

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | 21 MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 36.0°C
Min: 27.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
36/27 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha
Navami till 11.06 am
Star: Poorva Phalguni till 3.16pm
Variyam: 10.05 pm to 11.36 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.21 am
to 9.12 am; 12.36 pm to 1.30 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR

Shawwal 8, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.35 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 5.15 pm

Maghrib: 6.25 pm

Isha: 8.15 pm

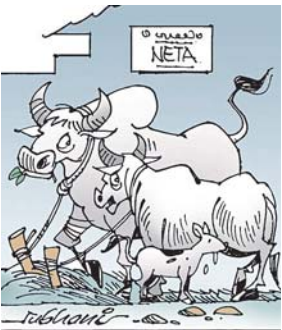
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM

SUNSET TODAY 6.33 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 1.31 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 2.12 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

India sought 40k FB users' data

New Delhi: Facebook said it has received 40,300 requests from the Indian government for user data in the second half of 2020. This was 13.3 per cent higher from the January-June 2020 period when India had made 35,560 total requests, according to the Facebook's Transparency Report. The company restricted access to 878 items in India in response to directions from the Union IT ministry.

New tax e-filing site from June 7

New Delhi: The income-tax department is expected to launch a new e-filing web portal for taxpayers, which they use to file routine ITRs and perform other tax-related works from June 7, officials said on Thursday. The existing web portal www.incometaxindiaefiling.gov.in will be shut for six days between June 1-6. Officials said the new portal www.incometaxgov.in will be made more user-friendly.

BBC tricked Diana in 1995

London: Journalist Martin Bashir tricked princess Diana into giving an explosive BBC television interview where she lifted the lid on her troubled marriage to Prince Charles, an report said on Thursday. Retired judge John Dyson said Bashir commissioned faked bank statements and then showed them to the princess' brother to persuade her to appear.

Lanka suspends inbound flights

Colombo: The Sri Lankan government has suspended all inbound international passenger flights for 10 days from Friday as part of its efforts to curb the spread of the pandemic in the island nation, which reported the highest spike in infections. The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka said on Wednesday the flight suspension will be in force from midnight of May 21 to May 31.

WORLD | 5

Israel vows to intensify strikes



Rescued crew of the barge P305 being brought off the Mumbai coast on Thursday. — PTI

Navy confirms 37 died on barge

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 20

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

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

"In one of most challenging SAR Ops in aftermath of #CycloneTauktae 325 survivors have been rescued & 37 #BNV recovered off Mumbai & Gujarat Coasts. Vigorous SAR efforts continue for missing crew of Barge

LOW PRESSURE TO BRING RAIN IN COASTAL AP

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 20

A low-pressure area is very likely to form over the north Andaman Sea and adjoining the east-central Bay of Bengal around May 22. It is very likely to intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 24 and move to Odisha-West Bengal coast on May 26 morning. Under its influence, isolated rains might occur over north coastal Andhra when the system crosses the coast.

Meanwhile, Southwest Monsoon may advance into South Andaman Sea and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal in the next 24 hours.

■ Page 3: Heavy rains predicted in Rayalaseema

P305 which sank off Mumbai with 05 IN ships, aircraft & helos deployed," the Indian Navy spokesperson tweeted on Thursday.

Notify black fungus as epidemic: Centre

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 20

Terming the emergence of "mucormycosis" as the new challenge before the health authorities across the country, the Centre has asked all state governments to notify "Black Fungus" under the Epidemic Diseases Act under which all government, private health facilities and medical colleges have to follow guidelines for screening, diagnosis, management of mucormycosis.

This law also makes it mandatory for the states to report all suspected and confirmed cases of

mucormycosis to the health department through district chief medical officers and subsequently to the IDSP surveillance team.

The Centre has said that the treatment for this fungal infection requires a multi-disciplinary approach, consisting of eye surgeons, ENT specialists, general surgeons, neurosurgeons and dental maxillo facial surgeons and the institution of Amphotericin B as an antifungal medicine.

The infection was detected among those who were on steroid therapy for Covid-19 treatment and deranged sugar control.

I-T FILING DATE EXTENDED TILL SEPTEMBER 30

New Delhi, May 20: The government on Thursday extended I-T return filing deadline for 2020-21 for individuals till September 30 to ease taxpayer compliance burden amid the pandemic. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30.

In a circular, the CBDT eased by a month till July 15, 2021, the deadline for issuing Form 16 by employers to employees.

The deadline for companies and firms whose accounts are to be audited was extended till November 30. — PTI

MEDICAL | TEST

Stakes high for CID, rebel MP

All eyes on MP's report

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

All eyes are on the report of the medical examination of Narsapur MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju that has been submitted by the Military Hospital, Secunderabad, to the Supreme Court. The three-member medical board appointed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court had already submitted a report stating that there were no external injuries. It also ruled out any assault as claimed by the MP.

"Local examination edema of both feet were present, discoloration of plantar aspect of both feet were present (sic)," said the report which the High

● THE STATE government has distanced itself ever since the CID booked Raju on sedition.

● THE CID justified the sedition charges by submitting several videos of his utterances which could foment communal strife and cause public unrest.

Court incorporated in its order. The rebel YSR Congress MP, however, moved the apex court seeking medical examination by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi. The court referred him to the Military Hospital, Secunderabad. It received the medical

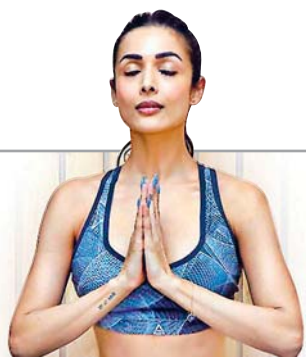
SPORTS | 8

Rahul Dravid is India coach for Lanka series



TABLOID

World Meditation Day: For that state of Zen



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Welfare gets huge Budget

Gender, children allocation a novelty, AP outlay at ₹2.29 lakh crore

MD ILYAS | DC VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy presented the AP State 2021-22 budget with a total outlay of ₹2,29,779.27 crore in the Assembly on Thursday. For the first time, a gender budget with ₹16,748.47 crore were also tabled. Presenting his third budget in row, the finance minister said social welfare was given the lion's share, followed by agriculture, health and water resources sectors in tune with the policies and priorities of the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government.

The revenue expenditure is pegged at ₹1.82 lakh crore, while the capital expenditure is estimated at ₹31,198.38 crore. The government expects the revenue deficit to be around ₹5,000.05 crore and a fiscal deficit of around ₹37,029.79 crore.

The finance minister said that funds were judiciously allotted to every welfare scheme without fail. Agriculture sector was allocated ₹11,210.80 crore, medical and health ₹13,830.44 crore and water resources ₹13,237.78 crore, reflecting the tone of the budget, he pointed out.

On the education front, school and intermediate education, including schemes like Amma Vodi, Jagananna Vidya Kanuka, Jagananna Goru Muddha, got ₹24,624 crore, while higher education which includes Jagananna Vidya Deevena and Jagananna Vasati Deevena was allocated ₹1,973.16 crore. For Nadu-Nedu Mana Badi, an amount of ₹3,500 crore would be spent during the fiscal. The health sector was allotted ₹13,830.44 crore with allocations for various schemes such as YSR Aarogyasri, Nadu-Nedu hospitals, setting up of kidney research center and super specialty hospital at Palasa, '104' and '108' services, assistance to APVVP, combating Covid-19, Covid vaccination and others. On the development and infrastructure front, the government would spend ₹3,763.34 crore on industrial development, ₹7,594.06 crore on transport, roads and buildings, and ₹6,637.24 crore for the energy sector.

For housing and infrastructure, ₹5,661.57 crore was allotted. ₹865 crore will be paid towards zero interest loans for SHG women. While YSR Pension Kanuka got ₹17,000 crore, YSR Cheyutha got ₹4,445 crore, and YSR Aasara ₹6,337 crore. Jagananna Vidya Deevena and Jagananna Vasathi Deevena were allotted a total of ₹5,723.15 crore.



Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy presents the Budget as Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy looks on in Assembly at Velagapudi in Amaravati on Thursday.

Budget to ensure AP cash transfer schemes continue



N. Vamsi Srinivas

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has every reason to smile after the regular budget for 2021-2022 was presented in the Assembly on Thursday.

It will ensure successful implementation of cash transfer schemes that had built an emotional con-

nect between him and the beneficiaries as reflected in the ruling party wiping the principal Opposition Telugu Desam out in the local bodies.

Proving wrong the doomsday prophecies on welfare schemes, the Chief Minister could roll out all the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes in the last fiscal despite the worst pandemic impacting the economy.

Some capital expenditure or asset building in simplistic form, might suffer but the electorate's choice of cash transfers over it will keep the bondage intact.

As such, the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led state government did well in

asset creation in the crucial education and health sectors, both tangible in the form of buildings and equipment and intangible by way of incentivising mothers to send their children to school. On top of it, the availability of cash, thanks to DBT, came in handy for the poor in facing the Covid-19 pandemic.

With revenue growth projections being close to reality for the current fiscal, excluding the exponential growth projected in state's own tax revenue, the Chief Minister seems to be confident about cash transfers this year too.

■ Page 2: Additional scheme for BC women

Agriculture budget at ₹31,256cr

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Minister for agriculture K. Kannababu presented the budget for agriculture and allied sectors with an outlay of ₹31,256.36 crore for the year 2021-22 with emphasis on the welfare of farmers in the Assembly on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister expressed gratitude to the farming community for working hard, braving the Corona pandemic, to feed the people. He thanked Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for being partial towards the farmers by paying utmost care for their welfare since assuming office. He said the state

I thank Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for being partial towards the farmers by paying utmost care for their welfare since assuming office. The farmers braved Covid-19 to feed people.

— K. KANNABABU
Agriculture minister

government had spent in the last 23 months an amount of nearly ₹68,000 crore for implementing various schemes with a major allocation of ₹17,430 crore for providing free power to the farmers.

Being critical of the previous TD government for failing to clear dues, he said that their government had cleared pending dues

worth ₹2,771 crore. He thanked the CM for giving him the opportunity to present the agriculture budget for the third consecutive year. He said the CM believed that if the farmer was happy the whole state would prosper, and, accordingly, he turned farmer-biased and so did the entire government machinery.

Detailing allocation of funds for various schemes, the minister informed that Rythu Bharosa Kendralu (RBKs) were providing a series of services ranging from providing seeds to procurement of crops and said that they were working on four pillars of supply of quality inputs, training and agriculture extension, procurement and

sale and integrated agriculture advisory centres. He described them as 'Farmers'.

Modern 'Temples,' and said that an amount of ₹128 crore was proposed to strengthen the RBKs further in the budget. For the implementation of YSR Rythu Bharosa — PK Kisan scheme, an amount of ₹6,876.50 crore was proposed in the budget, he said. For distribution of seed on subsidy basis at RBK level, an amount of ₹100 crore was allocated. The minister informed that 6.99 lakh quintals of subsidy seed was distributed to 13.96 lakh farmers for Kharif 2020, and 2.20 lakh quintals supplied to ₹3.04 lakh farmers for Rabi through the RBKs.

VIJAYAN SWORN IN KERALA CM FOR SECOND TERM

Thiruvananthapuram, May 20: CPM veteran Pinarayi Vijayan, who led the Left Democratic Front (LDF) to an unprecedented consecutive victory in the April 6 assembly polls, on Thursday took oath as Chief Minister of Kerala for the second time along with 20 ministers.

Governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oath of office to 77-year-old Vijayan and ministers in a low-key function at the Central Stadium here.

Opposition UDF leaders skipped the function in view of the Covid-19 spread. The Kerala HC also ordered limited participation. — PTI

Stinking HCA scrap rises to top

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Muck in the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has hit the ceiling. With five of the elected Apex Council members up against president Mohammed Azharuddin ever since the acrimonious Annual general meeting (AGM) on April 11, the HCA heavyweights have been landing blows and counters for control of the cricket body. The former Indian captain is in a tight corner and outnumbered.

First, it was the appointment of Ombudsman and Ethics Officer on which the two groups weren't on the same page. Now it is

the newly appointed CEO who is caught in the cross-fire. Azhar has taken strong objection to the nomination of Suneel Kante for the top executive post and has written to secretaries of affiliated clubs, listing out the anomalies in the appointment, which the other group claims was done at the AGM that continued after the president ended it abruptly (after a rukus) and walked out with his supporters.

Last week, HCA secretary R. Vijayanand sent out a note saying Kante has taken charge as CEO in the presence of the vice-president, secretary, joint secretary and the treasurer.

SHORT TAKES

JOGI SLAMS RAJU FOR TARGETING CM JAGAN

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

YSR Congress MLA from Pedana, Jogi Ramesh, slammed Narsapur MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju for targeting their government despite getting elected on the party ticket. The legislator seconding the thanksgiving motion to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan's address in the joint session of the legislature for the budget session here on Thursday lost his cool and made derogatory remarks against the MP.

He said, "Our government and Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy are being targeted by the MP for the last one year. He should remember that he was elected on our party symbol and by using a picture of the CM. People are despising his unwarranted criticism."

"I challenge him to contest without the name of our party and photo of our CM. I am sure that he will not get elected as a ward member even in his native place. The government has implemented welfare schemes worth ₹1 lakh crores, benefiting each and every section and making SCs, STs, BCs and minorities to live with respect and content."

The legislator said, "As the MP is trying to instigate communal violence and caste conflicts, he, and those who have been supporting him, should be arrested and punished as per law."

Meanwhile, Raghu Ramakrishna Raju's family members met the Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and sought his intervention on the arrest of the MP by the AP CID sleuths on charges of sedition.

MP's wife Ramadevi, son Bharat and daughter Indira Priyadarshini complained to the Speaker that the MP was arrested without taking any prior permission from the Speaker even as he was the member of the Lok Sabha. They alleged that the MP was harassed during interrogation.

The Speaker learnt to have assured them to look into the issue.

TD STAGES A WALKOUT FROM MOCK ASSEMBLY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Opposition Telugu Desam which boycotted the one-day Assembly budget session on Thursday conducted a mock Assembly to awaken people about the failures of the Jagan Mohan Reddy government. Interestingly, its members staged a walk-out from the mock assembly in protest against the 'anti-people and tyrannical' policies being pursued by the YSRC government at a time when the people were suffering greatly due to the unchecked Covid infections.

Mock Assembly Speaker D.B.V. Swamy struggled hard to control the members. Stormy scenes were witnessed in the 'mock assembly' as the Opposition members relentlessly raised slogans and held up placards, criticising the Chief Minister's indifference.

LOKESH FLAYS CM FOR VIOLATING FACE MASK NORMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday condemned Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for not wearing a face mask while taking part in the AP Assembly session proceedings.

He wondered what message Reddy was trying to send across to the five crore population of Andhra Pradesh by not following coronavirus guidelines.

Lokesh recalled that advertisements carrying the CM's photo were being released in which he is ironically asking the public to wear face masks while on the floor of the House he was showing utter disregard for the Covid-19 protocol and also to his own publicity slogans.

The TD leader recalled how complacent the Chief Minister was during the first wave of Corona when he said 'it is a small fever, which comes and goes. We have to coexist with it'. Reddy had also used terms like 'paracetamol' and 'bleaching powder' when speaking about the epidemic.

Lokesh lamented that now the situation had turned deadlier and the entire State has turned into a 'burial ground' but Reddy continued to flash smiles.

Spent ₹2.2 k cr in past 14 months for Covid

Revolutionary changes to save lives, free vaccine to all, once sufficient doses reach AP, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy declared in AP Legislative Assembly that everyone in the state will be vaccinated against Coronavirus for free once sufficient doses reach Andhra Pradesh. Until then, he asked public to strictly adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines and make them part of their life.

Replying to the debate on motion of thanks to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan's address, the CM pointed out that the government is setting up 53 oxygen generating plants in all identified Covid-19 hospitals across the state, apart from purchasing additional 50 cryogenic tankers, 18,500 oxygen concentrators and 10,000 b-type cylinders at a cost of ₹309 crore.

Paying his tributes to all those who have lost their lives in the Coronavirus pandemic, Jagan Mohan Reddy pointed out that his government has spent ₹2,229 crore on dealing with Coronavirus during the past 14 months. But opposition parties, particularly Telugu Desam, are being irresponsible in levelling baseless charges against the government.

The Chief Minister asserted that his government has brought in revolutionary changes in Aarogyasri. The previous government had provided for only 1,000 types of treatments under Aarogyasri. But in the last 23 months, his government has provided for treating 2,400 ailments under Aarogyasri, including Covid-19 and black fungus. He underlined that the government has identified 17 hospitals for treating patients suffering from black fungus.

Asserting that the entire country is fighting the battle with the Coronavirus, Jagan Mohan Reddy underlined that vaccination is the only way to win over the pandemic. He asserted that the government is ready to spend any amount of money to procure vaccines for all aged above 18 in the state. It has already called for global tenders for sourcing vaccine doses.

The Chief Minister pointed out that the state will require seven crore doses to cover all those above 18 years of age. But the centre has so far given only 76.29 lakh doses, which are around 10 per cent of the total requirement. Further, he said only two companies are currently manufacturing vaccines just seven crore doses per month in the country. In this context, he underlined that global tenders have been floated to secure vaccines for Andhra Pradesh.

Govt combating Covid well: Gov

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has appreciated the state government for its relentless efforts for Covid-19 management and vaccination by setting up testing facilities from zero in March 2020 to sub-district level at present, despite a severe strain on the economy.

Addressing the joint session of both the hous-



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Chief Whip G. Srikanth Reddy, and MLAs greet Governor before he addressed the Assembly session in virtual mode on Thursday.

— By Arrangement

HOUSE PASSES APPROPRIATION BILL, ADJOURNS SINE DIE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY. 20

The Legislative Assembly has passed the Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill, 2021, Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill No.2, 2021 and Andhra Pradesh Appropriation Bill No. 3, 2021.

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy tabled the three Appropriation Bills required to meet the supplementary grants made by the State Assembly for the year and supplementary expenditure charged on the consolidated fund of the state of AP for that year. The Bills were passed by voice vote.

The State Legislative Assembly also passed AP Medical Education and Research Corporation Bill 2021, Andhra Pradesh Survey And Boundaries Amendment Bill 2021, Andhra Pradesh Municipal Laws Amendment Bill, 2021 and Andhra Pradesh Municipal Laws Second Amendment Bill 2021 and withdrawn Andhra Pradesh Electricity Duty Bill 2015.

AP State Legislative Assembly also adopted a resolution to request the Government of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation to change the name of Orvakal Airport, Kurnool as "Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy Airport, Kurnool".

The State Legislative Assembly was later adjourned sine die by Speaker Tammineni Sitaram.

Victory in polls due to good ruling, says CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Thursday that his government takes the responsibility in reaching welfare schemes to all sections of the people despite the looming pandemic conditions and stands for public welfare.

The chief minister said good governance has resulted in tremendous victory for the ruling YSRC in all polls, nearly wiping out the opposition.

He said that in a first-of-its-kind gesture, the government released a welfare calendar for public knowledge, detailing the implementation schedules for the state's welfare schemes for the 2021-2022 fiscal starting from April 2021 to February 2022.

During the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, the Chief Minister reiterated his commitment to transparent, accountable and corruption-free governance and said that the manifesto is like a Holy Book.

Reddy said his government has fulfilled over 95 per cent of its promises, taking welfare to the doorstep of the people without any taint of corruption or discrimination.

The Chief Minister said that, in the last 23 months, the state government had directly credited ₹93,708 crore into the beneficiaries' accounts and indirectly spent over ₹31,714 crore on schemes of Sampoorna Poshana, free power to farmers, Goru Muddha and the like, the total spent being of ₹1.25 lakh crore.

Let us all unite to fight Covid: Jagan

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY. 20

Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Thursday that as the state had lost tier-1 cities in the process of the 2014 bifurcation, there arose a problem in accessing advanced treatments and in having super-specialty hospitals and better medical infrastructure facilities.

He recalled that in such conditions, the state government has taken up the Nadu-Nedu initiative for revamping all government hospitals right from PHC level to Teaching hospitals. He said the government is also ensuring one teaching hospital and a medical college in each parliamentary constituency.

Reddy said this is the time for everyone to unite, irrespective of their political differences, to fight against Covid-19. He told the media and the opposition not to cause panic among the people with fake news and false propaganda.

The CM said the government has strengthened the education system by revamping the government schools, providing English medium education, besides supporting them with welfare schemes like Vidya Deevana, Vasati Deevana, Amma Vodi, and Vidya Kanuka.

The CM said that despite the lack of tier-1 cities, the government solely focused on fast-testing and fast-treatment to fight against Covid-19 with the help of volunteers and Asha workers. This has helped the state to be one with the lowest death rate.

He explained that in the second wave alone over 47,000 beds have been made available for Covid-19 patients in 649 dedicated Covid-19 hospitals across the state. He said, besides these, over 52,000 beds have been set up in covid care centers. Some 18,000 oxygen concentrators were made available. The number of testing centres has been increased to over 150, wherein almost one lakh tests are being done every day.

The CM said the government had recruited over 18,270 staff including doctors, technicians and specialists to treat patients in 629 Covid-19 hospitals and also strengthened 104 call centres to address Covid-19 related issues.

He said true development comes with women empowerment, wherein the government has kept its word in empowering women by assisting them with schemes like YSR Aasara, YSR Cheyutha, YSR Sunna Vaddi Runalu and YSR Sampoorna Poshana.

Additional scheme for BC women

FROM PAGE 1

He went on to announce an additional scheme for the economically backward classes women.

The state might have witnessed a huge gap between the budget outlay and actuals for 2020-21, ₹1.85 lakh crore being realised out of the ₹2.24 lakh crore outlay, but it has become a regular feature for successive governments ever since Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, then Chief Minister of combined Andhra Pradesh, came up with a ₹1 lakh crore budget some two decades ago. The outlay for this year will be ₹2.29 lakh crore.

If the dream versus reality is left to the Opposition of the day to criticise the government, a close look at the Revised Estimates for 2020-2021 reveals that the finance department could manage the heavy load of DBTs with the revenue receipts, which grew at a very low rate due to the lockdowns, standing at ₹1.85 lakh crore. The unforeseen expenditure due to Covid-19 management had to be factored in while the huge pendency of payments which will be carried forward to the current fiscal, again a regular feature, was discounted.

The seven per cent overall expenditure growth from ₹1.73 lakh crore in 2019-2020 to ₹1.85 lakh crore in 2020-21 was manageable for DBTs with six per cent growth in revenue from ₹1.74 lakh crore to ₹1.85 lakh crore for the corresponding period. The revenue expenditure growth was close to 11 per cent.

This year, the state will borrow ₹6,000 crore less than last year's ₹50,000 crore from the open mar-

ket. The borrowing from the Centre was also slashed to ₹2,000 crore from ₹5,000 crore. It showed a meagre ₹2,000 crore hike in the share of Central taxes from ₹24,441 crore, all coming close to the reality.

This was possible partly due to the government offloading some of its loan burden to power utilities and other corporations. For instance, of the total power subsidy of ₹8,000 crore, the government agreed to pay only ₹6,000 crore. However, the exceptions are grant-in-aid from the Centre and state's own tax and non-tax revenues. The state fell ₹21,000 crore short of the projected grant-in-aid from the Centre last year but it continued to project ₹25,000 crore excess this year. Similarly, the state projected ₹85,000 crore from state tax revenues against ₹57,000 crore realised last year and ₹7,000 crore from non-tax revenue against ₹3,300 crore.

"The GST growth in worst conditions was 18 per cent and we are expecting the growth to be higher this year once normalcy is restored. We lost heavily on tax on petrol and diesel because of low consumption and this will definitely improve. Non-tax revenue will also go up through auction of prime government land," explained a senior finance official. Even after all positive factors contributing to revenue receipts, there will still be shortfall in achieving budget outlay. "This means no deviation from the regular phenomenon witnessed year after year and enough ammo for the Opposition," he quipped.

SUB PLAN FOR SCs

Revenue expenditure	₹1.82 lakh cr
Capital expenditure	₹31,198.38 cr
Revenue deficit	₹5,000.05 cr
Fiscal deficit	₹37,029.79 cr

SUB-PLAN FOR SCHEDULED CASTES IS PROVIDED WITH ₹17,403.14 CRORE

Vijayawada: The Sub-Plan for Scheduled Castes is provided with ₹17,403.14 crores, while that for Scheduled Tribes is proposed to spend ₹6,131.24 crore. The government allotted ₹28,237.65 crore for BCs, ₹3,840.72 crore for minorities, ₹3,306 crore for Kapu welfare and ₹5,478 crore for welfare of economically backward

classes (EBC). Other allocations include Vaahana Mitra (₹285 crore), YSR Nethanna Nestham (₹190 crore), EBC Nestham (₹500 crore), Jagannatha Chedodu (₹3,00 crore), Kapu Nestham (₹500 crore), YSR Law Nestham (₹16.64 crore), Rural Development (₹18,580.70 crore), Urban Development (₹8,727.08 crore).

TENDER DOCUMENTS FOR PROCURING 350 AC E-BUSES SUBMITTED FOR JUDICIAL PREVIEW

Vijayawada: As the state government approved for induction of electric buses in APSRTC recently, the department of heavy industries sanctioned 350 AC e-buses of 9M/12M size to be inducted.

A tender document was prepared for induction of 350 e-buses by the intending bidders to procure, maintain and operate through gross cost contract model under phase-II of FAME India Scheme. The tender documents comprising request for proposal and draft conces-

sion agreement, were submitted to the judicial preview judge B. Sivasankar Rao as per AP Infrastructure Act.

Accordingly, the tender documents were placed in public domain of judicial preview website on Thursday to invite objections/suggestions from the general public and intending bidders and they have to be submitted to the judge, judicial preview within seven working days by May 28 through judicial preview website 'www.judicialpreview.ap.gov.in' only.

SALUTING | KESARI

Prakasam Pantulu never craved for power, stood for pure politics over power politics

A tribute to the epitome of integrity and honesty

K.S.N. MURTY | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Once a poor student of Class IV was crestfallen as he could not pay three rupees towards his exam fee and even a 25-mile walk to his brother's-in-law's place did not help. Moved by plight, his mother sold off the silk saree which she had worn at the time of her marriage and gave him the money. The boy went on to excel in studies and pursued Bar at Law in London.

Unfazed by the presence

of Tamil legal luminaries, he started his practice where they did — at Mylapore in Madras. His success was such that by 1917-18, his earning was ₹1,000 a day — a fabulous sum in those days. In no time, he acquired riches, lands and bungalows in coastal districts.

By now, many of you would have recognised the protagonist as none other than Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu. His stupendous success is inspiring, considering he was born with a copper spoon in his

mouth on August 23, 1872 to Subbamma and Gopala Krishnayya in Vinodarayunipalem in the then Ongole district of AP.

Inspired by Gandhiji, at the height of legal glory, he dove headlong into the national movement and spent all his wealth for the cause. He even started a newspaper 'Swaraj' to carry on the freedom struggle. He was straightforward and once he even stood up to Gandhiji who was carried by the libels of his rivals. During the protest against Simon



Commission, he tore his shirt and bared his chest to the guns of the British Police and roared like a lion: "Fire at me, if you have guts." From then on,

he came to be known as 'Andhra Kesari' (The Lion of Andhra).

In 1937, he became the Revenue Minister in the cabinet of C. Rajagopalachari in Madras Presidency. Later, he became the first Chief Minister when the Telugu state of Andhra was formed in 1953. After a short period, his rivals moved a no-trust vote which he lost by a single vote. Not heeding pleas for another voting, even from his rivals, he quit and thus stood by his ideals.

And what a great service he rendered in so short a period of 13 months as the CM. He constructed 14 irrigation projects and set up Sri Venkateswara University. He also established a High Court for the Telugu people. He used state funds to restore the dilapidated barrage at Vijayawada as the centre refused to provide funds. Later it was named after him. On the formation day of the state, he released prisoners, the first of its kind.

In his last years, he suf-

fered from grinding poverty. When he was felicitated with a shawl, he commented "Instead of this shawl, had you provided two plantains it would serve as my dinner."

He never craved power. He stood for pure politics but not for power politics. In the scorching summer, at the age of 85, he paid a visit to the bereaved families of two old people and he suffered sunstroke and died on May 20, 1957. Indeed, his life was one of great integrity and honesty!

SHORT TAKES

COURT SERVES NOTICES OVER RUIA DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday served notices to Chittoor SP and state government, asking them to file counter affidavits. The vacation bench comprising Justices C. Praveen Kumar and K. Lalitha heard a public interest litigation filed by Telugu Desam leader P.R. Mohan that though the number of deaths due to lack of medical oxygen supply was 36, the state government was claiming only 11 deaths at RUIA government hospital at Tirupati. The petitioner prayed to the court to order a judicial probe and register case against responsible officials at the hospital on the issue.

Petitioner's counsel Y. Balaji argued that though a complaint was lodged at the police station concerned, the police did not register a case and submitted to the court that the death of patients in the hospital was caused only due to lack of supply of medical oxygen. He informed the court that though the Centre had sanctioned five oxygen plants, they were not set up.

Responding to it, the court issued directions to serve notices to Tirupati SP and also to the state government and posted the next hearing in the case after completion of summer vacation to the court.

● **THE PETITIONER** prayed to the court to order a judicial probe and register case against responsible officials at the hospital on the issue.

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People wait in a queue for Covid vaccination at the urban primary health centre near One Town Police Station in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. —P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

No let-up in Covid cases despite partial curfew

On Thursday, the dist sees the highest single-day caseload at 3,184

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, MAY 20

Even after two weeks of imposing partial curfew, there is no let-up in the spread of Covid-19 in Chittoor district, which on Thursday registered a record 3,185 fresh cases — the single-day highest number since the first case was reported on March 24 last year. What is causing more concern among the public as well as officials is that the district is holding a dubious distinction of registering highest Covid-19 death toll in the state with 1,137 persons succumbing to the deadly virus.

The escalating fresh positive cases continue to pose threats to the officials and people as well. The cases have been going up every day and a record 3,185 patients got infected in the last 24 hours. With this, the total positive cases in the district till now has gone up to 1,67,043 and the total active cases have reached 23,967, while 1,41,939 patients were recovered and discharged.

The district recorded around 18,583 cases and 69 deaths in the last seven days and the daily break-up from May 14 to May 20 was 2,708, 2,884, 2,885, 1,621, 2,630, 2,670 and 3,185. Around 15,220 cases and 59 deaths were registered during the previous seven-day period (May 7-13) and the daily break-up was 2,260, 2,269, 2,169, 1,543, 2,426, 1,908 and 2,646.

The continuous surge in new cases reflects the

22,610 new cases, 114 deaths in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 20

Andhra Pradesh has registered a surge with 22,610 new Coronavirus infections, along with the highest number of 114 deaths during the last 24 hours.

State health authorities reported on Thursday that out of 1,01,281 samples tested, 22,610 persons have been found infected with Covid-19. Out of the total 1,83,42,918 samples tested so far in the state, 15,21,142 persons have been found infected with the virus. Of them, 13,02,208 have recovered following treatment while 2,09,134 are still active with the virus.

Ten out of 13 districts of the state have on Thursday reported more than 1,000 Coronavirus infections. East Godavari district is leading the state with 3,602 cases, followed by 3,185 in Chittoor, 2,066 in West Godavari, 1,984 in

Visakhapatnam, 1,794 in Anantapur, 1,584 in Guntur, 1,523 in Prakasam, 1,517 in Srikakulam, 1,219 in Nellore, 1,178 in Kurnool, 1,084 in Krishna, 989 in Kadapa and 885 in Vizianagaram.

East Godavari is the worst hit, recording the highest number of cumulative 31,673 Corona positive cases, followed by 23,967 in Chittoor, 22,603 in Prakasam, 20,217 in Visakhapatnam, 18,729 in Nellore, 17,113 in Guntur, 14,421 in West Godavari, 12,995 in Srikakulam, 12,189 in Anantapur, 10,522 in Krishna, 8,484 in Vizianagaram, 8,806 in Kadapa and 7,415 in Kurnool.

Among daily cases of deaths due to Covid-19 during the last 24 hours, West Godavari recorded the highest 17 deaths, followed by 15 in Chittoor, 10 each in East Godavari, Guntur and Visakhapatnam.

gravity of the situation and shows that there was no let-up in the spread of the virus. However, it is pertinent to mention that the district is also registering a record number of recoveries, with nearly 30,398 patients got discharged as against the 33,804 fresh cases regis-

tered between May 7-20. Meanwhile, health experts opining that the curbs imposed as part of partial curfew are proving to be inadequate if these Covid numbers are taken into account.

Hectic movement of people and vehicles is being observed all over the dis-

MEDICAL AND HEALTH STAFF CALLS OFF STIR

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

Timely intervention by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy who appreciated the services of the medical and health workers made them call off their agitation on Thursday.

The health workers had been staging demonstration by wearing black badges while attending duties and even chalked out an agitation programme for the next few days in protest against the alleged raw deal being meted out in the hands of health and family welfare commissioner K. Bhaskar during the review of Covid-19 management and vaccination.

They went to the notice of the CM who in turn appreciated the efforts of everybody for working hard to attend to Covid-19 duty. He also advised the officials not to lose their cool, understand and treat their staff kindly. He asked the officials to be sympathetic to the frontline workers as they were under tremendous pressure and to get the works done.

A delegation of leaders led by AP Government Employees Association president K.R. Suryanarayanan and AP Public Health Employees Union president G. Askara Rao met the government senior representatives including Deputy CM and health minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas and officials including principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal and health commissioner K. Bhaskar and discussed their issues in detail.

The district Collector on Thursday reviewed the Covid-19 situation during a virtual meeting with all Municipal Commissioners, RDOs, nodal officers, medical officers and other officials in the district. Speaking to the officials, Hari Narayanan said that the positivity rate was high in rural areas and there were no mandals with less than 10 per cent of positivity rate in the district.

He told the officials to understand the situation and initiate measures accordingly to curb the spread of the virus. He said that the village committees and mandal level task force committees should closely monitor the situation.

JESUS CHRIST'S IDOL VANDALISED AT TADEPALLI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

The Christian community expressed anguish over the demolition of Jesus Christ idol at Good Shepherd Missionaries at Tadepalli on Thursday and demanded stern punishment of culprits. AP Christian Joint Action Committee chairman Yalamanchili Praveen lamented the heinous act and said it deeply hurt the sentiments of Christians in the state.

Praveen said that though Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's camp office is located in Tadepalli the sacrilegious act could be committed. He said that in AP all religions coexist but some forces were conspiring to create an atmosphere of unrest. He said the AP police should conduct transparent investigation and further should punish the culprits to end this type of menace. He also sought protection to Christian religious and worship places in view of the attack and appealed to the police department to be vigilant to prevent demolitions.

Meanwhile, the police booked a case and took up investigation.

Isolation centres to come up in villages

VADREU SRINIVAS | DC
KAKINADA, MAY 20

As Covid-19 virus is spreading to villages rapidly, many people are compelled to visit towns or nearby Covid care centres for treatment at hospitals or in isolation centres. With the urban scenario itself aggravating by the day, people from rural areas are at a serious disadvantage to access proper medical care. Sensing the severity of the situation, the East Godavari district administration has come up with a novel concept of starting isolation centres in villages themselves. It expects such centre to ease burden on Covid care centres and hospitals in towns and cities.

It has come to the knowledge of the administration many rural people with mild nature of Covid-19 are staying at home, but due to their small houses isolation from other family members has become very difficult. Fearing that such cases would pass on the virus to their families, the officials have acted with alacrity and are setting up isolation centres with home food right in the villages.

District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy has chalked out a plan of action for setting up village isolation centres. These would be run by sarpanches or any group of volunteers. Village secretaries would monitor the health of inmates and provide kits and arrange medical help when necessary.

Already, there are community halls, primary, upper primary or high schools, cyclone shelters and others in many villages and they have power connections too. The administration will arrange beds and other amenities. Toilets, wash-

● **WITH NO** worries about accessing the strained medical care in urban areas, villagers can now stay in these centres and get home food, too. Timely care and all facilities will be provided by officials, sarpanches and village secretariats.

rooms and others would also be provided for.

On Thursday, Joint Collector G. Lakshmisha inaugurated a Village Isolation Centre (VIC) at G. Ragampeta village in Peddapuram mandal. He called upon sarpanches, vice-sarpanches, ward members, youth and officials to come forward to set up such centres in their respective villages, as it would boost the morale of Covid affected to come forward and avail the services. Family members can provide homely food and donors can chip in by providing beds, he observed. He said that many of the organisations irrespective of castes and religions are rendering their services and the villagers should take a cue and come forward. He said that as many as 3,000 Covid-19 patients were getting treatment in government hospitals and 500 patients were on ventilators and 2,500 patients on oxygen supply in the district.

After inaugurating the centre, he interacted with the patients and enquired about their health. He also distributed fruits to the patients. District Panchayat Officer Nageswar Naick, Peddapuram RDO S. Mallibabu, Additional DMHO Dr Saritha, Pulimeru Primary Health Centre Medical Health Officer Rambabu Naick, MPDO Ramana Reddy, Tahasildar B. Sridevi, panchayat secretary-select Raju and others were present.

Min to resolve nurses' issues

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

The minister for medical and health, Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, has assured that the state government will resolve the problems of government nurses as early as possible. He said this to AP State Government Nurses Association state president Manjula Devi, Government Employees Union state president K. Suryanarayana, Secretary G. Askara Rao and others when they submitted a memorandum on the long-pending issue.

The association leaders took various problems being faced by the nurses in the state to the notice of the minister. APGNA state president Manjula Devi said that they urged the government to announce home quarantine leave for the nurses discharging Covid

duties in government hospitals. She deplored that many nurses were infected by Corona and a few even succumbed to it due to lack of leaves. She said the nurses had been discharging duties continuously and urged the government to consider their situation.

Manjula Devi also appealed to the government to increase the salaries of temporary staff nurses, release incentives during the Covid period and implement the insurance scheme of ₹50 lakh for nurses who died while discharging Covid duties.

She further appealed to provide medical services to the family members of nurses, on a par with those provided to the family members of doctors. She also sought special vaccination centres to vaccinate the family members of nurses across the state.

HEAVY RAINS PREDICTED IN RAYALASEEMA

From page 1

Thunderstorms and lightning are very likely to occur at isolated places over north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam and South Coastal AP from Friday to Monday.

The IMD also predicted that heavy rainfall is likely over Rayalaseema region on Saturday.

The day temperature will be two to three degrees higher than the normal temperature.

Funds allotted for electronics cluster

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 20

The state government is focussing the electronics manufacturing cluster being set up at Kopparthi Industrial Estate in the district. An amount of ₹200 crore has been earmarked in the budget tabled in the Assembly on Thursday for the creation of facilities at cluster.

Taiwan-based Foxconn mobiles manufacturing company has already expressed its readiness to set up a manufacturing unit for Redmi and Apple phones at the

cluster. The state government has already held talks with it in this regard. Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) has developed 6,553 acres at Kopparthi Industrial Estate for setting up industries. Following this, industrialists are coming forward to set up their units as all the necessary facilities are in place. At present, there are about 10 small and medium scale industries. APIIC is also in the process of setting up an Electronic Manufacturing Cluster

(EMC) in 500 acres there.

An amount of ₹250 crore has been earmarked in the budget for the creation of infrastructure facilities for a steel plant to be set up in Kadapa district in public-private partnership mode under the auspices of the YSR Steel Corporation. With an investment of ₹11,000 crore, the government expects the steel plant, which has an annual production target of three million tonnes of high-grade steel, to employ 25,000 people directly and thousands indirectly. Essar Steels

was recently selected as a partner for the steel plant. Also, an amount of ₹100 crore has been allocated for Pulivendula Area Development Authority (PADA). Besides, ₹502.26 crore has been allocated for taking up irrigation projects in the district.

Meanwhile, Telugu Desam politburo member Reddeppagari Srinivasa Reddy (Vasu) criticised the government for failing to keep the promises made in the last budget and for introducing another budget with juggling of figures to deceive the people again.

FIGHT BACK To defy orders, organise its distribution in Krishnapatnam today

MLA backs Ayurvedic medication for Covid

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, MAY 20

Even as the district administration issued orders against preparation and distribution of Ayurveda medicines for Covid at Krishnapatnam, till they are certified and permitted by any government agency, legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy was defiant and declared that the distribution would nevertheless commence on Friday.

Krishnapatnam is located in Sarvepalli assembly

constituency represented by Govardhan Reddy and the lawmaker's move to overlook the orders of authorities shocked official circles here on Thursday.

A team of Ayush doctors had examined the medicines prepared by Bonigi Anandaiah, without any qualification, and sent samples to a lab in Vijayawada.

Though they felt the medicine was harmless, they reported to the Collector that the formulation is not a standards recipe and the method of

● **A TEAM** of Ayush doctors had examined the medicines prepared by Bonigi Anandaiah, who has no qualification, and sent samples to a lab in Vijayawada. Though they felt the medicine is harmless, they reported to the Collector that the formulation is not a standard recipe and the method of preparation and dosages is sub-standard.

They opined that the ingredients used in the eye drops may harm eyesight in long run. The officials issued the restraining orders in view of the heavy flow of patients to Krishnapatnam. They

feared it would turn another super spreader event like Markaz in New Delhi last year.

However, Govardhan Reddy said he would oversee the distribution of medicine in the interest of public health as the Covid virus was spreading like wild-

fire and thousands were thronging Krishnapatnam, reposing full faith in the free medicine.

The MLA said they would ensure proper Covid safety protocols such as physical distance, wearing of face masks in Krishnapatnam. He questioned the rationale behind stopping the distribution even after the Ayush doctors declared that there was no harm in consuming the medicine consisting of general herbs.

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IN BRIEF

POLICE THRASH WOMAN FOR NOT WEARING MASK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ONE DETAINED FOR REMDESIVIR BLACK MARKETING

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 20

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

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

Govind was, however, let off after interrogation.

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

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

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

SONIA URGES MODI TO HELP OUT COVID ORPHANS

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

- PTI

Vaccine will be available for all by December: Nadda

India conducts 20.55 lakh Coronavirus tests in single day, highest so far

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

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

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

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

"India developed two indigenous vaccines for the first time in just nine months, which have been administered to 18 crore

Indians so far. By the end of December, the vaccine will be available to all and its calendar has been set," he said.

Nadda said the Modi government at the Center has ensured the availability and supply of oxygen and medicines to all the states.

He said that real face of the Congress has been exposed after revelation of its "tool kit".

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

Meanwhile, more than 20.55 lakh Covid tests were conducted in a span of 24 hours, the highest-ever conducted in a single day in India, while the daily positivity rate stands at 13.44 per cent, the Union

Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulatively, 20,55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country.

India's daily Covid-19 recoveries outnumbered the daily new cases for the seventh consecutive day. A total of 3,69,077 patients recuperated in a span of 24 hours as against 2,76,110 infections being reported during the same period, the ministry said.

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

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

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana reported 77.17 per cent of the 2,76,110 new cases regis-

tered in a span of 24 hours.

Tamil Nadu has reported the highest daily new cases at 34,875, followed by Karnataka with 34,281 new cases.

The ministry said India's total active cases have decreased to 31,29,878 with a decline of 96,841 cases being registered in the total active caseload in a day. It now comprises 12.14 per cent of the country's total cases.

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh cumulatively account for 69.23 per cent of India's total active cases. The National Mortality Rate currently stands at 1.11 per cent, the ministry said.

A total of 3,874 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for

72.25 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (594). Karnataka follows with 468 daily deaths.

The ministry also said that the cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country has reached 18.70 crore. A total of 18,70,09,792 vaccine doses have been administered through 27,31,435 sessions, according to the provisional report till 7 am.

These include 96,85,934 healthcare workers (HCWs) who have taken the first dose and 66,67,394 HCWs who have taken the second dose, 1,46,36,501 FLWs who have received the first dose, 82,56,381 FLWs who have taken the second dose and 70,17,189 beneficiaries in the 18-44 years age group who have received the first dose.

- PTI

S'pore talks of anti-misinformation law after AK demands flight ban

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

New Delhi on Thursday evening refused to react to media reports that quoted Singapore's High Commissioner to India Simon Wong as saying that his country reserves the right to invoke its anti-misinformation law

POFMA (Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act) against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for his recent comments that had alleged that there was a Singapore variant of the Covid virus and that flights from Singapore to India should be stopped.

Asked about the Singapore High Commissioner's com-

ments, ministry of external affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said his ministry "does not have anything to add" other than the statements already issued by the MEA earlier on Wednesday on the entire controversy.

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

chief minister on this topic".

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

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had also then swiftly "clarified" that "the Delhi CM does not speak for India".

Lauding Singapore's dispatching of military aircraft with oxygen supplies recently to help India battle the second Covid wave, Jaishankar - in a thinly-veiled barb at Mr. Kejriwal - had lamented that "irresponsible comments from those who should know better can damage long-standing partnerships".

Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan - who had lambasted Mr. Kejriwal and asked him to "stick to facts" - then thanked Jaishankar for the clarification.

Mr. Kejriwal's tweet earlier on Tuesday when he called for a ban on flights from Singapore to India had led to a furore in the tiny nation.

NDRF to set up spl. unit to deal with pandemics

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

So what the Home Ministry now plans is to put in place what is being described as a "modern and professional unit" that can deal with all health related pandemic in future. Even now both central para-military forces and defence forces had worked over time in setting up temporary hospitals and health care facilities, transporting oxygen and other essential items. But now the government proposes to have a dedicated agency which will anticipate, prepare and provide all necessary assistance during the such health crisis.

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

2nd Covid wave hits K'taka hard

Bengaluru, May 20: One-third of the total Covid cases and fatalities since the outbreak of the pandemic in Karnataka took place in the last two-and-half months when the second wave hit the State, reveals official data.

The second wave did not spare children, teenagers and youth in their 20s who accounted for a number of infections and fatalities.

According to the data, 7,06,449 people got infected, of which 7,980 people lost their lives between March 1 and May 15.

However, since the outbreak of the pandemic last year, 21,71,931 contracted Covid, out of which 21,434 lost their lives.

The data shows that 20,206 children up to the age of nine were infected in the second wave which killed 17 of them, whereas 51,673 teenagers contracted the disease, of which 19 lost their lives.

People in their 20s accounted for 1,53,174 infections of which 151 lost their lives.

According to the data, as many as 467 people in their thirties, 1,037 in their 40s and 1,717 in their 50s died of Covid in the second wave.

People above 60 years of age were the worst hit in this second wave of pandemic.

Out of 93,483 infected, 2,198 sexagenarians lost their lives whereas 1,584 people among the 28,658 infected persons in their

● The second wave did not spare children, teenagers too. The data shows that 20,206 children up to the age of nine were infected in the second wave which killed 17 of them, whereas 51,673 teenagers contracted the disease, of which 19 lost their lives.

● People in their 20s accounted for 1,53,174 infections of which 151 lost their lives.

70s succumbed to Covid-19. The mortality rate among the people in their 80s and 90s was very high compared to any other age group.

Out of 81,65 infected octogenarians, 674 died of Covid taking the Case Fatality Rate (CFR) to 8.3 per cent.

Among those in the 90s, the CFR is 11.9 per cent with 970 infections and 115 deaths.

The centenarians, however, were lucky enough to escape the wrath of the second wave of pandemic.

Out of 68 infected, only one person died.

Dr. Sheela Chakravathy, Director of Internal Medicine at Fortis Healthcare, said Covid infection and its reaction to the virus causes injuries to the lungs.

"Since elderly people have poor immunity, they end up having infections. A majority of youngsters are affected because of cytokine release," Dr Chakravathy said.

FIGHTING | COVID

Coronavirus cases in the country peaked in Sept. and there was a decline in cases from Oct.

3rd wave likely if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist

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

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

immunity, in six months.

"If the antibodies are lost, then there is a chance of immunity going down. In this case, vaccination has to be ramped up and Covid-19 appropriate-behaviour must be practiced. If not then there is a possibility of a third wave in 6-8 months," Vidyasagar said. "We are also adding the aspects of immunity and vaccination in our model for our future forecasts," he added.

According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with Covid-19 for at least eight months after they were infected.

A recent sero-survey by

● According to a study by the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, antibodies against coronavirus remained in the blood of patients with Covid-19 for at least eight months after they were infected.

the Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) suggested that the neutralising antibodies declined significantly after five-six months, making people prone to reinfections. The coronavirus cases in the country peaked in September 2020 and there was a nationwide decline of new cases starting in October.

"Using more stringent measures (more than 30

per cent inhibition of surrogate receptor-spike protein binding), the loss of neutralisation may be even higher.

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

K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser, had said on May 5 that as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves. Two days later, he said there may not be a third wave of coronavirus in the country, if strong

measures are taken and effectively implemented at the state, district and city-level.

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

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



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

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

IMPEACHMENT
VOTE AGAINST
SLOVENIA PM

Ljubljana, May 20: Less than two months before Slovenia takes over the EU's rotating presidency, conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa is battling fires at home and abroad — including an impeachment motion.

The vote in the Alpine country's parliament is the latest crisis for the combative 62-year-old, known for his support for former US president Donald Trump and his outspoken Twitter posts.

Four centre-left opposition parties have initiated the impeachment bid, alleging among other things that Jansa mismanaged the country's coronavirus response.

With the nation of two million suffering a relatively high proportion of pandemic deaths compared to other EU countries, the premier's public approval ratings have slumped to their lowest point since he took office in March 2020.

13 KILLED IN
AFGHAN ROAD
BOMBINGS

Kabul, May 20: Roadside bombings in southern and central Afghanistan killed 13 people, including nine members of one family, officials said Thursday. Meanwhile, militants stopped a bus in western Afghanistan, ordered three men to get out and shot and killed them. No one has claimed responsibility for the latest attacks. The three men on the bus were ethnic Hazaras.

The government blamed the Taliban, who denied responsibility. Previous attacks on Hazaras, who are mostly Shiite Muslims, have been claimed by the Islamic State group. Large swaths of war-ravaged Afghanistan have been littered with bombs and land mines.

Many have been planted by insurgents to target military convoys but often kill civilians instead. One of the two bombs struck a car carrying a family of 12 in southern Helmand province late on Wednesday, said provincial police spokesman Zaman Hamdarad. Several of the nine family members who died were children.

NIGERIA'S BOKO
HARAM LEADER
BADLY WOUNDED

Kano, May 20: Nigerian Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau has been seriously wounded after trying to kill himself to avoid capture during clashes with rival Islamic State-allied jihadists in the north of the country, two intelligence sources said Thursday.

Shekau's Boko Haram faction and fighters from the Islamic State West Africa Province had been battling in northeastern Borno state, where ISWAP militants have become the dominant force in Nigeria's more than decade-long jihadist insurgency. Shekau, who made international headlines when his men kidnapped nearly 300 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, has been reported dead several times since Boko Haram first began its insurgency in 2009.

After a series of clashes, Shekau and some of his fighters were surrounded on Wednesday by ISWAP jihadists in Boko Haram's Sambisa forest stronghold, where they demanded he surrender, one intelligence source said.

2012 CAMPAIGN
FINANCING:
SARKOZY ON TRIAL

Paris, May 20: The trial of former French President Nicolas Sarkozy on charges that his unsuccessful 2012 reelection bid was illegally financed has formally started on Thursday. The scandal had thrown his conservative party into turmoil. Sarkozy, 66, is facing allegations that he spent almost twice the maximum legal amount of 22.5 million euros (\$27.5 million) on the presidential race he lost to Socialist Francois Hollande. He has denied wrongdoing. Sarkozy wasn't present Thursday at the Paris court, where he was represented by his lawyers.

The trial is scheduled to last until June 22. Sarkozy, who was president from 2007 to 2012, faces up to one year in prison and a fine of 3,750 euros (\$4,580), if found guilty. The proceedings got underway less than three months after Sarkozy was convicted of corruption and influence peddling in another case. He has appealed that verdict. According to the judicial investigation in his case, Sarkozy "indisputably benefitted from fraud that allowed him to have, during his 2012 campaign, resources much superior to what the law authorised."



Slovak Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok (C) and his counterpart from the Czech Republic Jakub Kulhanek (2nd R) listen to remarks by their Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi (L) during a tour of a building that was hit by a rocket fired by Palestinian militants from the Gaza Strip, in the Israeli city of Petah Tikva on Thursday. — AFP

Israel unleashes strikes
as chances of truce rise

Bibi pushes back against US calls to wind down offensive

Gaza City, May 20: Israel unleashed another wave of airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Thursday, killing at least one Palestinian and wounding several, and Hamas fired more rockets, even as expectations rose that a cease-fire could be coming.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed back against calls from the US to wind down the Gaza offensive, appearing determined to inflict maximum damage on Hamas in a war that could help save his political career.

Still, officials close to the negotiations say they expect a truce to be announced in the next 24 hours. In another possible sign of progress, Netanyahu scheduled a meeting later Thursday with his Security Cabinet, where the issue of a cease-fire was likely to be debated.

Explosions shook Gaza City and orange flares lit up the pre-dawn sky, with bombing raids also reported in the central town of Deir al-Balah and the southern town of Khan Younis. As the sun rose, residents surveyed the rubble from at least five family homes destroyed in Khan Younis. There were also heavy airstrikes on a commercial thoroughfare in Gaza City.

The Israeli military said it struck at least three homes of Hamas commanders in Khan Younis and another in Rafah, targeting "military infrastructure," as well as a weapons storage unit at a home in Gaza City. With hundreds already killed in the worst fighting since Israel and Hamas' 2014 war, US President Joe Biden told Israel on Wednesday that he expected "a significant de-escalation today on the path to a cease-fire" — but Netanyahu pushed back, saying he was "determined to continue this operation until its aim is met."

It marked the first public rift between the two close allies since the fighting began and poses a difficult test of the US-Israel relationship early in Biden's presidency. Still, an Egyptian intelligence official said a cease-fire was likely late Thursday or early Friday, after the US appeal bolstered Cairo's own efforts to halt the fighting. The official spoke on

Stop hostilities at
once, says UN chief

United Nations, May 20: The UN chief is urging an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers at the start of a UN General Assembly emergency meeting.

The session is expected to hear from about 100 speakers, including 12 ministers mainly from Arab and Islamic countries. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Thursday's in-person meeting in the assembly chamber that he and the UN Mideast envoy are engaged in "extensive diplomatic efforts" in the region, including with Egypt, Jordan and Qatar, to stop the fighting.

He called on all members of the international community "to do everything in their power to enable the parties to conflict to step back from the brink." The UN chief also called on Israel and Hamas "to allow for mediation efforts to intensify in order to bring the fighting to an end." Guterres implicitly criticised Israel and Hamas for violating "the laws of war" which ban indiscriminate attacks

United Nations, May 20: The top Palestinian diplomat is accusing Israel of committing "genocide" against Palestinian families and urging the international community to protect the Palestinian people until their freedom is assured. Foreign Minister Riad Al-Malki told Thursday's emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly on the conflict between

condition of anonymity to discuss the delicate talks. Khalid Okasha, director of the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, which has close ties to the government, also said a cease-fire was likely in that timeframe, as did Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official. Visiting the region,

US man survives
mauling by bear

Anchorage (US), May 20: Allen Minish was alone and surveying land for a real estate agent in a wooded, remote part of Alaska, putting some numbers into his GPS unit when he looked up and saw a large brown bear walking about 30 feet away. "I saw him and he saw me at the same time, and it's scary," he said by phone Wednesday from his hospital bed in Anchorage, a day after being mauled by the bear in a chance encounter.

The mauling left Minish with a crushed jaw, a puncture wound in his scalp so deep the doctor told him he could see bone, lacerations and many stitches after a 4½-hour surgery. He also is wearing a patch over his right eye, saying the doctors are worried about it. All that damage came from a very brief encounter — he estimates it lasted less than 10 seconds — after he startled the bear Tuesday morning. — AP

Beijing, May 20: China postponed a supply mission to its new space station Thursday for unspecified technical reasons.

The Tianzhou-2 cargo spacecraft was expected to have been launched early Thursday morning. China Manned Space announced the delay on its website but didn't say when the rescheduled launch may occur. It would be the first mission to head to the main Tianhe module of the space station that was launched on April 29.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said Israel has "the right to defend itself against such unacceptable attacks." But he also expressed concern about the rising number of civilian victims and voiced support for truce efforts. Even as the diplomatic efforts appeared to gather

TECH | REASONS

Nasa says Beijing failed to meet standards regarding debris
China delays mission to space station

Another 10 launches are planned to deliver the station's other two modules, various components and supplies, and a three-person crew. The launch of Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, was considered a success although China was criticised for allowing the uncontrolled reentry of part of the rocket that carried it into space. Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

strength, an Israeli airstrike smashed into the Khawaldi family's two-story house in Khan Younis, destroying it. The 11 residents, who were sleeping outside of the home out of fear, were all wounded and hospitalised, said Shaker al-Khozondar, a neighbour. — AP

Lavrov says talks
with Blinken
constructive

Reykjavik, May 20: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday praised his talks with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken as "constructive" and "useful", saying both sides understand the need to mend ties.

"The conversation appeared constructive to me," Lavrov was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies after nearly two hours of talks with Blinken in Reykjavik.

The discussions were the first high-level ones between the two countries since Joe Biden became president.

"There is an understanding of the need to overcome the unhealthy situation in ties between Moscow and Washington," Lavrov told Russian reporters after meeting Blinken on the sidelines of the Arctic Council meeting in Iceland.

Since taking over the White House in January, Biden has taken a strong line against Russia, going as far as describing Putin as a "killer" — in sharp contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump, who was accused of complacency towards the Russian president. But signs have emerged that the two sides are seeking to appease each other.

Lavrov said there were "a lot of logjams" in the two countries' ties and working through them was not easy.

"But I sensed the determination of Antony Blinken and his team to do it. We will not be found wanting," he said.

"I believe the talks were useful," he added, saying the two sides also looked into the work of US and

● **THE DISCUSSIONS** were the first high-level ones between the two countries since Joe Biden became president.

● **SINCE TAKING** over the White House in January, Biden has taken a strong line against Russia, going as far as describing Putin as a "killer" — in sharp contrast to his predecessor Donald Trump.

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Russian diplomatic missions following tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats. "We've agreed to continue our joint actions — which are developing rather successfully — on regional conflicts where US and Russian interests overlap," he also said.

Lavrov and Blinken discussed Washington's proposal to organise a summit between the Russian and US leaders, possibly in June. But asked by reporters if Russia formally agreed to the summit between Biden and Vladimir Putin, Lavrov did not reply.

He said however that the two had agreed to prepare proposals for the top-level summit, including those on strategic stability. He said he had reiterated Moscow's suggestion of beginning broad dialogue with the United States on strategic stability, stressing that Blinken did not refuse.

"But experts will have yet to work on it," he added.

— AFP

UK TO REUNIFY
RAIL NETWORK
UNDER GOVT

London, May 20: Britain plans to bring the national rail network back under government control, reversing one of the most controversial elements of the privatisation drive carried out by the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Under plans announced Thursday, the government will create a new entity known as Great British Railways that will own all railroad infrastructure, set most fares and schedules, collect ticket revenue and run a single ticketing website. Private companies will continue to operate trains under contracts with the state.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government said the move would end "a quarter-century of fragmentation" that created a confusing, expensive patchwork of privately run rail franchises. That system was created after the railroads were privatised in the 1990s under former Prime Minister John Major who, like Johnson, led a Conservative Party government. "I am a great believer in rail, but for too long passengers have not had the level of service they deserve," Johnson said in a statement.

The privatisation of Britain's railroads followed the sell off of other state-owned assets that began under PM Margaret Thatcher. — AP

China 2nd protest
over US navy move

Beijing, May 20: China on Thursday issued its second protest in as many days over US naval activity in the region, accusing a US ship of intruding into its territorial waters surrounding the Paracel island group in the South China Sea.

A statement from the Southern Theater Command said the guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur committed the "illegal" action on Thursday, prompting Chinese forces to mobilise and demand it leave the area.

The US action "artificially increases regional security risks, and is prone to misunderstandings, misjudgments, and accidents at sea," the statement said. It called the ship's manoeuvres "unprofessional and irresponsible," saying Chinese forces were determined to defend the country's sovereign claims while maintaining peace and stability in the South China Sea.

The US refuses to recognise China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea and regularly conducts what it calls freedom of navigation operations to assert its right to sail in international waters. China on Wednesday issued a complaint over the Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region. While the strait is in international waters, China claims self-

MOBS ATTACK
SYRIANS HEADING
FOR PREZ VOTE

Beirut, May 20: Lebanese mobs attacked buses and cars carrying Syrians expatriates and those who fled the war heading to the Syrian embassy in Beirut on Thursday, protesting against what they said was an organised vote for President Bashar Assad.

Assad is running for a fourth seven-year term facing symbolic competition from two candidates in a vote all but guaranteed to bring him back as president.

The in-country vote is expected next week, while Syrians abroad are casting their votes Thursday.

The election is the second since the country's civil war broke out 10 years ago and is seen by the opposition as well as Western and some Arab countries as a sham designed to give the incumbent a new mandate with a veneer of legitimacy. Scattered mobs of anti-Syrian Lebanese, most of them from the Christian rightwing Forces group, waited for convoys of cars and buses carrying Syrian voters at intersections in Beirut, outside the capital and in the eastern Bekaa region. They pelted them with rocks and smashed windows with sticks. In one incident near Nahr el-Kalb on the highway north or Beirut, one attacker poked a wooden stick inside the car, poking the driver as others smashed the windshield.

Buses carrying hundreds of voters featured pictures of the incumbent president on the windows. They don't need to carry pictures and flags for an absurd criminal regime, said Fadi Nader, one of the protesters. — AP

● **CHINA ON** Wednesday issued a complaint over the Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region.

● **CHINA HAS** fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea.

governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the US Navy's presence near the island as providing support for its independence-leaning democratically elected government.

Along with building the world's largest navy and coast guard by numbers of vessels, China has fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea and created new island outposts by piling sand cement on coral reefs and topping them with airstrips and other infrastructure.

It has ignored rival territorial claims by its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours, as well as an international arbitral ruling that declared most of China's claims in the South China Sea invalid. An emboldened China faced with the scaling up of US military operations in the area has increasingly raised concerns about a possible clash or confrontation, whether intended or not. — AP

DECCAN Chronicle

21 MAY 2021

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

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

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

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

The government will have to quickly roll out a programme for the rural areas, and the lack of health infrastructure is going to be a major issue there. However, no challenge is insurmountable if there is political will. Top US public health expert on Covid-19 and former director of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Anthony Fauci, is on record saying India must put to use all its national resources, including the military, to fight and stop the virus spread. He has even gone on to suggest that the government make use of the services of the armed forces to get medical facilities available for its suffering population by building field hospitals. The government must consider the suggestion as it has little choice if it wants to save its massive rural population from falling victim to the virus.

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

The WhatsApp conundrum

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

Facebook-WhatsApp's performance during this privacy storm was never transparent enough and it exacerbated the situation by warning users now to sign up

Any user of the Internet should know the minute he signs up for a free site like the messaging platform WhatsApp that his privacy has already been compromised. In Facebook's case, it stood exposed by rivals, including Apple, that it collects much more data — device ID, user ID and contact info — of a user than is really required for offering its secure messaging. Encryption of messages is still its best feature as all individual user's conversations are secure and no one has access to them unless they are leaked by other users in a group. However, the reason for collecting excessive data is hard to understand. Being a free platform, WhatsApp was at liberty to base any advertising fed to the user on the basis of the data collected. But it was not free to share some data with Facebook, whose last quarter of 2020 revenues were upwards of \$28 billion. Facebook did clarify that its change of terms would only enable its business customers to communicate to WhatsApp users who allow access. A user can now turn off, in WA settings, access to anyone who is not on his/her contact list.

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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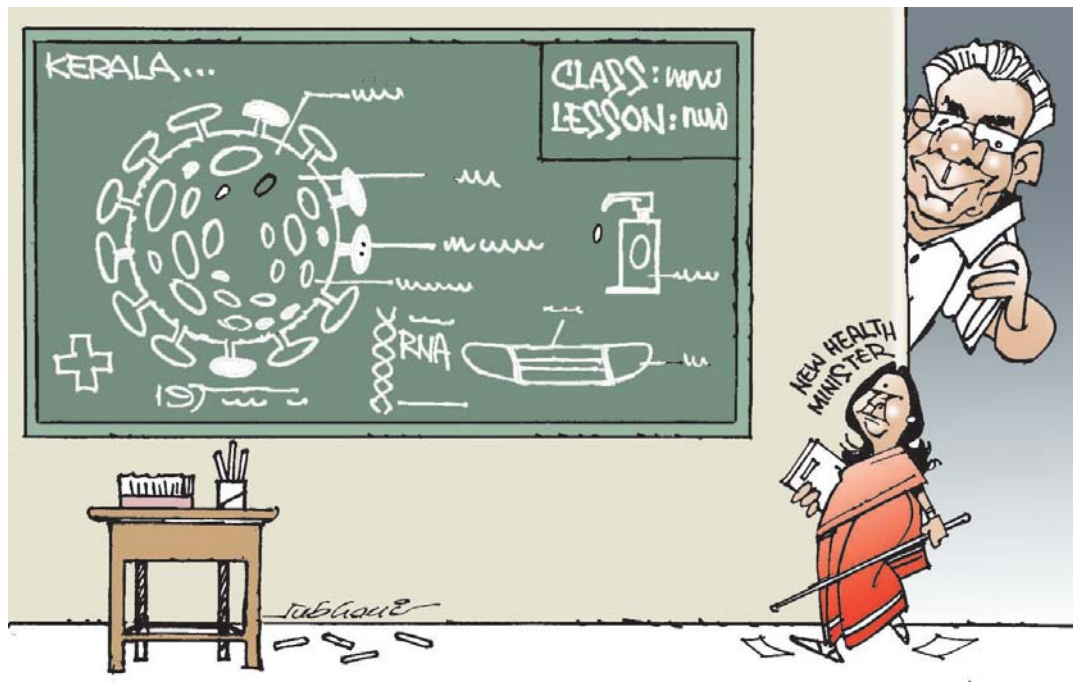
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Subhani



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



Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the way to prepare for any eventuality may

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

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

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

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

Mr Modi has been on the whole solicitous, his

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

The LDF has taken the road less travelled (*Pinarayi springs surprises, Kerala gets new look Govt., DC, May 20*).

Pinarayi Vijayan, the captain, has wisely decided to allocate portfolios to new faces to show his credibility of governance to the public. In spite of having an experienced team, he has chosen the road less travelled by inducting new faces in his Cabinet. There is no doubt there will be much difference in his journey. He will never regret his decision as Robert Frost did in his poem.

P. Thomas Joy
Nellore

ELECTION DEATHS

1,621 teachers and workers of Basic Education Department died during the panchayat elections in UP while performing their election duties under coercion of losing their jobs (*Priyanka, Akhilesh slam UP govt over teachers' deaths, DC, May 20*). According to the UP Prathamik Shikshak Sangh, 90 per cent died of Covid-19 whereas the Yogi government claims only three died. CBI inquiry is a must.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

HEALTH STAFF

It is highly distressing to read that health workers and staff are being harassed by authorities (*Health workers on uarpath over abuse, insult by official, DC, May 20*). They were at the forefront in the grim battle against Covid-19.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Ramagundam power plant to work from next month

HYDERABAD, MAY 20.

Mr. A. Krishnaswami, Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Electricity Board, today announced that the Ramagundam Thermal Station would start functioning from next month.

Speaking to the ANS, Mr. Krishnaswami said that the capacity of this station would be 62.50 million megawatts. Its total cost would be about Rs. 12 crores and a sum of Rs. 7 crores had been advanced as loan by the USAID.



Mahir Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,564.86	-0.68
Nifty 50	14,906.00	-0.83
S&P 500*	4,161.83	1.12
Dollar (₹)	73.10	0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.23	0.39
Euro (₹)	89.09	0.28
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,994,237	0.49
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	65.37	-1.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.968	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.642	-0.041

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sugar exports subsidy cut to ₹4,000/ tonne

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

Bosch Q4 net jumps six-fold to ₹482 crore



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

Mindtree to buy L&T's Nxt Digital Business

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

Nucleus Software gets Bank of Sydney contract

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



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

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Meanwhile, the ICMR said only symptomatic individuals and immediate contacts of people who have tested positive in laboratory-conducted tests should use this kit.

"Indiscriminate testing is not advised," the top medical body said while issuing detailed guidelines on the kit's use.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HOME LOAN MARKET GROWS 9.6%

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FY21 ITR filing deadline extended till Sept. 30

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

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

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

Gold to gain from crypto fall, dollar weakness

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 20

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

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

rency movement has been just speculation," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

According to him, the movement of speculative money into cryptocur-



gishness in gold in the past few months despite strong fundamentals. However, now the trend shall see a reversal and this has been evident from the gold price movement in the past few sessions.

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

commodities and currencies, Angel Broking.

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

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

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

(SFT) report has been extended till June 30, from May 31, 2021.

Also, the Income Tax Department is expected to launch a new e-filing web portal for taxpayers, which they use to file routine ITRs and perform other tax-related works, early next month, officials said.

The existing web portal will be shut for six days between June 1 and 6. The officials said the new portal will be made more user-friendly. — PTI

DBS HAS FUNDS TO BUY CITI INDIA UNIT: BERNSTEIN

CHANYAPORN CHANJAROEN MAY 20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Bloomberg

BADGE OF HONOUR Verification application to appear in Account Settings tab

Twitter starts verification for blue tick

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

ing conversations with.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Legendary Milkha Singh is Covid +ve

New Delhi: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh has tested positive for Covid-19 and is in isolation at his Chandigarh residence. The 91-year-old, popularly known as Flying Sikh, is asymptomatic and claims to be in "high spirits".

"A couple of our helpers earlier tested positive and so all the family members did the tests.

Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha said.

"I am fine and there is no fever or cough. My doctor told me I will be alright in three-four days. I did jogging just yesterday. I am in high spirits," he added. None of the other family members, including Milkha's wife Nirmal Kaur returned a positive test. — PTI

Shooting coach Monali dies at 44

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

Many people recovering from Covid-19 have of late been afflicted by black fungus — or mucormycosis — disease. It is a fungal infection that affects the nose, eye and sometimes the brain. A few hours before her death, her father Manohar Gorhe too succumbed to Covid-19. Monali was the coach of the pistol core group.

She had also served as the national coach of the Sri Lankan shooting team. — PTI

Bhuvneshwar's dad passes away

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

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

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

Archer doubtful for India series

London: England pacer Jofra Archer will undergo a surgery on his right elbow on Friday, which could effectively rule him out of the first part of the five-match Test series against visiting India beginning on August 4. Archer is already out of the upcoming two-match Test series against New Zealand and this will be his second surgery after being operated upon on his right hand.

"Jofra has been reviewed by a medical consultant in respect of his right elbow soreness. He will now proceed to surgery tomorrow," the ECB said. — PTI

Medical insurance for sportspersons

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

"We want to ensure that all our athletes and contractual staff have health cover during these difficult times and even after," he said. — PTI

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REJUVENTUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But ten minutes later Ruslan Malinovskyi blasted in the equaliser.

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

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



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

Liverpool move into top 4; Spurs' Euro hopes dented

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

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

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

their final game at home to Crystal Palace on Sunday, they should finish in the top four and salvage a difficult campaign that saw them tamely surrender the title to Manchester City.

Leicester host Tottenham on Sunday, while third-placed Chelsea travel to Aston Villa.

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

third in the 88th minute.

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

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

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

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

MBAPPE DAZZLES AS PSG CROWNED WITH FRENCH CUP

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

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



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

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM AWAIT COVID TEST RESULTS AFTER REACHING DOHA

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

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

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

matches," it added.

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

PEREZ LEADS 1ST PRACTICE SESSION, HAMILTON FIFTH

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

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

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

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

Dravid to coach India on SL tour

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Rahul Dravid

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

ball specialists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India not safe for T20 WC: Hussey

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

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

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

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

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

lier, if they're playing in different cities, that is when the risk goes up. "I think they'll have to look some pretty big contingency plans, perhaps looking at the UAE or somewhere like that that could host the World T20.

— MIKE HUSSEY
former Australia player

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



Hemant Kenkre
Silly Point

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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