASION

Insects have taken over social media, newspapers even before parks, gardens

## US braces for cicada wave after 17 years

**Washington, May 7:** Some are waiting for their arrival with trepidation, others are curious what they might taste like: Americans are swapping tips on how best to weather the storm when billions of cicadas soon emerge after 17 years underground.

Before invading parks and people's gardens, the insects have already conquered the airwaves, social media and newspapers, especially in parts of the eastern, central and southern United States

where "Brood X" is due to emerge.

Billions of cicada nymphs that have been living underground since 2004 will burst out of the soil, shed their skin, mate, lay eggs and then die, all against the backdrop of the deafening noise that males make to attract females.

The last time they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready to host the

● **LAST TIME** they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready for Olympics.

Summer Olympics. So when will the swarm arrive?

Hard to say, as it depends to some extent on weather conditions, and in particular the temperature of the soil. Expected cooler temperatures could delay their emergence until mid-

May — or they could pop up any day now.

Residents have been watching for signs of their arrival for weeks, sharing photos of the tunnels the cicadas have dug to make their way to the surface when ready to briefly face the world.

Tim Pfeiffer has taken to tweeting about the insects. The 28-year-old, who lives in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland posted videos of a few bugs that had appeared ahead of the

swarm and were crawling on his porch.

He said that he was "more anxious than excited" and admitted that cicadas "are kind of gross as nymphs." But watching some of them morph into the adult form in under an hour is fascinating, he said.

On the neighborhood email network Nextdoor, there are more and more comments about the looming bug invasion, including how best to deal with the flying critters.

"Get a face shield, wear a cap, carry a fly swatter, keep your windows up while driving," advised one person.

Another user had the following advice for cyclists: "Pedal slow and use wide tires, those squished cicadas on the bike trail are mighty slick." It is important to remember that cicadas pose no real threat to humans, except for the high annoyance factor — and the even higher gross-out potential. — *AFP*



DECCAN  
Chronicle

8 MAY 2021

## Vaccines: IP waiver fine, but tech transfer crucial

The warning by the principal scientific advisor to the Union government that a third wave of the pandemic Covid-19 is in the offing and the Supreme Court's assessment that the government needed to finalise a formula for the allocation, supply and distribution of oxygen in a scientific manner before the wave hits the nation bind the government into pulling up its socks to fight the pandemic. The decision of the United States administration to support a joint move by India and South Africa to waive patent for vaccines for the pandemic could add to its preparedness.

Most experts were of the view that the pandemic would stage a second coming after it started waning in the fourth quarter of last year but the government planned little or nothing for it. The Niti Aayog and the parliamentary committee for health and family welfare had flagged the increased use of medical oxygen during the first wave and wanted the government to streamline its supply and distribution mechanism. But the government had chosen to ignore most of them with the cumulative result that patients in their thousands choke and some die across India.

**The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and production increased in the shortest possible time**

The government that had cleared two vaccines, one developed indigenously, and then launched the "world's largest vaccination drive" in the beginning of the year did little to augment their production with the result that other nations now scour their vaults to export the jabs to the "world's vaccine factory". This is almost the same in the case of life-saving anti-viral drugs, too. The government did nothing to improve the healthcare infrastructure in the interregnum, with the result that only a percentage of the patients get decent medical attention with proper care.

A repeat of the heart-wrenching scenes that several parts of the country now witness is totally unacceptable and the Union government must lead from the front the defensive actions against the third wave. It has presented and got passed a budget earmarking ₹2.23 lakh crores for the health ministry, which marked a 137 per cent hike compared with the previous year, in the light of the pandemic. This should be reflected in the preparatory work, which should also see an improvement in the infrastructure. The government must, as the court wanted, make a realistic assessment of the projected requirements of the medicines and auxiliary materials and start sourcing them from within the country or abroad.

The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and the production increased multi-fold in the shortest possible time. Three vaccine manufacturing units in the public sector — those in Kasauli, Coonoor and Guindy — have stopped working for want of regulatory compliance for more than a decade and the government must ensure that they are back in action at the earliest; the fourth one in Chengalpattu requires only a minor effort to start production. The time for the Narendra Modi government to pluck the lowest hanging fruits is long over; it must now face tougher challenges.

## Stalin era begins

Among Tamil Nadu's 10 chief ministers from Rajaji to Edappadi K. Palaniswami there were giants like Kamaraj, Karunanidhi, MGR and Jayalalithaa who brought in welfare schemes to benefit a cross-section of people from students to the poor and disadvantaged. The burden of expectation on Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin is, perhaps, at an apogee, especially considering the circumstances rendered dire by a sweeping pandemic. The expectations may have been lower when Edappadi took over in 2017 but in terms of tackling the coronavirus health crisis he also set an example of a leader backing a proficient set of administrators.

To Stalin's credit he has started off on a good note, first acknowledging political elders before putting together his Cabinet thoughtfully. Having waited patiently for his turn when he also revealed a statesmanlike side to his personality in not trying to take advantage of the situation during Edappadi government's existential crisis, Stalin has swung into action, signing Covid-19 relief measures and women's welfare. In taking on the job with executive decisiveness straightaway, Stalin has shown himself to be a seasoned politician who also eschewed glitzy shows in triumphalism. He has also kept off introducing into his Cabinet his kin, including his son who was so prominent at the hustings.

Having worked for his party DMK for decades, Stalin must be well aware of collective responsibility and that is reflected in the quality of ministers he has chosen for key tasks. While keeping faith with elders who were among his father's loyalists, his choice is apt of former Mayor Ma Subramaniam as health minister at a time when the virus is throwing up record numbers and the state has to look into oxygen availability among preparatory measures. Tending to finance will be Palanivel Thiagarajan, with his rich experience as a former investment banker and there are other key ministers to look after education, etc. The mixture of the old and the new Cabinet is a promising enough sign as the Stalin era begins.

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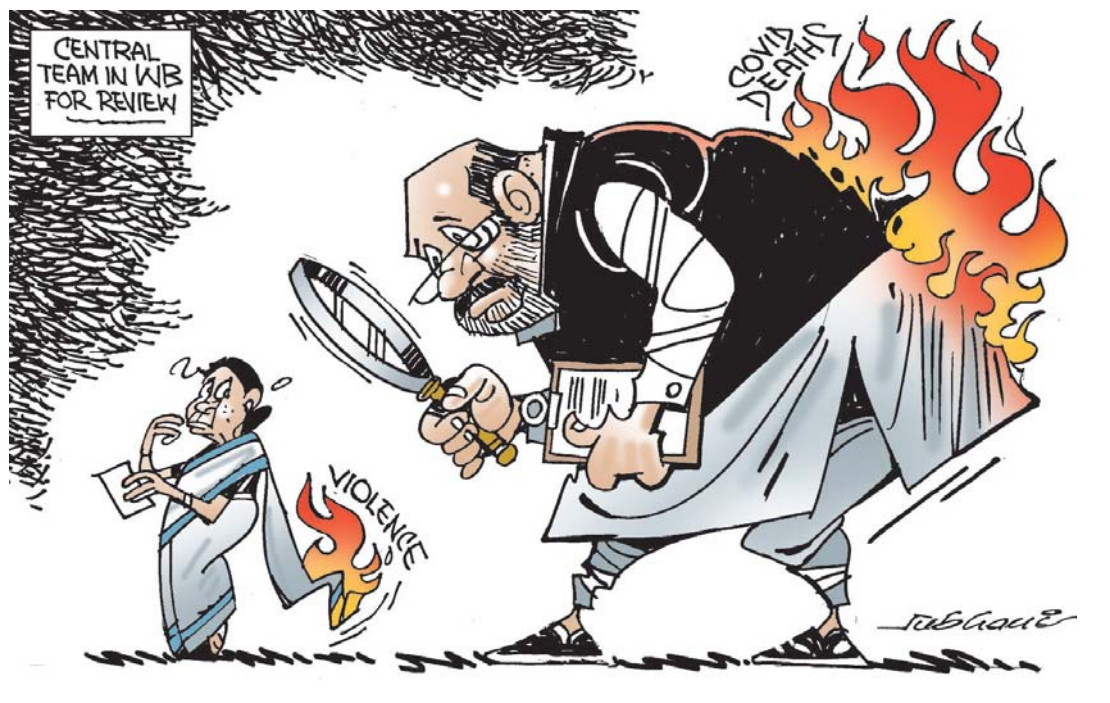
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Subhani



## Heal at home first, then try to be a global leader



K.C. Singh

While India was distracted by the macabre events in and outside hospitals in Delhi and other major cities as patients gasped for breath, and some even died as the oxygen ran out, minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar headed to London for a meeting of G-7 foreign and development ministers earlier this week. Also invited, besides G-7 members, were the ministers of South Korea, South Africa and the chair of Asean. Mr Jaishankar had just met US secretary of state Antony Blinken and his host, British foreign secretary Dominic Raab, when some members of his delegation tested positive for Covid-19. What could represent his government's mishandling of the coronavirus' second wave than this international embarrassment?

The G-7 meeting, preparatory to the summit later this year, issued a long joint statement. US trade representative Katherine Tai set the scene by announcing on its eve that the United States supported the Covid-19 Trips waiver at the World Trade Organisation. Its preamble begins by recognising the "critical juncture" at which stand "our people, our planet, our security and our future prosperity". This holistic approach is most welcome as it recognises the connection between pandemic elimination, future pandemic avoidance, climate change centrality and the world's prosperity depending on global interdependence.

Then it addresses the themes of continuing relevance, if the G-7 nations have to retain their moral advantage over the Chinese model of single party rule favouring economic over political and humanitarian rights. It asserts that democracy "is under pressure globally".

cine-sharing programme Covax.

Although since October 2, 2020, when India and South Africa introduced the Trips waiver at WTO, as India's former permanent representative to the UN in New York Syed Akbaruddin tweeted, 60-plus nations have co-sponsored and 100-plus nations extended support to it in the 164-member body. The G-7 statement shows residual resistance in Europe, which may slowly dissipate as the US draft gets circulated and perhaps amended to reflect corporate interests. In any case, it means two things — a waiver is not coming soon enough to help the developing world this year; and India has to take the lead in compelling indigenous manufacturers to voluntarily waive Trips cover and share their intellectual property to put moral pressure on the foot-draggers at WTO. However, so far, the Indian government is headed in the reverse direction by putting half the vaccine production in the market for states and the private sector to haggle over. The CEO of a major hospital chain in Gurgaon claimed on television that he was offered vaccines by intermediaries at higher prices. Will the Indian government now end up with a controversy of its own making?

However, past experience shows that the US throwing its weight behind a proposal generally gets European compliance. Germany and Switzerland may be the last holdouts. In the meanwhile, India requires to focus on two things — normalising access to hospitals by ramping up beds with oxygen, ICUs, etc. The supply of oxygen must take into account not only escalated hospital needs but also the moderately ill who are self-

**What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy**

isolating at home. Also, to address vaccine supplies as the government has compounded the confusion by opening-up vaccinations for the 18-plus age group just as the supply has dried up. Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawala abandoning his factory, alleging threats and making gratuitous statements from his lair in London needs deft handling. In any case, the US has now released raw material for 20 million vaccines, which he needs to put in vials promptly.

What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy. Not coincidentally, two-thirds of the G-7 statement has them in the cross-wire. One or the other figures directly in the paras relating to Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific, Myanmar or Taiwan, the entry of which to WHO has been endorsed. They also are the objects of themes like a rules-based order to human rights and freedom of religion, as indeed democracy. So, the news that Russia is starting mass production of a single-dose Sputnik vaccine comes as great relief. India also needs to be more proactive internationally in tying up contracts with emerging vaccines like a new RNA based product of Cure Vac, Germany, the final results of which are awaited in mid-May, which unlike Moderna and Pfizer can be stored in fridges. There is also the US-supported initiative between Baylor College of Medicine and the Hyderabad-based Biological E for a safe, effective and affordable vaccine. Its production does not start till later this year. This has the potential to inoculate the world.

The moral for India is that a government which cannot prioritise between a looming health emergency at home and its political and religious interests will hardly be viewed as a global leader in anything else. Our slogan has to be to heal at home first — politically and health-wise.

*The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.*

## LETTERS

## POST-POLL STRATEGY

Prior to the elections, BJP leaders in West Bengal threatened TMC workers and the police. The post-poll violence is a reaction from TMC workers. The BJP is trying to gain mileage by accusing the Mamata government of driving away Hindus and even seeking President's rule. Let the BJP introspect on its failures. Gimmicks will not help.

**P.R. Ravinder**  
Hyderabad

## GAG ORDER

The apex court verdict on Election Commission's plea is laudable (*SC rules out gag order on Media, DC, May 7*). A majority of us feel the EC committed a blunder by announcing elections when Covid-19 was spreading. The heavens would not have fallen if the elections were postponed by a few months. It could have controlled the spread of the virus and saved thousands of lives. All government agencies should take note of this costly experience and take suitable decisions to protect people.

**S.S. Rama Chandra Murty**  
Hyderabad

## HALF-BAKED CURES

Many half-baked nature cure ideas for Covid-19 are being circulated on WhatsApp and other social media. Some naive people are following them and suffering irreparable losses. They are confused about what is correct. There is no control over this. There is a need to control such news.

**M. Mohan Rao**  
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN  
DECCAN  
Chronicle

## Jewellery out of rare coins

HYDERABAD, MAY 7.

Yelliah, the waddar (stone-cutter), who found 200 rare gold coins of the 14th century A.D. belonging to the Vijaynagar empire at Mubarakpur village, about 35 miles from here in Vikarabad taluk, after making ingots from 100 of them, also made some jewellery for his wife.

After burying the remaining 100 gold coins in his house, the waddar came to the city with gold ingots for selling. When the waddar gave two gold ingots to a jeweller, the latter got suspicious and formed the police.

Farukh  
Dhondy  
Cabbages  
& Kings

*"I lived in glass houses, but confess I had no stones I stepped out of those kitchens — and rattled those marrow bones I stood in the ruins of the church — the one with the broken spire O Sage, O Saint, O soothsayer — O blessed prophetic liar!"*

— From *The Love Song of Wroor K. Gumby-Hara* By Bachchoo

We live in enlightened times, my friend... witness the fact that Boris Johnson has moved his girlfriend into 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Britain's Prime Ministers.

This is perhaps an honest if unconventional move. Boris announced his engagement to 32-year-old Carrie Symonds before their baby boy was born. So, Ms Symonds went from being a former adviser on his staff and lover to "First Girlfriend".

I call it a relatively honest, if not permanent, setup as former Prime Ministers have had unacknowledged mistresses while living in Downing Street with their wives. There was the confessed dalliance of John Major

with one of his ministers and then the alleged one-night stand of Tony Blair with Rupert Murdoch's wife Wendy Deng — and others going back further into history.

Ms Symonds, having moved into Downing Street, has proved to be a different fettle of kitsch. Recent Prime Ministers with kids have found the flat above the official rooms of 10 Downing Street constraining and have spread themselves to a connected upstairs flat of the adjoining 11 Downing Street. What the Chancellors of the Exchequer, whose right it is to live in Number 11, have thought of this I don't know, but that's now a matter for Rishi and Mrs Sunak. Perhaps gratitude for being appointed supplants territorial discomforts.

Carrie was very rude about the décor of the flat she inherited from previous PM Theresa May, saying she was appalled by its furniture and wallpaper, calling it a "John Lewis nightmare". She commissioned a designer named Lulu Lytle to refurbish and refurnish the place. I am no expert on interior décor, but pictures of the redecorated flat and Ms Lulu's handiwork are, for me, the best definition of

that elusive word "kitsch" that I have ever seen.

The redecoration cost £200,000. So why, when the world is in the throes of a deadly plague, am I devoting space to this idiosyncrasy? Because it is now alleged that some Tory donors had paid for this extravagance, and that makes BoJo beholden to these benefactors on the principle that there is no such thing as a free lunch. This scandal, the significance of which is yet to be established, may cause BoJo to be found guilty of lying to Parliament about the settlement of the redecoration bill, thus breaching the ministerial code — a matter for resignation.

Now the commentariat, even in right-wing BoJo-supporting publications such as *The Spectator*, are getting worried about the influence of the "First-Girlfriend" in the affairs of the country. Her bad taste in décor and the consequent threat to BoJo aside, it is a fact that she has packed the staff and advisory phalanx of the PM's office with her friends and people she agrees with politically.

Her overseeing several of these crony appointments had led to the resignation of the previous Svengaliish adviser, Dominic Cummings, who after his ejection

from Downing Street is taking his revenge by leaking damaging information to the press on BoJo's dealings. For instance, there was the leak of a phone and text correspondence between tax-dodging Singaporee Sir James Dyson and BoJo in which the PM asked for the manufacture and delivery of ventilators for the Covid crisis and agreed to Dyson's demand to waive the taxes his employees would have to pay. The meanness of billionaires, even when discussing the alleviation of a world health crisis, is unfathomable. Couldn't Dyson have paid the tax from his profits? Can the PM really step in and, with Chancellor Sunak, waive taxes on a select band of people?

Ms Symonds is accused, apart from crony appointments of interventions in policy areas that affect the country, decisions that very many Conservatives and people in government are convinced that BoJo would not have taken had it not been for her prevalent influence. The contention is that if Ms Symonds wants to influence or dictate policy, for instance on green issues to which she is commendably dedicated, she shouldn't do it through the conjugal bed, but through the ballot box.

She allegedly caused BoJo to interfere in a parliamentary-sanctioned cull of badgers. He banned the cull which environmentalists now say has disastrously decimated the hedgehog population.

Her trivial influence was demonstrated when she insisted that BoJo interrupt and leave an important scientific meeting on Covid to demand that he immediately get in touch with *The Times* to refute a story in the newspaper that Carrie's affection for their dog Dilyn had cooled since she insisted on adopting him. Not a shaggy-dog story!

The criticisms of Ms Symonds' unconstitutional influence has been characterised by her supporters in the press as the grumblings of "old-school, sexist Tory dinosaurs who are afraid of intelligent women".

As an anti-Tory dinosaur and no supporter of Dominic Cummings or his hypocritical revenge and as someone who has never had — or has had through vast experience to overcome — a fear of intelligent women, I beg to disagree. BoJo was elected on some particular policies and democracy demands that he concentrate on those and not on the concerns of an unelected paramour.



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,234.60	0.78
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185▲474	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Sovereign rating to stay for next two years: S&P

S&P Global Ratings said India's credit rating would be retained at the current level for the next two years, and the country will see a slightly faster pace of growth in the next couple of years that will support its sovereign rating. Speaking at a webinar, Andrew Wood, director-sovereign and public finance ratings, S&P Global Ratings, said, "India's rating remains stable on a 'BBB-' rating. We do not expect there to be a change."

## Carlyle sells 4% stake in SBI Life for ₹3,900 crore



Private equity firm Carlyle Group divested 4 per cent stake in SBI Life Insurance for over Rs 3,900 crore through an open market transaction. According to bulk deal data available with the BSE, Carlyle Group, through its entity CA Emerald Investment, sold 4.1 crore shares, amounting to 4 per cent stake, of SBI Life for Rs 3,936 crore. The shares were offloaded at an average price of Rs 960.

## HDFC net up 31% in Q4, interest income falls

Mortgage lender HDFC reported a 31 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 5,669 crore for the fourth quarter against Rs 4,342 crore a year ago. Total income on a consolidated basis more than doubled to Rs 35,754 crore from Rs 16,632 crore. Interest income fell to Rs 10,879 crore from Rs 11,391 crore. For the full year FY21, the net profit was down at Rs 20,488 crore against Rs 22,826 crore in FY20.

## Cams lists on NSE to broaden investors base

Chennai-based Computer Age Management Services (Cams), India's largest registrar and transfer agent of mutual funds, got listed on the NSE. Cams shares were first listed on the BSE on Oct. 1, 2020 after the IPO. Since NSE Investments was a shareholder in Cams prior to the IPO, though they exited completely during the IPO, this prior shareholding precluded the listing of the company's shares on NSE then.



■ Banks have to disburse loans in 30 days

# Quick on-lending of health fund ordered

**FALAKNAAZ SYED**  
MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that banks seeking funding from its special Rs 50,000 crore 'on-tap term liquidity facility' to on-lend to Covid-related healthcare services, should do so within 30 days from the date of availing of the funds from it. The banks will have to ensure that the amount borrowed from it should at all times be backed by lending to the specified segments till the maturity of the scheme.

The RBI early this week announced a Rs 50,000 crore liquidity window to banks under priority-sector lending to augment Covid-19 healthcare infrastructure to help raise treatment capacity, and availability of medicines and medical equipment in India. Loans under the scheme, for tenures up to 3 years, are available to banks at the repo rate till March 31, 2022. Such loans would also be classified under priority sector.

Consequently, banks are expected to extend these loans below current interest rates for companies engaged in health care activities. These include makers and suppliers of vaccines and drugs; hospitals; pathology labs; suppliers of oxygen; makers of emergency medical equipment; logistics firms; and Covid-19 patients.

According to Crisil Ltd, hospitals could be among the biggest beneficiaries as

### ₹10K-CR WINDOW FOR SFBs OPENS ON 17TH

**FALAKNAAZ SYED**  
MUMBAI, MAY 7

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said that it will conduct the first auction for special three-year long-term repo operations of Rs 10,000 crore for small finance banks (SFBs) on May 17.

With an aim to soften the impact of the Covid second wave on small borrowers, the RBI this week announced a special long term repo operation (SLTRO) window for small finance banks and allowed classifying on-lending by small finance

banks to microfinance as priority sector lending. The special liquidity window to the tune of Rs 10,000 crore to SFBs, through SLTRO will be available at the repo rate. This Rs 10,000 crore facility is to be deployed for fresh lending with a maximum ticket size of Rs 10 lakh per borrower and would be available till October 31, 2021.

The RBI said it will conduct one auction for SLTRO each month. The unutilised portion of notified Rs 10,000 crore will be carried forward in each subsequent auction until fully utilised.

the incremental funding can potentially increase bed capacity in the country by 15-20 per cent. "As many as 354 Crisil-rated companies with aggregate bank exposure of Rs 40,000 crore will be eligible for such loans. Though pharmaceutical firms account for 68 per cent of rated bank exposure, hospitals at around 24 per cent of rated exposure are likely to avail majority of the funding available," said the rating agency.

The borrowing cost of hospitals rated by Crisil are 10.5-11 per cent and the new loans taken for expansion under this RBI scheme could be 300-350 basis points cheaper, leading to substantial interest

savings.

Subodh Rai, chief ratings officer, Crisil Ratings said, "Increased availability of funds at low cost will incentivise hospitals to augment beds, oxygen storage, ICUs and critical medical equipment. Even if half of the funding available is used to add hospital beds through brownfield expansion, it will mean about 5 lakh incremental beds, or 15-20 per cent of India's current capacity."

In comparison, for entities in other health care related sectors such as pharmaceuticals, the capital requirements for enhancing production capacity of critical Covid-19 related drugs is not very high.

## LIC RELAXES CLAIM SETTLEMENT REQUIREMENTS

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
HYDERABAD, MAY 7

Keeping in view the safety of its customers in the current pandemic situation, Life Insurance Corporation of India said it has relaxed claim settlement requirements to make the processes easier and hassle free.

"To facilitate a speedy settlement of death claims in the prevailing situation where death has occurred in a hospital, in lieu of Municipal death certificates, LIC has allowed alternate proofs of death," the life insurance behemoth said in a statement. The alternate proof of death, which will be accepted by LIC include, discharge summary or death summary containing a clear date and time of death issued by hospitals run by government or ESI or Armed Forces or any corporate.

The company, however, said such hospital issued the certificate should be counter-signed by a LIC Class I officer or a Development Officer with 10 years standing along with cremation or burial certificate or authentic identifying receipt issued by the relevant authority. In other cases, the municipal death certificate will be required as earlier. For annuities with the return of capital options, the insurer said the production of life certificate is waived for annuities due up to October 31, 2021.

## WHATSAPP SCRAPS MAY 15 DEADLINE FOR PRIVACY POLICY

**STUTI ROY & MOUMITA BAKSHI CHATTERJEE**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts.

WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent Facebook.

A WhatsApp spokesperson said no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not accepting the policy update.

"No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query on Friday.

The spokesperson added that while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some people have not had the chance to do so yet.

But the company neither clarified the reason behind the decision nor divulged the number of users who have accepted the terms so far.

In January this year, WhatsApp had informed users about the changes in its terms of service and public policy through an in-app notification. —PTI

# Patents: Pharma has limited legal options

**IAN LOPEZ & TINA DAVIS**  
MAY 7

A potential World Trade Organization waiver of patent and trade secret protections for Covid-19 vaccines would leave pharmaceutical companies with limited legal avenues to recover costs.

The US on Wednesday expressed support for a temporary waiver, sending shares in several vaccine makers down the next day. The issue now faces thorny negotiations at the WTO, where several members, including Germany, have opposed efforts to skirt intellectual property rights. They say it would complicate production and make companies less likely to respond in the future.

The proposed waiver is intended to ramp up the production and export of vaccines and medicines to stem the pandemic's surge in the developing world. It would let countries obtain know-how and forge compulsory licenses without facing blowback in the form of trade complaints and sanctions from other nations.

Still, some vaccine producers, like Moderna Inc and Pfizer Inc, might sue the US to recoup some of their losses, said Matthew Howell, an intellectual property attorney at Alston & Bird in Atlanta. If the manufacture of the vaccine is done in the US, under the government's authorisation, there are avenues for compensation in American courts.

That's not always the case in other countries, particu-

# India's Covid relief comes to \$302 per capita: ADB

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, MAY 7

India's over \$410 billion Covid-19 relief package ranks as the second biggest among Asia's developing countries, but this, when translated to per capita relief, slips many places down the ladder.

Among ADB's developing members, the top three packages are those of China at \$2.3 trillion, India at \$412 billion and the Republic of Korea at \$248 billion.

However, the per capita package in India is a low \$302 against \$15,629 in Singapore, \$4,799 in Republic of Korea, \$2,528 in Malaysia, \$1,658 in China and \$1,208 in Thailand.

"If we look at ADB's developing members, we see large countries such as India or Indonesia with seemingly small packages per capita of \$302 and \$426, respective-



ly," the Asian Development Bank said in its study.

However, whether a package on a per capita basis is adequate to address the Covid-19 pandemic is a difficult question with no easy answer. It depends on the government's objectives, both with respect to the pandemic and other economic objectives like fear of running a fiscal deficit and how it perceives the situation, it added.

India allocated 38.6 per cent share of its total package for liquidity support, which includes short-term lending to the

private sector, regulatory adjustments to liquidity requirements and foreign exchange operations. India's actions included increased short-term repurchase agreements (0.1 per cent of GDP), variable-term repurchase agreements (0.5 per cent of GDP) and special refinance facilities for rural banks, housing finance companies and small enterprises (0.2 per cent of GDP).

Among ADB developing members, China and India allocated the largest amounts to direct income support to households and individuals at \$1.3 trillion and \$194.4 billion, respectively.

In India direct income support makes up 10.9 per cent of the total package. Other actions implemented by India include subsidies for businesses, investments in health institutions and programmes for the agriculture sector.

# IMF to revisit India's growth forecast

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Considering the recent surge in Covid cases, the IMF will be revisiting India's growth forecast in July. The fund finds that the downside risks predicted by it are now materialising.

The IMF, in its April World Economic Outlook, had envisaged an economic recovery in India, with growth projected at around

12.5 per cent in FY22. "The recent upsurge in Covid-19 cases implies that India's side risks, which we had also spoken of at that time, are materialising. So, we are following these developments very closely, and we will be revisiting that growth forecast in our World Economic Outlook update, which will be forthcoming in July, so not too far off in the distance, but we will be looking at that again," IMF spokesman

Gerry Rice told reporters. While making the growth forecast in April, IMF's chief economist Gita Gopinath had said that Covid-19 still posed a downside risk.

"We're all watching what is happening in India with concern. And I think really what the economic impact will be will really of course depend on the path of the pandemic and how long this serious situation goes on for," said Rice.

### EVEN WITH WAIVERS, EXTRA VACCINES MAY BE A YEAR AWAY

**JAMES PATON & TIM LOH**  
MAY 7

The US-backed effort to waive patent protection for Covid-19 vaccines, even if successful, is unlikely to narrow a yawning gap in access to life-saving shots anytime soon.

The proposal faces weeks of difficult negotiations and intense push-back from the pharmaceutical industry. And if it were to be approved at the World Trade Organization, it could take a year or more to meaningfully increase supplies, vaccine specialists said.

"The short answer is no, it's not going to make any big difference," said Klaus Stohr, a former World Health Organization official who helped mobilise governments and drug-makers to prepare for pandemics. "Patents are not the real hurdle. It's the

understanding of complex technology."

The Biden administration won plaudits from health advocacy groups for backing what they describe as an important step toward achieving equitable access to vaccines, and the European Union and China signalled willingness to take part in the debate. However, German Chancellor Angela Merkel appears opposed to the proposal.

"The limiting factor for the production of vaccines are manufacturing capacities and high quality standards, not the patents," a German government spokeswoman said in an email.

Even if companies diverted resources and know-how in a 'full-blown technology transfer,' it wouldn't make a difference before the middle of 2022, said Stohr, a former

executive at drugmaker Novartis AG. Countries with ample supplies could help more quickly by committing to increased exports and publishing when and how much they can share, Stohr said.

To boost production, the priorities should be addressing a lack of key materials and components needed to make vaccines, adding manufacturing lines and more sharing of expertise to support technology transfers, said Rajeev Venkayya, president of Takeda Pharmaceutical Company's vaccines business.

"It's important for the world to be focused on the more complex issues of scaling up manufacturing rather than spending time on patents," said Venkayya, who worked in the Bush administration to develop a US pandemic flu plan. —Bloomberg

larly in less developed nations.

"Under the law they can get just and reasonable compensation for the use of their patented inventions" by another company in the US. However, when trying to make up for losses from an international manufacturer producing the vaccine overseas, the lawsuit avenue isn't available.

"A lot of conduct outside the country wouldn't be covered," Howell said.

Drugmakers such as AstraZeneca Plc have pledged not to profit from

their vaccines for the length of the pandemic, while Moderna has said it won't enforce its patents during the pandemic. The companies have contracts with governments around the world to deliver vaccines at a set price.

The US may seek to limit the waiver to just the rights to produce the vaccine, but some WTO members, like India, also want access to manufacturing and distribution developments spawned by the rush to develop and deliver vaccines.

"The pharmaceutical

industry has legitimate concerns about India's proposal, because the manufacturing and distribution innovations aren't just limited to producing the Covid vaccine," said Polk Wagner, a professor of intellectual property at the University of Pennsylvania.

"I don't know how they would legally stop this moving forward, because it just becomes a decision by the WTO," said Ellen 't Hoen, director of Medicines Law & Policy, a legal research group in the Netherlands. —Bloomberg

### CYBER | RISKS \$1.3 tn fund hires self-taught persons without a formal education

## Norway fund in desperate search of cyber experts

**LARS ERIK TARALDSEN**  
MAY 7

Norway's sovereign wealth fund is widening its recruitment net to include people without college degrees as it searches for the brightest minds to protect its \$1.3 trillion portfolio from growing armies of hackers.

Nicolai Tangen, the Oslo-based fund's CEO, says he

occasionally picks up the phone himself to "encourage good candidates to apply," as part of the recruitment process. The kinds of attacks the fund encounters are "more and more sophisticated. The powers we're up against are huge," he said. "There's a lot of money in this fund, so it's a precious target."

Hackers attempted to breach the fund's systems



more than 1,000 times in 2020, representing a doubling from the previous year, Tangen said in an interview.

The 54-year-old CEO says

he's also interested in talking to ethical hackers.

The focus on cyber security has prompted the fund to rethink some of its traditional recruitment requirements. "In general, we're more open than we used to be," said Ada Magnaes, head of HR. Now applicants won't be expected to have the kinds of university or college degrees normally needed

to get past the screening process.

She says Norges Bank Investment Management – the fund's official name – has already hired people in Singapore and New York who were "without a formal education, practically self-taught."

"They've got exactly the mindset and the attitude we're looking for," she said. —Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Abid, Azhar put Pak in command

**Harare:** Centuries by Abid Ali and Azhar Ali put Pakistan in a strong position on the first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe on Friday. Abid (118 not out) and Azhar (126) put on 236 for the second wicket before tall fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani brought Zimbabwe back into the match by taking three wickets with the second new ball. Pakistan had reached 268 for four at the close. Abid and Azhar came together with the total on 12 in the eighth over and ground down the Zimbabwe bowlers before Azhar edged Muzarabani to gully in the last half hour of the day. Azhar's dismissal was followed by a second failure in the series for Babar Azam, who drove Muzarabani to point after scoring two. — *AFP*

**Brief scores: Pakistan 268/4** (Azhar 126, Abid 118 n.o., Muzarabani 3/41) vs Zimbabwe.

## Nadal beaten in Madrid quarters

**Madrid:** Rafael Nadal lost 4-6, 4-6 to Germany's Alexander Zverev in the Madrid Open quarterfinals on Friday, casting doubts over the Spaniard's form ahead of this month's French Open. Nadal has now fallen early in two clay-court Masters tournaments ahead of the Grand Slam in Paris, after going out in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals last month before winning in Barcelona. Even in Barcelona, however, Nadal needed to save a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final. World number two Nadal is hoping to clinch a 14th Roland Garros title and record-setting 21st major in the French capital. Zverev's impressive straight-set win at the Caja Magica earns him a meeting with Dominic Thiem in Madrid semis, in what will be a repeat of last year's US Open final, which was won by Thiem. — *AFP*

## Laureus awards for Rafa, Osaka

**Seville, Spain:** Tennis players Rafael Nadal and Naomi Osaka picked up the Laureus Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year awards on Thursday with football star Mo Salah and Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton also recognised. World number two Nadal claimed his fourth Laureus award as he was recognised for his 13th French Open and record-equaling 20th major. Osaka, who won the US Open for the second time and has four majors, is now a two-time Laureus winner. "Winning the French Open and equalling the 20th Grand Slam of Roger Federer has been an unforgettable moment," said Nadal. "It means a lot to equal my great rival, but at the same time, my great friend," he added. — *AFP*

## Hazard sorry for upsetting Real fans

**Madrid:** Eden Hazard apologized to Real Madrid fans after he was seen laughing and joking with Chelsea players following the team's elimination in the Champions League. A video of the Madrid forward having fun with his former teammates after Madrid's loss on Wednesday attracted a lot of attention in Spain, upsetting fans who loudly complained against him on social media. Hazard was one of the Madrid players who performed poorly in the 2-0 defeat in London. "I am sorry. I have read lots of opinions about me today and it was not my intention to offend the Real Madrid fans," Hazard said in a statement on Instagram. "It has always been my dream to play for Real Madrid and I came here to win. The season is not over and together we must now battle or La Liga! Hala Madrid!" — *AP*

## Live on TV

FOOTBALL
<b>English Premier League:</b> Leeds United vs Tottenham Hotspur from 5 pm; Sheffield United vs Crystal Palace from 7:30 pm; Manchester City vs Chelsea from 10:30 pm on Star Sports Select 1
<b>Italian League:</b> Inter vs Sampdoria from 9:30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD; Fiorentina vs Lazio from 12:15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD
FORMULA ONE
<b>Spanish GP:</b> Qualifying session from 6:25 pm Star Sports Select 2
UFC FIGHT NIGHT
<b>Sandhagen vs Dillashaw</b> from 5:30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD, Sony Ten 3, HD

## Pat bats for safety

Says if India is unsafe for T20 World Cup, shift to UAE is ideal

**Male (Maldives), May 7:** Australian pace spearhead Pat Cummins believes if hosting the ICC T20 World Cup amidst raging Covid-19 pandemic is a "drain on Indian resources" or is "unsafe", it would be prudent to shift it to the United Arab Emirates.

The postponement of Indian Premier League after multiple cases of Covid-19 inside the bio-bubble has led to a big question-mark on whether the marquee ICC event should be held in India where a third wave is expected around that time.

"If it's going to be a drain on resources or it's not going to be safe, then I don't think it's right to play it over here. That's the first question which needs to be answered," Cummins was quoted as saying by *The Age* newspaper.

Cummins said cricket authorities should check with Indian government and do what's best.

"It probably too early to say. It's six months away. The priority should be for cricket authorities to work with the Indian government to see what's best for the Indian people," Cummins said.

Cummins feels hindsight always provides better perspective like many who feel that IPL could have been held in UAE this time also.

"The IPL in the UAE last year was brilliant, it was really well run, but millions of people were saying it should have been played in India, so what do you do? You can see both sides. They set up this tournament with all the best advice."

Cummins has a lot of empathy for what the country is currently facing. "Around the hotel there is less staff and when you hop in the bus to go to training there is normally a few hundred people waiting. There's no one out there now and no crowds at games." — *PTI*

## HAMILTON TOPS SECOND PRACTICE FOR SPANISH GP

**Montmel (Spain), May 7:** Lewis Hamilton looked poised to continue his dominance of the Spanish Grand Prix after clocking the fastest time during the second practice session on Friday.

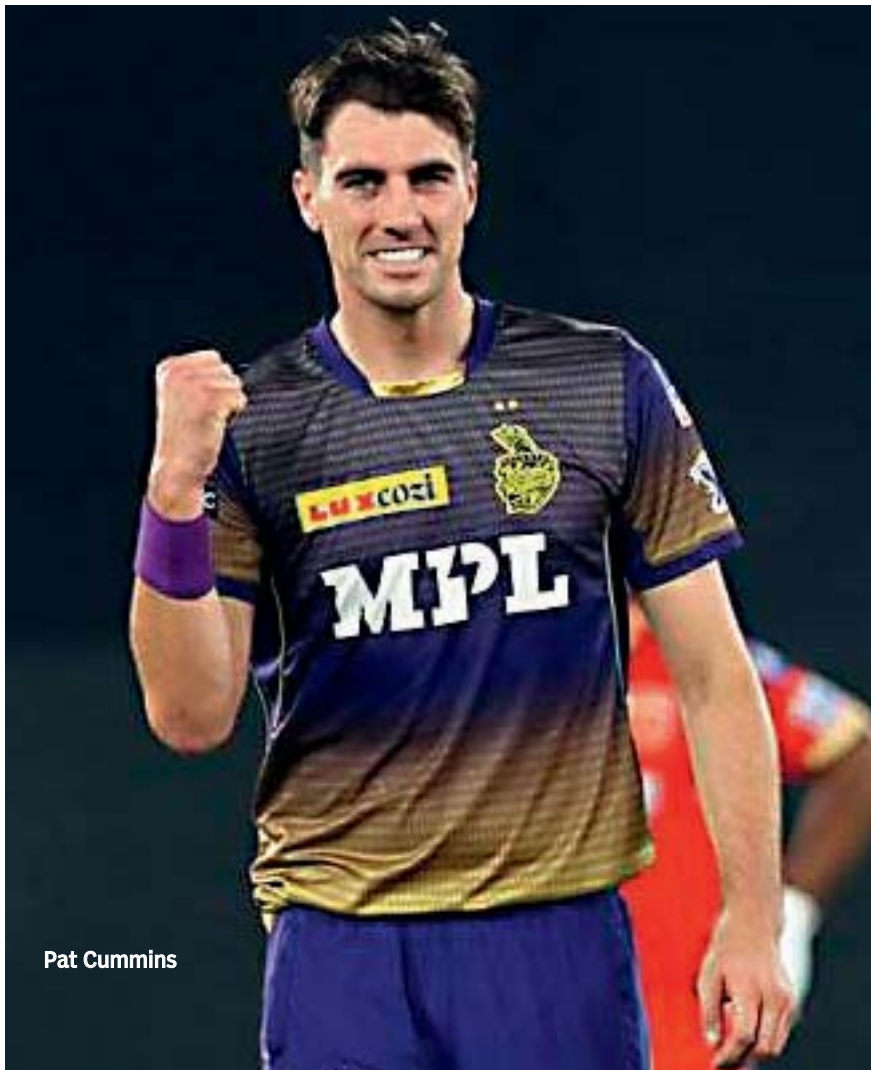
Formula One leader Hamilton had a flying lap of 1 minute, 18.170 seconds. Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas was .139 seconds behind Hamilton after the Finn set the fastest time in the first practice session.

Red Bull driver Max Verstappen, seen as the main challenger to Hamilton's reign as world champion, finished only ninth fastest at .615 off the pace. Verstappen missed some time on the track while his team worked on the car, and his last lap was cut short when he damaged the right tip of his front wing.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc had the third-best time, followed by Alpine pair Esteban Ocon and Fernando Alonso, who is back in Spain for his first race since 2018. Eight points separate Hamilton from Verstappen at the top of the standings after they finished 1-2 in the first three races. — *AP*

## Saina, Srikanth's Olympic hopes take hit

**New Delhi, May 7:** The Malaysia Open Super 750 tournament, one of badminton's last two Olympic qualifying events, was on Friday postponed due to a recent Covid-19 surge in the host country, dealing a severe blow to the qualification hopes of India's Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth. The \$600,000 event was scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur from May 25 to 30. "All attempts were made by the organisers and BWF to provide a safe tournament environment



Pat Cummins

## Morris "relieved" after leaving bubble

**Johannesburg, May 7:** South Africa and Rajasthan Royals all-rounder Chris Morris is "relieved" to be safely back home after witnessing "chaos" unfold once Covid-19 cases in the IPL bio-bubble came to light.

Morris, along with his 10 other South African players have reached home, after the IPL was suspended following six cases of Covid-19 — four players and two coaches from three different teams.

"Look, obviously I'm relieved," Morris, who is currently undergoing a 10-day mandatory quarantine at home, told *iol.co.za*. Morris said they came to know about the Covid cases in Kolkata Knight Riders — Varun Chakravarty and Sandeep Warrier — on Sunday night.

"The moment we heard that, when players are testing positive, inside the bubble, then everyone starts asking questions. The alarm bells definitely started going off for all of

us," he said. "By Monday when they postponed that game (between Kolkata and Royal Challengers Bangalore), we knew the tournament was under pressure to continue."

The Twenty20 league was suspended after Sunrisers Hyderabad's wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and Delhi Capitals' Amit Mishra tested positive on Tuesday.

"I was chatting to our team doctor, whose room

was across the hallway from my mine in the hotel, and Kumar (Sangakarra, the Royals' head coach) came around the corner, and drew his finger across his throat, and then we knew it was over," said Morris.

"And then it was chaos! The England guys especially were panicking because they needed to isolate in hotels in England first, and apparently there weren't any rooms." — *PTI*

## VIRAT-ANUSHKA DONATE ₹2 cr TO FIGHT COVID-19

**New Delhi, May 7:** India captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma have donated ₹2 crore to a fund-raising project, which will raise a total of ₹7 crore to support the country's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The two are raising money through crowd-funding platform Ketto.

"...Virat Kohli and Bollywood superstar Anushka Sharma are aiming to raise ₹7 crore for Covid relief in India," a press release from the celebrity couple stated.

"They are kickstarting a fundraising campaign #InThisTogether on the crowd-funding platform Ketto and are putting ₹2 crore for this initiative."

The campaign will run for seven days on Ketto and the proceeds will be directed to ACT Grants, the implementation partner which will work towards providing oxygen, medical manpower, vaccination awareness and tele-medicine facilities all through the pandemic and the amount.

— *PTI*

The selectors also picked four standby players — Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasad Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

## ENGLAND | TOUR

## No Hardik, Jadeja makes comeback

**New Delhi, May 7:** Hardik Pandya was not considered for selection as "he is still not in a position to bowl", while a fit-again Ravindra Jadeja made his way back to a 20-strong Indian squad announced on Friday for next month's World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a five-match series against England.

Along with Jadeja, batsman Hanuma Vihari and senior pacer Mohammed Shami also walked back into the side after missing the home series against England due to injuries.

All three had endured injuries during the away series against Australia earlier this year when India recorded one of their best triumphs.

Hardik, who was with team during the home series against England but did not play, has not been picked because he is not fit enough to do the job with the ball. He can play as a specialist batsman in the shorter formats but has to bowl for a place in the Test team.

"Hardik Pandya is still not in a position to bowl. The experiment of selectors to keep him during England and prepare him with bowling workload has failed miserably. He will henceforth not be considered for Test cricket," a BCCI source said.

The selectors also picked four standby players — Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasad Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

## INDIA SQUAD

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (Captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper; subject to fitness clearance).

Opener Easwaran and pacer Avesh Khan were also with the team during the England series while the extra pace did it for IPL regular Prasad Krishna and Gujarat left-arm fast bowler Arzan Nagwaswalla, who had a stellar 2019-20 season. He is the only Parsi cricketer currently playing at the first-class level in India.

The 23-year-old left-arm pacer has 62 first-class wickets to his credit in 16 matches that he has played since his debut in 2018.

K. L. Rahul, who underwent a surgery after being diagnosed with appendicitis, and Wriddhiman Saha, infected with Covid-19 during the recently-suspended IPL, have been included subject to fitness.

Out-of-form spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Navdeep Saini have been left out of the squad, which is expected to depart for England for the twin assignments in the third week of this month. — *PTI*

## INDIAN ROWING TEAM BOOK OLYMPIC BERTH

**New Delhi, May 7:** Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia/Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta in Tokyo on Friday.

Another Indian, Jakar Khan finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final which offers five Olympic quotas but he missed out as a country gets only one qualifying spot from this regatta.

The top three qualify for Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event.

"A country can qualify in only one boat from this regatta and since Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh had finished second in men's lightweight double sculls, they will qualify," Rowing Federation of India president Rajlaxmi Singh Deo said.

## 'NO ATMOSPHERE OF OLYMPIC BUILD-UP'

The Olympics open in Tokyo on July 23 but Arjun said the Games will be unlike any previous edition if they happen.

"It is less than 80 days for the Olympics but it is weird, there is very little Olympic atmosphere building up. The streets are empty, no people, very few vehicles, though we are told there is lockdown going on," Arjun said from Tokyo. — *PTI*

## Seema &amp; Sumit seal Tokyo spots

**Sofia (Bulgaria), May 7:** Seema Bisla on Friday became the fourth Indian woman wrestler to qualify for the Tokyo Games by reaching the final of the 50kg competition even as Sumit Malik settled for a silver medal after conceding his final bout due to a knee injury at the World Olympic Qualifiers, here.

Seema booked an Olympic berth for herself after a close 2-1 win over European Championship bronze medallist Anna Lukasiak of Poland, showing tremendous defensive skills in the semifinal.

After giving away a point on passivity, Seema pulled off a quick take down in the first period for a 2-1 lead, which she kept till the end to earn the quota.

She will now fight for gold against Ecuador's Lucia Yamileth Yezpez Guzman on Saturday. The 29-year-old is the fourth Indian to qualify for the Games after celebrated Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg). It will be first time that four Indian women wrestlers will compete in the Olympics. In the 2106 edition, three Indian women



Sumit Malik

wrestlers had competed. Nisha (68kg) and Pooja (76kg), however, failed to win quota after losing their respective bouts.

Meanwhile, Malik, who had become only the fourth men's free style wrestler to qualify for the Olympics, did not take the mat for his 125kg gold medal fight against Russia's Sergei Kozlyrev, the 2018 Youth Olympic champion, due to injury.

National coach Jagminder Singh said that Malik had injured his right knee during practice at the national camp a few weeks back and competed only because an Olympic quota was at stake.

— *PTI*

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