

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | TUESDAY 18 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34°C
Min: 23°C
Rainfall: 3%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 4
Tithi: Sashti
Star: Poosam
Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm
Yamagandam: 9 am to 10.30 am

PRAYERS

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

SUNSET TODAY 6.38 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.59 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.10 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.56 AM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,81,860)	(+4,077)
2,52,47,982	2,78,465

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+33,075) 335
TN: 16,31,291 18,005

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,40,61,550

DEATHS

33,99,249

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES 219

worldometers.info

Government drops plasma therapy from Covid treatment guidelines

New Delhi: The government on Monday revised the clinical guidance for COVID-19 treatment, dropping the off-label use of convalescent plasma as it was found not beneficial in reducing the progression to severe disease or death. The development came following a meeting of the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Task Force for COVID-19 last week wherein all members were in favour of removing the use of convalescent plasma from the guidelines citing its ineffectiveness and inappropriate use in several cases.



ICF engineer, Railway police personnel die

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

A 55-year-old ICF engineer and a Railway police personnel died after a faulty steel gate fell on the duo on Monday evening at the furnishing division in the coach manufacturing unit. The deceased person has been identified as Nargunan. S., Senior Section Engineer in ICF (Integral Coach Factory) and Lakshman, an RPF police personnel. Preliminary inquiries revealed that the main gate of the furnishing division in the coach manufacturing unit fell on them.

COUNTER

POINT



My god! Our planet Earth is mutating...

STATE | 3

AIADMK to donate 1 cr to CM's Covid relief fund



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'Vaccine costs to strain already creaking state budgets'



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Azhar bats for ousted Raman



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NO INVITE FOR MIN

TN keeps off new edu policy meet

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 17

Sending across a strong message to the Centre on Tamil Nadu's disillusionment over the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the DMK government did not let the education secretary attend a meeting called by Union education minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Monday. When the minister called for the online meeting to discuss the implementation of NEP, the DMK government wrote back saying that it would like its new minister for school education also to take part in the discussions as the state had certain reservations on the issue.

Since the Centre did not bother to reply to the e-mail, the education secretary kept off the virtual meeting at 11 am convened with three agendas - conducting online education in view of Covid-19, implementation of NEP and feasibility of holding class 12 examinations in the present situation.

Stating that it would not be proper to call it a 'boy-



Delhi cannot decide what the people of Tamil Nadu, especially those in the rural areas, should learn. —ANBIL MAHESH POYYAMOZHI, Minister for school education

cott,' school education minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozi said the DMK government felt that the meeting should take note of the minister's view and not just that of the officials. It was a matter that concerned the future of students and not something to be politicised, Mr Poyyamozi told the media in Trichy, clarifying the DMK's stand on the NEP. ■ P3

Covid numbers fall below 3-lakh mark

VINEETA PANDEY | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The number of daily fresh Covid-19 cases in the country on Monday dropped below 3 lakh for the first time since April 21. Delhi recorded 4, 524 fresh cases and the city's case positivity rate dropped to 8.42 per cent. However, since testing is usually low on Sundays, the figures in the next couple of days will be important to watch.

The Centre of Monday said it has identified only 26 potential cases of bleeding and blood clotting in India due to the administration of the Covishield vaccine as Adverse Event Following Immunization (AEFI). In a report submitted to the ministry of health and family welfare, the National AEFI Committee has said that bleeding and clotting cases following the vaccine shots in India were minuscule and in line with the expected number of diagnoses of these conditions in the country.

The report comes after alerts were raised in some countries on post-vaccination "embolic and thrombotic events" on March 11, 2021, particularly with the Astra Zeneca-Oxford vaccine, Covishield, in India. Since the Covid-19 vac-

SC MOVED TO QUASH FIR FOR VAX POSTERS

New Delhi, May 17: A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking quashing of FIRs registered by Delhi police for allegedly pasting posters critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in connection with the vaccination drive against Covid-19. The plea filed by advocate Pradeep Kumar Yadav also sought direction to Delhi police commissioner to not register any further cases/FIRs with regard to Covid-19 posters /advertisement/ brochures which have surfaced in context to ongoing vaccination drive. Mr Yadav said he sought court's intervention in the "illegal arrest of innocent general public. —PTI

cination drive was initiated, more than 23,000 adverse events have been reported through the CoWin platform from 684 districts of the country. Of these, 700 cases (@ 9.3 cases/million doses administered) were reported to be serious and severe, the health ministry said. ■ P4

CBI arrests 2 WB ministers

■ **MLA, leader also held on graft charge** ■ **Calcutta HC stays grant of bail**

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 17

Within two weeks of obtaining West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's "sanction for prosecution" of four former Trinamul Congress ministers, accused in the Narada sting operation, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Monday arrested and chargesheeted the quartet after detaining them from their residences in Kolkata during a raid with the help of the Central paramilitary forces.

Of the arrested, Firhad Hakim is state transport minister while Subrata Mukherjee is the panchayat minister. Madan Mitra is the TMC MLA from Kamarhati and Sovan Chatterjee, who defected to the BJP from the TMC earlier, quit the saffron party ahead of this year's Assembly elections.

In the evening the Bankshall court, in a virtual hearing, granted bail to the accused after rejecting the CBI's plea for 14-day judicial custody on the grounds of their influential status and role in the case. Dissatisfied, the CBI later moved the Calcutta high court, which had actually ordered the probe, and asked the division bench of acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal for an immediate stay order on the day's proceedings in the case alleging the CM herself was present at CBI office and tried to influence the proceedings. It also sought the transfer of the case under Section 407 CrPC. ■ P4



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee leaves the CBI office at Nizam Palace where she had come following the arrest of TMC ministers and MLAs in a scam case, in Kolkata, Monday. — PTI

Mamata storms CBI office in Kolkata as protests erupt

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MAY 17

A furious TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday stormed the CBI's anti-corruption branch office on the 14th floor of Nizam Palace on AJC Bose Road in south Kolkata and laid a six-hour-long siege there from around 11 am, immediately after the arrest of the four of her party leadwrs.

TMC councillor and lawyer Anindya Raut, who accompanied her, said:

"The CM demanded that the CBI officers arrest her too like they did to Firhad Hakim, Subrata Mukherjee, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee."

The arrest of these four by the CBI, close on the heels of the TMC coming to power for the third consecutive time in the state, triggered a volcano of protests in Kolkata and beyond. Violating the Covid-19 lockdown that got underway from May 16, ruling party workers came out on the roads and burst into anger. Some of them

thronged to Nizam Palace and pelted stones at the Central forces deployed to guard the CBI personnel, while others demonstrated outside Raj Bhavan with their party flags.

A worried governor, in the eye of the storm now, tweeted: "Invited attention @MamataOfficial: On channels and in public domain I notice arson and pelting of stones at CBI office. Pathetic that Kolkata Police @KolkataPolice and West Bengal Police @WBPolice are just onlookers.

6 killed, 1.5 lakh people evacuated as Tauktae makes landfall on Guj coast

Mumbai, May 17: A very severe cyclonic storm with winds gusting up to 185 km per hour began making landfall on the Gujarat coast Monday night, after dumping heavy rains on Mumbai, forcing the evacuation of over 1.5 lakh people in Gujarat and leaving two barges with 410 people on board adrift in the Arabian Sea.

Tropical storm Tauktae (pronounced TauTe) which had intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm, lies close to the Gujarat coast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. "The landfall process has started," the IMD said.

Six persons were killed in Maharashtra's Konkan region in separate incidents related to the severe cyclonic storm and three sailors remained missing after two boats sank in the sea, officials said.

The Indian Navy con



Strong sea waves near the Gateway of India as cyclone Tauktae approaches the coast of Mumbai, Monday. — PTI

Monday deployed three of its frontline warships after receiving messages to rescue 410 people on board two barges off the Mumbai coast. The ships deployed

to extend assistance to the two barges were INS Kolkata, INS Kochi and INS Talwar.

Three persons died in Raigad district, a sailor in

Sindhudurg district and two persons were killed in Navi Mumbai and Ulhasnagar in Thane district after trees fell on them.

India backs Palestinian cause but wants early ceasefire

United Nations, May 17 Amid escalating tensions between Gaza and Israel, India has urged "both sides" to show extreme restraint and refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the status-quo, underlining that "immediate de-escalation" is the need of the hour.

The UN Security Council held an open meeting on the situation in the Middle East on Sunday, during which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres termed the tensions as the "most serious escalation" in Gaza and Israel in years.

Describing the current hostilities as "utterly appalling", the UN chief asserted that "fighting must stop. It must stop immediately. Rockets and mortars

on one side and aerial and artillery bombardments on the other must stop. I appeal to all parties to heed this call."

India's Permanent Representative to the UN T. S. Tirumurti said the continuing violence, which began in East Jerusalem a week back, is now threatening to spiral out of control. "The events of the last several days have resulted in a sharp deterioration of the security situation."

Mr Tirumurti reiterated India's strong support to the "just Palestinian cause" and its unwavering commitment to the two-state solution, while also stressing India's strong condemnation of all acts of violence, provocation, incitement and

destruction. "Immediate de-escalation is the need of the hour, so as to arrest any further slide towards the brink. We urge both sides to show extreme restraint, desist from actions that exacerbate tensions, and refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status-quo, including in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhood," he said. India voiced support for the diplomatic efforts of the Quartet and other members of the international community, the countries in the region in particular, to "calm" the situation and put an end to the ongoing violence and seek to achieve durable peace.

These incidents have once again underscored the

need for immediate resumption of dialogue between Israel and Palestinian authorities. The absence of direct and meaningful negotiations between the parties is widening the trust deficit between the parties," Mr Tirumurti said, voicing concern that "this will only increase the chances for similar escalation in future." India believes that every effort should be made to create conducive conditions for resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine, he said.

During the two previously held Security Council closed meetings last week on the escalating tensions, India had expressed its deep concern over violence in Jerusalem. —PTI

Israel pounds tunnels, Hamas leaders' homes

Gaza City, May 17: The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early on Monday, saying it destroyed 15 kilometers of militant tunnels and the homes of nine Hamas commanders, as international diplomats worked to end the weeklong war that has killed hundreds of people.

The latest attacks killed a top Gaza leader of the

Islamic Jihad militant group whom the Israeli military blamed for some of the thousands of rocket attacks launched at Israel in recent days.

Israel has said it intends to press on for now with its attacks against Hamas, the militant group that rules Gaza, and the United States signalled it would not pressure the two sides for a cease-fire.

The overnight

airstrikes in Gaza on Monday hollowed out one floor of a multistory concrete building. A woman picked through clothing, rubble and splintered furniture in a room that had been destroyed.

One strike demolished the wall of one room, leaving untouched an open cabinet filled with bedding inside. Children walked over debris in the road. —AP

SHORT TAKES

SSI succumbs to coronavirus

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

A special sub Inspector of police succumbed to Covid-19 at a private hospital in the early hours of Monday.

Sankaran (54), was a special sub-inspector of police. He joined the force in 1988 and was serving with the Sunguvarachtram police station in Sriperumbudur.

Ten days ago, he had tested positive for the coronavirus and was admitted to a private hospital in Avadi. Later was shifted to another private hospital in Ranthinamangalam, Vandaloor where he breathed last. Police sources said that he was in critical condition and in the intensive care unit of the hospital. Early on Monday morning, the police SSI passed away.

Oxygen Express reaches Chennai, Thoothukudi

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The fourth and fifth oxygen express operated, by Southern Railway, arrived at Chennai and Thoothukudi on Monday. While the fourth oxygen express from Tata Steel Siding, Kalinganagar, Odisha, carrying 80 MT LMO in four containers reached Tondiarpet, the fifth express from Rourkela, Odisha arrived at Milavittan Railway station near Thoothukudi carrying 78.82 MT of LMO in five tankers. A release said so far the state received a total oxygen of 310.22 MT.

The sixth oxygen express carrying 40 MT LMO in two containers will reach Tondiarpet late Monday. The oxygen has been loaded at Tata Steel Siding, Kalinganagar. The seventh oxygen express, carrying 4 tankers with 57.46 MT, departed from Rourkela on Monday. It will reach Tondiarpet shortly.

Oxygen Express for Kerala: The first oxygen express carrying 117.9 MT in 6 containers from Kalinganagar, reached Kochi on Sunday.

2,716 cases registered on single day in Chennai

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The Greater Chennai police on Sunday registered 2,716 cases against those who violated lockdown and seized 2,793 vehicles for violating lockdown restrictions. According to the GCP, till Sunday night, the traffic police in the city registered 1,489 cases and seized 330 vehicles, while the law and

order wing registered 1,227 cases and seized 2,463 vehicles for flouting Covid-19 restrictions.

Besides, 2,925 cases have been filed against those not wearing masks, 251 for not following social distancing. In all, 52 shops were sealed and a fine of Rs 3,46,800 were levied upon the shop opening despite restrictions.

Chennai Commissioner of

Police Shankar Jiwal, IPS, had issued orders to set up checkpoints at various places in the city to monitor people's movement and lockdown violations. A total of 200 check-points come under the control of the law and order police and another 118 under the control of the traffic police. Additionally, about 360 patrol vehicles have been deployed to cover the entire

city during the lockdown period.

DGP J.K. Tripathy had deployed 10,000 police personnel for bandobast duty in Chennai soon after the announcement of the statewide lockdown. The DGP also gave strict instructions to the police personnel not to use lathicharge to enforce norms and to use drones to monitor long stretches.



According to new Covid-19 lockdown guidelines in the state, traffic cops checking e-registration pass near Vandalur on Monday. People without pass are fined on the spot. —DC

Travelling to other dts? E-pass registration must

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

E-pass registration made mandatory for inter-district passengers in Tamil Nadu came into effect on Monday.

According to new Covid-19 lockdown guidelines in the state, an e-pass is required to travel between districts.

Inter-district commuters

are only required to register for the e-pass. It is mandatory to get the pass to travel, they can commute once registered. Only for essential activities such as marriages, funeral, medical treatment, elderly care people will be allowed to travel after filling the forms on the state government's dedicated website. (https://eregister. tneqa.

Org). It came into effect from 6 am on May 17. Chennai airport continues to witness low passenger traffic due to the covid-19 second wave and lockdown restrictions. On Monday, only 3,000 used the airport, considering both arrivals and departures. According to the airport officials, just 1,200 passengers arrived at the airport on Tuesday, while 1,800 departed.

CJM of Tirunelveli succumbs to Covid-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUNELVELI, MAY 17

Tirunelveli district chief judicial magistrate V.M.Neesh succumbed to Covid-19 after being hospitalised in Thoothukudi for two weeks in the wee hours of Monday.

Diagnosed positive for Covid-19 on May 3, the chief judicial magistrate, Neesh (42), got admitted for treatment at Thoothukudi government medical college hospital, where he died on Monday morning. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

V.M.Neesh served as sub-Judge at Chidambaram court in Cuddalore district was transferred with promotion as district chief judicial magistrate to Tirunelveli hardly a month ago on April 21. Earlier in 2015, V.M.Neesh too served in Tirunelveli district as additional district Munsif at Valliyoork court.



Chief Minister M. K. Stalin inaugurates special vaccination camp at Kolathur Assembly Constituency and inspects the Covid-19 special ambulances on Monday. GDC commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi, HR&CE minister P. K. Sekar Babu also present. —DC

AIADMK to donate ₹1 cr to CM's Covid relief fund

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D.SEKAR I DC
CHENNAI, MAY 17

Cutting across all divides and barriers, political parties, business houses and public personalities contributed to the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund generously, exemplifying the fact that the fight against Covid-19 is a responsibility of all and not just the government.

The opposition AIADMK announced a donation of ₹1 crore and a month's salary by all its MPs and MLAs. A statement issued by party coordinator O Panneerselvam and co-coordinator Edappadi K Palaniswami on Monday said that apart from these donations, party cadre would contribute their mite in helping people affected by the pandemic.

The statement recalled that the AIADMK had contributed Rs one crore during the first wave of the

coronavirus spread.

Among those from Kollywood who responded to the call for donations by Chief Minister M K Stalin were actor Rajinikanth and actor Vikram. While Rajinikanth called on the Chief Minister at the Secretariat and handed over a cheque for ₹50 lakh, Vikram made a bank transaction for ₹30 lakh.

The head of the Sun Group, Kalanidhi Maran, met Stalin at his residence, along with his wife Kaveri Kalanidhi, and handed over the cheque for ₹10 crore towards the Relief Fund. Chief Minister's wife, Durga Stalin was also present during the meeting.

Apart from them, several top business honchos called on the Chief Minister at the Secretariat and presented their cheques and articles. Among them were Leema Rose Martin of Martin Group, who gifted oxygen

concentrators. Cylinders and other articles used in the fight against Covid-19 totally worth ₹3 crore.

Others were TR Kesavan of the TAFE Group (₹1 crore), owners of Pon Pure Chemicals India private limited (₹1 crore), Bashiam Constructions directors Abinash Yuvaraj and Bashiam Yuvaraj (₹1 crore), Nagu Chidambaram and his family members of the Kamala theatre group (₹50 lakh), Rapid Care managing director Venkatesh (₹50 lakh) owners of Prince Jewelry (₹25 lakh) and Harris and Menuk Chemicals Pvt Ltd owners (₹25 lakh).

Apart from that, distribution of relief for sanitary workers was carried out at the Kolathur constituency. A scheme to serve food for the workers was launched on Monday.

At the MLA's office in Kolathur, the disabled were given rice, oil, dhal and sanitizer by Stalin.

Judicial work in TN, Pondy subordinate courts suspended

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The Madras high court suspended all judicial work in the subordinate

courts in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry until further orders in view of steady surge in Covid-19 cases.

In an order on Monday, the Madras High Court's

Registrar General P. Dhanapal stated that since there is steady surge in Covid-19 cases in recent days, all judicial work has been suspended

in subordinate courts to prevent further spread of infection.

All litigants and lawyers are prohibited entry into the court complexes in all

the subordinate courts unless unavoidable and with the permission of judge in-charge.

Except for remand purposes and other unavoid-

able matters, all the judicial work in the subordinate courts shall remain suspended until further orders. In view of this, the judicial officers

and staff members of all the subordinate courts are instructed not to attend court except to the extent absolutely necessary.

Despite restrictions, crowd swells at Tambaram market

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

Hundreds thronged the Tambaram market on Sunday despite the government's appeal to avoid crowding.

Police sources said, on Sunday morning, the Tambaram market saw a steady stream of shoppers. Vegetables, meat and fish shops in the market saw the most crowd on Sunday.

Initially, the flow of shoppers was minimal and there was discipline on their part to adhere to physical distancing. However, the situation became awry after 9

am. after the crowd swelled presumably due to panic buying.

While officials were seen advising the people to wear masks and maintain physical distancing, local residents were in no mood to listen. Most of the vendors and the people were seen wandering around the shops without properly wearing masks. Based on an alert by the public regarding the violations of Covid-19 restrictions in the market, M.L.A Raja rushed to the spot.

Based on the information, Tambaram municipality Commissioner Chitra also arrived at the spot. Tension

simmered thereafter a minor clash broke out between the MLA and the officer; as the MLA raised concern over the commissioner's failure to manage the crowd at the market.

Later the police intervened and regulated the crowd by giving instructions and reminding everyone to maintain physical distancing. Public and the shopkeepers were advised to wear masks and maintain personal distance in the market. The police personnel had a tough time controlling the huge crowd that had gathered at all the shops.



Police personnel of Korattur station inhale herbal steam before leaving for their lockdown vehicle check-up duty on Monday. —DC

Minister warns against steam inhalation in public places

Chennai May 17: Tamil Nadu on Monday reported 33,075 new coronavirus cases and 335 related fatalities.

The new cases, including 6,150 in Chennai, a bulletin said.

Though there was a slight dip in the new infections, the fatalities rose by 24 as against the previous day.

Of the 335 deaths - 152 were in private and 183 in government hospitals. This took the total number of fatalities to 18,005 in the State.

Meanwhile, minister for medical and family welfare Ma Subramanian warned people against using steam inhalers installed at some few public places, promoting them as

Covid-19 preventive measures.

Advising those who test positive for Covid-19 to consult a doctor for appropriate treatment, the minister said COVID-19 can affect the lungs directly, and steam inhalation should not be taken without doctors advice.

Do not resort to steam inhalation by following social media posts, as this could lead to the rapid spread of the virus. Do take it only on the advice of the doctor, he said in a statement here.

The toll on Sunday was 311, including 60 in Chennai.

The total number of people testing positive till date increased to 16,31,291 and the number of active cases, includ-

ing isolation, remains at 2,31,596, according to the bulletin.

The number of positive patients discharged after treatment today stands at 20,486 and the total has gone up to 13,81,690.

In Chennai, 5,067 people were discharged, and the total recoveries stand at 3,90,364.

While 4,44,371 are total positive cases, the active cases remain at 48,156. The toll is 5,851 so far including 86 deaths today. Next to Chennai, Coimbatore registered 3,264 cases, Chengalpattu 2,154, Thiruvallur 1,829, Tiruchirappalli 1,544, Madurai 1,288, Kancheepuram 1,241, Kanyakumari 1,069, Thoothukudi 1,024 and Thanjavur 1,019. —PTI

Off-centre

Ooty cop gets mouthful

Last Friday, when an elderly man was walking along the Coonoor Road at Charring Cross bus stop junction in Ooty, a woman police constable rudely told him to avoid taking a walk after 12 noon.

But he shot back, "then why do you open hospitals, medical shops, banks, government offices and Aavin booths after 12. I need to go to a hospital. I don't have a vehicle. There are no auto rickshaws and taxis. The only option is to take a walk. If you want the public to avoid visits, then ask your administration to close down these things too." Leaving the arrogant cop dumbfounded, he walked towards the hospital on Coonoor road. —B. Ravichandran

Lockdown makes shuttlers comfy

In the lockdown days, Chennai residents have a lot of options before them while finding a place to play badminton. In pre-lockdown days, they used to climb on their terrace or occupy the sidelines of busy roads to play. Now, the empty roads have given them the leisure to stretch their badminton nets and play

doubles very smoothly. On the streets of Rayala Nagar, the local badminton players, including children, have turned custodian of roads. As their badminton net is tied across the road and blocks your way, a naughty one asked, "Where are you going, sir? Can't you indoors?" —T. Sudheesh

Remembering Sir Cotton's Grand Anicut connection

The builders of dams are rarely remembered, but not Sir Arthur Cotton, who modernised the Grand Anicut built by Karikal Cholan. The farmers of Thanjavur district don't forget to celebrate the birthday of Cotton. This year also, on May 15, they garlanded the bust of Cotton at Grand Anicut and celebrated his 218th birth anniversary. Born in England in 1803,

Cotton was appointed engineer for managing the Cauvery system of composite Thanjavur district in 1829. He was amused by the way the Grand Anicut was built by Karikal Cholan. He built additional structures and modernised the Anicut. Later he built upper anicut at Mukkombu and lower anicut at Anaikarai based on Grand Anicut model. —G. Srinivasan

Wall of love feeds hungry

Concerned by those going hungry on the streets of Kumbakonam, a group of youngsters are doing their bid to try and ensure they find food in a dignified way. The group's

recently-installed 'Anbu Suvar', wall of love, at Mathematician Ramanujan's memorial on Sarankabani Kovil Sannidhi street in Kumbakonam, has been helping hundreds of people in these tough times.

The team places 100 packs of variety rice, including lemon rice, tomato rice, curd rice and sambar rice on the shelf every day and the whole rack is emptied with an hour. This will allow people to

fetch themselves food packets without hesitation. People have been flocking to the 'wall of love' regularly and many people now look forward to it every day. —Sindhiya Samuel

Reprieve for woman candidate in TNPSC appointment

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 17

A woman candidate, who applied to the post of assistant director in the social welfare and nutritious meal programme department and successfully completed her written examination but her candidature was rejected by the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission on the ground that she failed to upload the documents for certificate verification within the stipulated period, got reprieve with the Madras high court directing the TNPSC to permit her to upload documents in their official portal and call for other selection process, if any, in case of any vacancy.

Allowing the petition filed by J.Jayashree, Justice S.Vaidyanathan gave the above directive and dismissed the petition filed by B.Poonguzhali, who was selected in the second list in the place of Jayashree.

The judge said, "In the result, a petition filed by Jayashree is allowed. The respondents (TNPSC) are directed to permit Jayashree to upload docu-



ments in their official portal and call for another selection process, if any, in case of any vacancy. In addition to uploading of documents in the website, Jayashree is also permitted to hand over the copies of documents to TNPSC, in the physical form. The very fact that Jayashree's name finds place in the 1st list itself is sufficient to infer that she is meritorious, as Poonguzhali has neither scored equal marks nor more marks than Jayashree, otherwise her name would have found place in the List-1 itself. Hence finding no merits in the case of Poonguzhali, the petition filed by her is dismissed".

Pondy logs 1,446 fresh cases, death toll 1,179

Puducherry, May 17: Puducherry added 1,446 new coronavirus cases during the last 24 hours pushing the overall tally in the union territory to 85,952, a senior official of the Department of Health and Family Welfare Services said on Monday. Twenty-eight more people succumbed to the virus during the last 24 hours ending 10 AM Monday, raising the toll to 1,179. Director of Health and Family Welfare Services S Mohan Kumar said. Eighteen of the dead were men and the rest women, he added. All the deceased hailed from the Puducherry region of the Union Territory.

The number of active cases stood at 17,383 with 15,281 patients in home isolation and 2,102 were in hospitals. The 1,446 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 8,056 samples, Mohan Kumar said, adding the test positivity rate was 17.85 per cent. While the Puducherry region of the Union Territory accounted for 1,210 of the fresh cases, Karaikal reported 147, followed by Yanam (78) and Mahe (11). The fatality and recovery rates were 1.37 per cent and 78.40 per cent respectively. The Director said that 1,701 patients were discharged after recovery during the last 24 hours. Mohan Kumar said that 33,737 healthcare workers and 20,326 frontline workers have been inoculated so far and 1,27,204 people coming under the category of either senior citizens (sixty years and above) or those above 45 years with comorbidities have been vaccinated since May 1. —PTI

IN BRIEF

3 KILLED IN COP-NAXAL ENCOUNTER

DC CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, MAY 17

Three people were killed in a gunbattle between security forces and Maoists in a forest in the borders of Bijapur and Sukma in south Bastar in Chhattisgarh on Monday.

Police were ascertaining if the three slain were civilians, caught in the crossfire between security forces and Naxals, or jan militia members (foot soldiers of Maoists).

"It was yet to be known if the deceased were Maoists or civilians", Bastar range inspector general of police Sunderraj P said.

He said Maoists opened fire on a police camp set up at Silger on the side of Sukma district on the inter-district border at around 12.30 pm, provoking the security forces to retaliate.

Local villagers have been staging protests against the establishment of a police camp in the area for the last several days.

Naxals, taking the cover of the protest, opened fire on the police camp, leading to the gun battle between them, he added.

Bodies of three people were recovered by police.

The encounter site is barely 10 km from the spot where Maoists ambushed a joint search party of security personnel killing 22 CRPF jawans on April 3.

COLLEGIUM FOR NAMING POLL OFFICERS SOUGHT

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) on Monday moved the Supreme Court seeking setting up of an independent collegium for making appointments of the Election Commissioners to the Election Commission.

The petition by ADR says that present process of appointing the election commissioners by the Executive is incompatible with Article 324(2) of the Constitution.

Citing the views of the Constitution-makers, the petition says: "There is no doubt that in order to ensure the purity of election process, the responsibility to hold free and fair elections in the country should be entrusted to an independent body, which would be insulated from political and/or executive interference."

"The appointment of the members of the Election Commission on the 'pick-and-choose' of the Executive violates the very foundation for which it was created, thus making the Commission a branch of the Executive", says the petition by ADR.

The petition cited the recommendations of the Law Commission, the Second Administrative Reform Commission and Dinesh Goswami Committee's May 1990 report, all stressing on appointments on the vacant positions in the Election Commission by an independent collegium.

PVT HOSP 'HIDES' DEATHS, PROBE ORDERED

Dehradun, May 17: A private hospital in Haridwar allegedly withheld information about deaths of 65 Covid-19 patients from the health authorities for over a fortnight in violation of the norms, officials said on Monday.

Cabinet Minister and state government spokesman Subodh Uniyal said the matter is being probed and appropriate legal action will be taken against those responsible for the negligence.

Sixty-five Covid-19 patients died at Baba Barfani Hospital between April 25 and May 12 but the facility hid the figure from the State Covid Control Room here, officials said.

When the hospital management was threatened with action it disclosed the truth, state Covid Control Room officials said. However, the hospital management offered excuses like shortage of staff for not being able to provide the information on time, they said.

Hospitals across the state are supposed to inform the Covid Control Room within 24 hours about the death of patients suffering from the infection, Chief Operating Officer Abhishek Tripathi said on Monday. Health Secretary Amit Negi has written to all hospitals asking them to regularly provide figures to the state control room or face action.

PARAM BIR SINGH MOVES SC CHALLENGING MAHA INQUIRY

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 17

Former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh has approached the Supreme Court against the departmental inquiry initiated against him by the Maharashtra government. In his petition, Mr Singh has claimed that the inquiry is an attempt to frame him in false cases.

He has claimed that the inquiry officer is threatening him with false cases unless the complaint made by him against former Home Minister Anil Deshmukh is withdrawn. The state had directed Maharashtra DGP Sanjay Pandey to conduct a preliminary inquiry against Singh. The two enquiries were ordered on April 1 and April 20. Incidentally, Singh made similar allegations against Pandey that he was pressuring Singh to withdraw the complaints against Deshmukh.

Singh had also alleged that he had recorded the conversation between him and Pandey following which Pandey had recused himself from conducting a probe against Singh.

Later, the government again ordered fresh inquiries against Singh. Now the former Mumbai top cop has once again claimed that he has submitted before the CBI the transcripts showing alleged phone call conversations from the inquiry officer threatening him to withdraw his allegations against Deshmukh.

In his petition before the apex court, Singh has prayed that all the enquiries against him be transferred to another state. He has alleged that there is a threat of hosting multiple enquiries against him unless he withdraws the complaints against Deshmukh. Singh prayed for a direction to the CBI to act on his representation against the alleged threats made by the Maharashtra Government's inquiry officer.

Singh was shifted from the post of Mumbai Police Commissioner to the Home Guards department on March 17 this year.



Trinamool Chhatra Parishad supporters block NH34 to protest the arrest of senior party leaders in connection with the Narada case at Gazole in Malda on Monday.

WB Speaker slams Governor, says MLA arrests are 'illegal'

Biman points out that the Assembly Speaker's chair was not vacant

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MAY 17

Breaking his silence finally, West Bengal Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee tore into Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday for "empowering" the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) with his "sanction for prosecution" in arresting the four former Trinamool Congress ministers of the Mamata Banerjee government in the high-profile Narada sting operation case.

He denounced the arrests as "illegal." Mr Banerjee, who is also a veteran lawyer, claimed, "The Calcutta High Court, since it is hearing the case, wanted to know from the CBI whether it obtained the sanction of prosecution from the Assembly Speaker. As the

CBI did not submit any reply, we, on behalf of the Assembly, apprised the high court clearly through the state advocate general that neither the CBI prayed for our sanction for prosecution nor it sent us any communication on the matter."

He alleged, "I do not know under what circumstances, the CBI went to seek the Governor's permission especially when the Assembly Speaker's chair was not vacant. I was holding the chair then. But I was surprised to see the Governor still giving his sanction to the CBI. I do not know any law which allows the Governor to act when the Speaker's office is not vacant. I also do not know his purpose to give the sanction which I think was obtained in an illegal and undemocratic way totally. The arrests are

thus illegal."

The Assembly Speaker added, "Therefore, how far the approval, using which the CBI made the arrests, is lawful is very much doubtful. If such a trend is followed, no one will have any legal entity or right in the state. Only the governor will exercise his power in every case."

Meanwhile, the BJP on Monday lashed out at TMC workers over their agitations across the state, following the arrest of party leaders in the Narada sting case, and said Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her supporters, instead of coming in the way of CBI probe, should opt for a legal remedy.

Taking to Twitter, BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya claimed that Banerjee was creating hurdles for the

CBI.

"CM of West Bengal @MamataOys...any official who is under oath to maintain law and order in the state is sadly indulging in threatening law enforcing agencies and creating hurdles for the CBI," the BJP's Bengal minder tweeted.

"This is very unfortunate for the people of Bengal," Vijayvargiya added. BJP state president Dilip Ghosh, too, condemned the protest by TMC activists, and said the agitation, amid the Covid-19 lockdown, only goes on to show that they have no respect for the law of the land.

"Instead of demonstrating on the streets, the party should seek a legal remedy," Ghosh stated.

Slamming TMC activists who sought to know why BJP leaders Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari

were spared, as their names, too, had cropped up in the case, Ghosh asserted that they had "co-operated with the agency, unlike others who have been taken into custody".

It may be recalled that the sting operation was purportedly conducted by Mathew Samuel of Narada TV news channel in 2014 wherein people resembling TMC ministers, MPs and MLAs were allegedly seen receiving money from representatives of a fictitious company in lieu of favours.

The tapes were made public just before the 2016 assembly elections in West Bengal.

Both Roy and Adhikari were TMC members when the purported tapes had surfaced.

The Calcutta High Court had ordered a CBI probe into the sting operation in March 2017.

CBI ARRESTS TWO BENGAL MINISTERS

FROM PG 1

On Monday night, the high court stayed the lower court's grant of bail to the four accused and scheduled a hearing on Wednesday, May 19, till when the four would be kept in judicial custody at Presidency Jail. TMC MP and defence counsel Kalyan Banerjee said: "This procedure is unheard of. We did not get any notice or order from the high court. I also have no idea about it except hearing that an oral submission was made." The four heavyweight accused were cabinet colleagues of Ms Banerjee when they, along with seven more TMC leaders, including many MPs, and IPS officer S.M.H. Meerza were allegedly caught accepting around Rs 5 lakhs in cash each in a sting operation by journalist Mathew Samuel ahead of the 2016 Assembly elections.

While Mr Hakim was then the municipal affairs and urban development minister, Mr Mukherjee held the panchayat portfolio. Mr Mitra was state transport minister and Mr Chatterjee was state housing minister, apart from being Kolkata's mayor.

Questioning why no CBI action was taken against two other accused in the case -- Mukul Roy and Suwendu Adhikari -- who are now in the BJP, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh claimed: "Protests are spontaneous because the arrests of the four are illegal and undemocratic. The BJP is misusing the governor and CBI to fulfil its grudge of poll debacle at the hands of our party and create a situation of unrest which will push the state towards President's Rule."

Mr Samuel also wondered why Mr Adhikari, who was seen accepting cash from him, had been spared. The CPI(M) and Congress too criticised the arrests amid the Covid-19 pandemic, but BJP spokesman Sayantan Basu said: "The CBI acted according to the law."

Later, TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee tweeted: "I urge everyone to abide by the law & refrain from any activity that violates lockdown norms for the sake of the larger interest of Bengal and its people. We have utmost faith in the judiciary & the battle will be fought legally."

'Girlfriend' of MLA dies by suicide

RABINDRA NATH CHOWDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 17

The "girlfriend" of senior Congress MLA and former minister Umang Singhar, the tribal face of the party in Madhya Pradesh, ended life by 'suicide' in his bungalow here, police said on Monday.

Thirty nine-year-old Sonia Bhardwaj, hailing from Ambala, was found hanging from the ceiling of a room in Mr Singhar's house on Sunday.

A purported suicide note 'recovered' by the police in the room read, "Tum gusse mein bahut tez ho. Ab sahan nahin

kar sakti (You are a very angry man. I can no longer take it)".

However, the letter made no mention of any person responsible for her 'suicide'.

Mr Singhar, who represented Gandhwani assembly constituency in MP, was out of town when the incident took place.

"I was away. I talked to her day before yesterday (on Saturday) to inquire if she had taken her food. She was a good friend (of mine). We were going to marry", Mr Singhar told reporters here.

According to the police, the MLA and the woman knew each other for last two years.

Covid numbers fall below 3-lakh mark

FROM PG1

"The AEFI Committee has completed an in-depth case review of 498 serious and severe events, of which 26 cases have been reported to be potential thromboembolic (formation of a clot in a blood vessel that might also break loose and carried by the blood stream to plug another vessel) events following the administration of Covishield vaccine -- with a reporting rate of 0.61 cases/ million doses," the report said. It added there were no potential thromboembolic event following administration of Covaxin vaccine.

The health ministry is separately issuing advisories to healthcare workers and vaccine beneficiaries to encourage people to be aware of suspected thromboembolic symptoms occurring within 20 days after receiving any Covid-19 vaccine (particularly Covishield) and report preferably to the health facility where the vaccine was administered. People have to

watch out for breathlessness, pain in the chest, pain in limbs/pain on pressing limbs or swelling in limbs (arm or calf), multiple, pinhead size red spots or bruising of skin in an area beyond the injection site, persistent abdominal pain with or without vomiting, seizures in the absence of previous history of seizures with or without vomiting, severe and persistent headache with or without, weakness/paralysis of limbs or any particular side or part of the body, persistent vomiting without any obvious reason, blurred vision or pain in eyes or having double vision, change in mental status or having confusion or depressed level of consciousness,

any other symptom or health condition which is of concern to the recipient or the family.

However, in the absence of a proper reporting mechanism as most of the helplines are not responding, and awareness among people to report to AEFI, the study may not be reflecting the true picture and magnitude of AEFI.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with a group of doctors to discuss the Covid situation. He said home-based care of patients must be SOP driven and it was imperative to expand telemedicine services in all tehsils and districts of the country besides giving psychological care as well as physical care importance. The PM urged doc-

tors to include oxygen audit in their daily efforts and discussed the challenge of Mucormycosis.

He said doctors may need to put in extra effort towards spreading awareness about it.

Meanwhile, the first batch of anti-Covid drug 2DG developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) was launched on Monday. The medicine will be supplied directly to hospitals from June. The indigenous anti Covid drug is expected to reduce average recovery time by 2.5 days and oxygen demand by 40 per cent. Apollo Hospitals and Dr Reddy's have also announced the vaccination programme with Sputnik V.

FIGHTING | COVID

Essential services staff, those travelling for emergency to be allowed to move outside

Four districts of Kerala under triple lockdown

Thiruvananthapuram, May 17: The boundaries of four major districts in Kerala, which report the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the state, were sealed and restrictions were further intensified on Monday as a seven-day triple lockdown announced by the state government came into force there from midnight.

Majority of sub-roads were closed and police took control of the major roads in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts as part of efforts to arrest the massive

spread of the virus infection. Only essential services people and those travelling for meeting emergency needs were allowed to move out in all the four districts.

Borders were under the strict surveillance of police who could be seen returning many people while trying to travel without any valid reason in many places. They also warned of stern legal action and seizure of vehicles against those violating triple lockdown norms. In the state capital, police cut down the number of entry points to the

city to just six to force people to stay safe at homes and make them avoid unnecessary travels.

Despite strict instructions, the closing of roads, however, seemed to have caused long queues of vehicles in many places waiting for the police permission to proceed further. Thiruvananthapuram city police Commissioner, Balram Kumar Upadhyay, said 100 bike patrolling teams have been deployed here to check quarantine violations.

The public could seek the support of getting essential articles like medicine

in emergency situations, he added. Meanwhile, the district authorities have issued specific guidelines for each district under the triple lockdown.

While Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts would be under triple lockdown till May 23, the current lockdown would continue in other 10 districts, authorities added. As per the norms issued by the Thiruvananthapuram district administration, shops dealing with food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat and fish, animal

fodder, poultry and cattle feed, bakeries were opened Monday. They would be open on alternate days starting from Monday onwards and all shops would close, including for home delivery purposes by 2 pm. Banks, insurance and financial services will function with minimal staff on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 am to 1 pm.

Cooperative Banks will remain open only on Monday and Thursday from 10 am to 1 pm.

According to the guidelines, milk and newspaper distribution shall be com-

pleted before 8 am.

Fair price shops (Ration/PDS/Maveli/Supply co shops) and milk booths are permitted to function on all days till 5 pm while restaurants and hotels will be allowed to function from 7 am to 7.30 pm with home delivery services only. No dine-in and take-away/parcels shall be allowed in any restaurants or hotels, it said. Medical shops, petrol pumps, ATMs, shops selling life-saving equipment, hospitals and other clinical establishments shall be functioning on all days.

Authorities have advised

the public to buy provisions and vegetables from shops near their houses and not to travel long distances for the purchase of provisions and vegetables.

The public will be prevented from travelling long distances for purchase of essential commodities, they said.

Police have already informed that all houses with positive and primary contact family members would be sealed and no person from containment zones would be allowed to step out even if he or she belongs to the exempted category of work. -PTI

SHORT TAKES

TUNISIA TROOPS
KILL 5 SUSPECTED
JIHADISTS

Tunis, May 17: Tunisian forces on Monday killed five suspected jihadists in an air and ground operation targeting a rugged mountain hideout of Islamist fighters, the interior ministry said.

The operation launched at dawn was still underway, the ministry said in a statement, adding authorities were working to verify the nationalities and affiliation of the “five terrorists” killed. The operation targeted a jihadist base on Mount Chaambi, near the border with Algeria.

Tunisia has seen a surge in radical Islam since veteran president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in the country's 2011 revolution.

The army has been battling armed groups since 2012 in the country's central mountains.

They include fighters from Jund al-Khalifa, or “Soldiers of the Caliphate”, linked to the Islamic State group.

SYNAGOGUE
BLEACHER
COLLAPSE: 2 DIE

Jerusalem, May 17: Israeli medics said at least two people were killed and more than 150 injured after a bleacher collapsed at an uncompleted West Bank synagogue on Sunday, the eve of a major Jewish holiday. The bleacher was packed with ultra-Orthodox worshippers and collapsed during prayers at the beginning of Shavuot. A spokesman for Magen David Adom told Channel 13 that paramedics had treated over 157 people for injuries and pronounced two dead, a man in his 50s and a 12-year-old boy.

Rescue workers were on the scene, treating the injured and taking people to the hospital.

The collapse comes weeks after 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews were killed in a stampede at a religious festival in northern Israel.

Amateur footage showed the collapse Sunday during evening prayers in Givat Ze'ev, just outside Jerusalem.

The ultra-Orthodox synagogue was packed with hundreds of people.

NINE DEAD IN
BURKINA FASO
JIHADIST ATTACK

Ougadougou, May 17: At least nine people were killed in a weekend attack in Burkina Faso blamed on jihadists in the country's restive north, local and security sources said Monday. A traditional chief and three civilian defence volunteers were among those killed in the attack on Sunday in a village near the town of Pissila, a local official said, adding that another three people remained missing.

He said the “terrorists” who waged the attack were killed, without stating a death toll.

“The attack occurred around 9:00 am when men from the village and volunteers were holding a strategy meeting after a series of incidents and attacks in the area,” he said.

A local elected official said hundreds of people had fled to Pissila in recent days.

Three of the dead belonged to the Volunteers for the Defence of the Motherland (VDP), an anti-jihadist civilian defence force created in December 2019 to help the former French colony's poorly equipped military fight jihadists.

COURT CLEARS WAY
FOR SAMOA'S 1ST
WOMAN LEADER

Wellington, May 17: Samoa appeared set to get its first woman leader after the nation's top court on Monday reinstated the results of a knife-edge election last month.

Two decisions by the Supreme Court have paved the way for Fiame Naomi Mata'afa to become prime minister of the small island nation.

Her ascent represents a significant milestone not only for Samoa but for the broader South Pacific region, where there have been few women leaders.

Like many of its neighbours, Samoa tends to be conservative, strongly Christian and deeply traditional.

An advocate for women's equality, Fiame, who was born in 1957, broke new ground during her campaign by going on the road and robustly criticising the incumbent, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, who had been in power for 22 years.

The court's decisions appeared to end what most people viewed as an attempt by Tuilaepa to cling to power. Fiame had served as his deputy before they had a bitter split.

Israel: Gaza tunnels destroyed in strikes

The UN warns Gaza's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel because of continued aggression



A ball of fire erupts from a building in Gaza City's Rimal residential district during massive Israeli bombardment on the Hamas-controlled enclave. — AFP

Gaza City, May 17: The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Monday, saying it destroyed 15 kilometres (nine miles) of militant tunnels and the homes of nine alleged Hamas commanders. Residents of Gaza awakened by the overnight barrage described it as the heaviest since the war began a week ago, and even more powerful than a wave of airstrikes in Gaza City the day before that left 42 dead and flattened three buildings. There was no immediate word on the casualties from the latest strikes. A three-storey building in Gaza City was heavily damaged, but residents said the military warned them 10 minutes before the strike and everyone cleared out.

They said many of the airstrikes hit nearby farmland. Gaza's mayor Yahya Sarraj told *Al-Jazeera* TV that the airstrikes had caused extensive damage to roads and other infrastructure. “If the aggression continues we expect conditions to become worse,” he said.

He also warned that the territory was running low on fuel and other spare parts. The UN has warned that Gaza's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel. The territory already experiences daily power outages of 8-12 hours and tap water is undrinkable.

The war broke out last Monday, when Hamas fired long-range rockets at Jerusalem after weeks of clashes in the Holy City

between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police. The protests were focused on the heavy-handed policing of a flashpoint holy site during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. Since then, the Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure.

Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired more than 3,100 rockets into Israel. — AP

Cricket club saves
Indian researchers

Beersheba (Israel), May 17: A cricket club in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba has come to the rescue of several Indian researchers at the Ben-Gurion University in the Negev southern region, who had been struggling for a proper shelter while being under a complete siege with rockets raining over the country's south during the past one week.

The Beersheba Cricket Club building, a two-storey structure close to the University, which is actually a shelter house with an underground floor, opened its door for the local residents immediately after rockets launched by Palestinian militants started to fall on

Israel's southern areas and also extended the kind gesture to Indian researchers at the University who were looking for proper protection during distressed times.

“Some of the Indian researchers also play for the cricket club and are like part of our family. But we told them that anybody looking for a safe shelter is welcome to use our facility,” said Naor Gudker, the Chairman of Beersheba Cricket Club. “There are several Indian researchers staying with us during the past week, both boys and girls, and we have tried to make things as comfortable as possible, extending them all possible help”, he said. — PTI

Court postpones
start of Navalny
extremism case

Moscow, May 17: A Russian court on Monday postponed the first hearing in the “extremism” case against the political network of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, part of a campaign to outlaw the opposition to President Vladimir Putin. As the hearing got underway behind closed doors, the prosecution submitted additional documents and the proceedings were postponed until June 9, according to lawyers representing Navalny's network.

The case is part of a sweeping crackdown on Putin's most prominent critic and his supporters after Navalny barely survived a poisoning with the Novichok nerve agent last summer.

As part of the effort — which comes a few months before parliamentary elections — the lower house is set on Tuesday to begin debating a bill banning members of “extremist” organisations from being elected lawmakers.

Navalny's network is being represented by lawyers of Team 29, a Saint Petersburg-based group that specialises in freedom of speech and treason cases.

The lawyers said it was not clear why Monday's hearing was held behind

closed doors.

The Kommersant business daily on Monday cited a source saying the secrecy was because some of the case files contained personal information of police involved in dispersing opposition protests.

But key Navalny ally Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter that the case materials were kept secret so that “nobody could see the absurdity of what was happening”.

Prosecutors in April requested that Navalny's regional network and his Anti-Corruption Foundation be designated “extremist” organisations, accusing them of plotting to stage a Western-backed uprising in Russia.

Such a court ruling would put Navalny and his supporters and financial backers on par with members of the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda and threaten them with long prison sentences.

“The opposition will be crushed,” Abbas Gallyaymov, an independent political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter, said, warning that the official ban on dissent would eventually backfire. “By destroying the opposition, they are destroying their own legitimacy,” he said. — AFP

US asks Israel for proof of
Gaza media building strike

Copenhagen, May 17: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday he has asked Israel for any evidence of Hamas operating in a Gaza building housing news bureaus that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike over the weekend, but hasn't seen any.

Blinken spoke at a news conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, as pressure is increasing on the Biden administration to ask for a ceasefire in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel destroyed a building housing The *Associated Press* and *Al Jazeera* claimed that Hamas used the building for a military intelligence

office.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the building a “perfectly legitimate target” and told *CBS*’ “Face the Nation” on Sunday that Israel passes such evidence through intelligence channels.

“Shortly after the strike we did request additional details regarding the justification for it,” Blinken said Monday.

He declined to discuss specific intelligence, saying he “will leave it to others to characterise if any information has been shared and our assessment that information.”

But he said, “I have not seen any information provided.”

Blinken's comments came after UN Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved. — AP



Palestinian demonstrators burn tires and create a barricade during a protest against the tension in Jerusalem and the Israeli-Gaza fighting, on Monday. — AP

Shehbaz placed on no-fly list
Remarks: Pak pulls
up Kabul's envoy

Islamabad, May 17: The Pakistan government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday added the name of Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who has been charged with corruption, to the no-fly list, barring him from leaving the country for medical treatment.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court granted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz — also the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — permission to travel abroad once for medical treatment.

After obtaining bail, Shehbaz, 69, was about to fly to London on May 8

when an Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team at the airport stopped him from travelling on the grounds that his name had been on the provisional national identification list (PNIL), which impose a temporary bar on someone to leave the country.

Shehbaz was offloaded from Doha-bound flight on May 8.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that Shehbaz's name was added to the exit control list (ECL) after it was given approval from the federal Cabinet. — PTI

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO), however, did not specify the statement which angered it. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in a recent interview, alleged that Pakistan “operates an organised system of support” for the

Afghan Taliban.

“The names of the various decision-making bodies of the Taliban are Quetta Shura, Miramshah Shura and Peshawar Shura — named after the Pakistani cities where they are located. There is a deep relationship with the state,” the Afghan leader said.

The FO said Pakistan was seriously concerned about the statements. — PTI

BACK ISRAEL
CURBS, TURKEY
URGES POPE

Ankara, May 17: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has asked Pope Francis to support sanctions against Israel, saying Palestinians will continue to be “massacred” as long as the international community does not punish Israel. During a telephone call Monday with the Pope, he also said that “continued messages and reactions” from Francis in support of Palestinians would be of great importance for the “mobilisation of the Christian world and of the international community,” said a statement from the Turkish presidential communications directorate. — AP

AMID CLASH,
ISRAEL BATS
FOR TOURISM

Dubai, May 17: As violence flares within Israel and on a day in which Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City killed at least 42 people, it was business as usual for a senior Israeli tourism official in Dubai as she promoted the country as a must-see destination for Muslim visitors.

At Dubai's Arabian Travel Market on Sunday, billed as the first travel and tourism event to happen in person since the global coronavirus outbreak, a small Israeli booth — tucked behind Slovenia's — marketed the country as the “Land of Creation.” — AP

WRITS SEEKING
FRESH SWEARING
IN OF OLI FILED

Kathmandu, May 17: Four writ petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal on Monday demanding that Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli be sworn in again as he disgraced the office of the President by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during the oath-taking ceremony. President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace, on Friday.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Oli, the 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), omitted the word vow when the President recited it, besides in the name of God. I will take oath in the name of the country and the people, Oli, who has become Nepal's prime minister for the third time, said, while President Bhandari mentioned God, country and the people. All four writ petitioners have demanded that Oli take another oath of office and secrecy as the one taken on Friday was illegal, *The Kathmandu Post* reported. — PTI

SMART | CITIES Fourth Industrial Revolution guided Japanese choice models

Mumbai, Medellin: Knowledge networks

Singapore, May 17: Mumbai and Medellin would be the two knowledge sharing regional networks for South East Asia and Latin America respectively to help realise and align smaller cities in the zones to execute their vision to become smart cities in the coming years, a top industrial source has said.

The two World Economic Forum (WEF) selected networks, which would be hosted by India and Colombia respectively to connect leading pioneer cities from the Global

Alliance with smaller cities in the region, will also help them have better cyber security as cyber attacks are becoming more frequent globally.

“Our ready for market approach with solutions for smart cities follows a recent announcement by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to launch two regional networks of cities in South Asia and Latin America with the aim to share knowledge on smart city development, while protecting public interests related to privacy, security and sustain-

ability,” the source, who did not wish to be named, said.

“With cyberattacks on municipalities rising and digital technologies becoming central to economic competitiveness and especially so in India, small cities need to invest in new technologies but have less capacity than their larger global counterparts to implement and ensure effective governance, said the source, who is close to one major technology group which is in talks with several parties to offer its products and

solutions tailored to specific need of each city. Bengaluru, Bhopal, Fardabad, Hyderabad, Indore, Kohima, Mangalore, Raipur, Shillong and Thane are on top Indian cities in the smart city list that would be seeking global best practices to be tech-driven municipalities for growth of local economies, according to the source.

He said global technology companies have positioned their solutions and products to help India realise and align its ambitions with the vision of smart cities in the coming

years. These networks selected last month as part of the WEF's G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance are designed to help small cities implement new technology policies and will be supported by partners of the WEF and the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) Global Network. Going forward, the Japanese cities are their choice models which were guided by the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Japan, he noted. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

18 MAY 2021

Use every tool to overcome hesitancy on tests, vaccines

The second wave of Covid-19 is wreaking havoc in rural areas as well as our big cities, unlike the first one which had mainly hit urban dwellers. Reports coming from rural India are quite depressing as everything that plagues Indian villages plays a role in frustrating the attempts by health workers and local government representatives in getting people tested for the deadly virus. The people who live there have very little access to authentic information on what is happening all around them; they trust the quack more than the qualified physician; they are comfortable with him and his magic potions and home remedies much more than with evidence-based medicine and its elaborate protocols; they have very little health infrastructure to depend on; they fear the ways of officialdom — once their names appear on governmental records, they are done, they fear. So, they assume that if they test positive, they will be forcibly moved to government facilities, from which they are not sure when or if they will ever return. What will happen to their jobs, and who will take care of the rest of their family — these are the big questions on their minds. Why take risk when the quack can more than cure them?

There is very little point in blaming the villagers; there are urbanites who continue to believe that hot water, when gulped, will kill the virus on its way to the intestine. A pinch of turmeric powder mixed with milk is another panacea and the virus' nemesis, WhatsApp messages will tell you, and many people still believe it. There are those who earnestly believe that they can build immunity overnight and resist the onslaught of the microorganism; there are immunity boosters available in the market too. Vaccination is a waste, some of them feel, we would rather contract the disease and let the body manufacture its own antibodies, they would argue.

This is an area where the government must, and only the government can, intervene and set the record right. This message must pass down to every citizen that untested patients make themselves vulnerable, and that they will spread the infection among their near and dear ones if they delay getting tested or in getting vaccinated. The government needs to make sure that no one loses his/her job or is harassed at their workplace for undergoing the test or even for contracting the infection. It must be driven home that home remedies are okay as long as people follow the physician's advice. They must be told upfront that we as a nation do not have the infrastructure that can take care of everyone who falls sick, and that they risk losing their lives if they don't follow the scientific ways of keeping the virus at bay. The government must put every tool at its command and in the collective armoury of our society to defeat the virus. There is an urgent need to launch an information blitzkrieg on the pandemic aiming at emboldening the people to go in for testing and vaccination at the earliest. Every societal asset, be it governmental, media, religious, cultural, tribal, social or otherwise, must be tasked with taking the message to every home and get people out for testing and vaccination. Better be late than never.

Stop targeting critical voices

Are we intent on proving right the wag who said that we are a democracy until we begin to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi? In the national capital a rash of ordinary-looking posters appeared asking the PM: "Why did you send vaccines abroad, denying our own people?" The Delhi police, which comes under the Union home ministry, swung into action and rounded up a clutch of poor souls who make their living from climbing on poles to stick posters on rectangular frames, carpenters, three-wheeler auto drivers and cycle-rickshaw pullers.

It is possible to be supportive of India's vaccine diplomacy, and yet note that the police action in this case is a distinct mark of intolerance by the government of those who dare to ask the PM a question which is increasingly coming to the fore.

In hindsight, it appears that if the Modi government was alert to science and followed expert advice, it would not have prematurely declared victory over the Covid-19 pandemic and wound up the temporary facilities set up to treat millions of patients hit by the virus. If expert recommendations were heeded, it would have been realised by policymakers that India not only lacked oxygen, hospital beds and critical medicines, but also vaccines since advance bookings from manufacturers against payments hadn't been made.

Ergo, the rollout of vaccine diplomacy was premature. Today it seems more and more to have been a propaganda ploy to bring out the feel-good factor at home while earning goodwill abroad. In short, it was a political move, pure and simple, which left India defenceless. Its consequences are strewn everywhere for all to see and condemn. No wonder, there is talk now of ramping up the infrastructure of crematoriums, not just medical facilities.

If vaccine diplomacy has led to painful results, then the question posed in the poster must be answered by those in authority. Locking up those behind the poster, or wag fingers at Opposition leaders asking questions, besmirch the country even more. It must stop.

The so-called "positivity" and "constructive" approach by the government and its apologists appears cynical. If questions aren't raised, and we meekly submit to what we get as the natural law, God help our democracy, which is founded on the basic principle of accountable governance.

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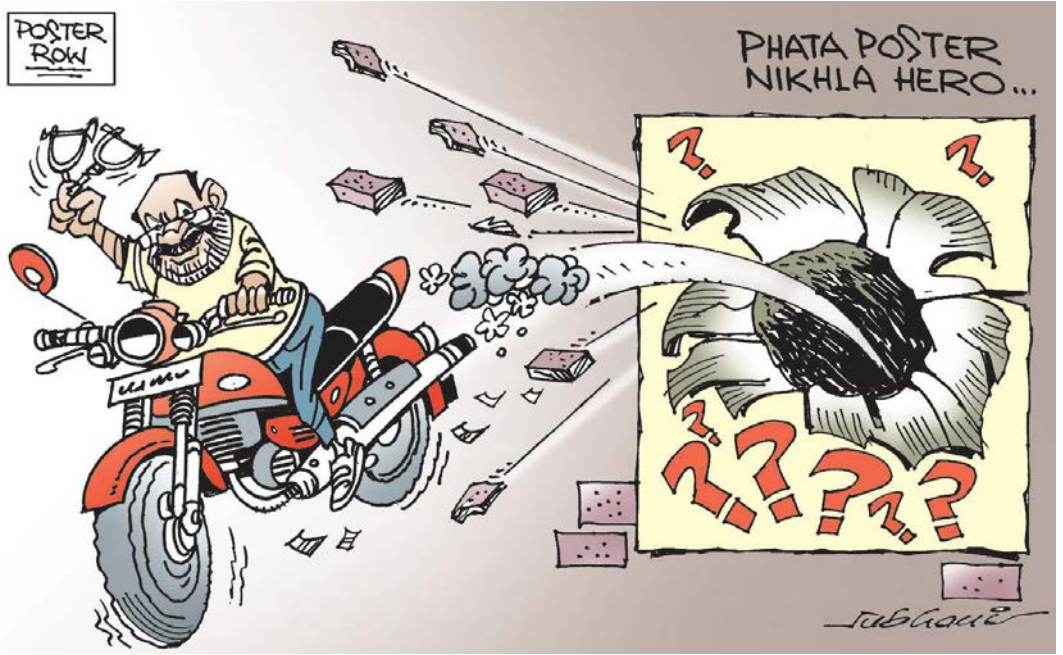
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Subhani



Positivity effect: Govt has to do things differently



Shashidhar Nanjundaiah

Confronted with an unprecedented international media focus and global criticism from several governments as well as global health experts, state governments, analysts, reputed medical journals, and the international and national media, the Central government and the ruling party's parent organisation, the RSS, have jointly begun a "positivity drive", in effect weaving a positive bias narrative both for itself and for the people at large. While one has the potential of a soothing impact on the audience, the other seeks to be politically self-serving. So have we indeed been communicating negativity in a crisis? Or have the Central government and the BJP been seeing it all wrong?

Earlier, in his monthly "Mann ki Baat" radio address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said a powerful positivity message needs to go out. Soon afterwards, the Covid Response Team chipped in with a five-day lecture series called "Positivity Unlimited", starting May 11. The stated intent was to instil confidence in a society struck by hopelessness and despair. Speakers included spiritual leaders, artistes, writers, philanthropists and RSS leaders.

Meanwhile, the BJP machinery was hard at work with characteristic gusto, producing and reproducing messages of how hard Mr Modi and the government machinery were working. On May 12, health minister Harsh Vardhan's address repeatedly included "santoshjanak baat hai, yeh khushi ki baat hai" (it is a matter of delight) and other positive connectors to the vaccination drives. The government's obsession with image management could fall on deaf ears as even its own ambassadors are finding it increasingly hard to put a positive spin.

Positivity sounds a good

thing. But has the government given positive developments to be articulated about? Given the overwhelming amount of heart-rending news, and news of the government's repeated attempts to thwart social media criticism, a positive perception is hard to justify.

Inconvenient truths

Rahul Gandhi has reacted to the positivity drive, calling it a "false assurance". The Congress has said positivity won't help people to breathe. Earlier, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh wrote to Prime Minister Modi, listing five specific points on which the government could work. Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Arvind Kejriwal, Uddhav Thackeray and other leaders regularly tweet or talk critically of the government's handling. Expert after expert in television debates has been critiquing the government's handling of the situation. The media, which has finally reached the villages, routinely interviews ordinary citizens from a cross-section, most of whom place the blame on the government for the dire situation. All this has systematically been ridiculed by various ministers at the Centre, but in fact responsible criticism in general is also accompanied by recommendations, roadmaps and suggestions. In response, BJP chief J.P. Nadda shot off a strong repartee, telling Mrs Sonia Gandhi that she has been misleading people with negative messages. In his response to the former PM, the health minister's letter ridiculed the Congress.

To their credit, Mr Modi and others in the government have often tackled criticism with facts and numbers. To continued complaints from state governments about the acute shortage of oxygen, the government has been claiming the nation does not have a shortage — the bottleneck

lies in logistics. More recently, Mr Modi pointed out that the supply of oxygen was now more than three times of what it was during the peak of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. In September 2020, the number of infections stood at less than one lakh a day. This time, that number is in excess of four lakhs. According to the ICMR, while 41.5 per cent patients required oxygen last year, that figure for second wave patients is 54.5 per cent. So Mr Modi's statement is a fair identification of where the problem lies, but does not provide any solution. The government is, after all, responsible for logistics management too.

Unacceptable interpretation

Positivity studies indicate that based on their belief system, people with a positivity bias will tend to hold positive views, report positively using those views, and filter in positive information. One way that organisations and governments seek to achieve popularity is through positivity effect, nudging people to see a situation positively when the desired results aren't achieved, and obtaining a positive feedback. Positivity bias can shroud reality and create false euphoria, which dangerous in a pandemic situation.

Rather than viewing criticism negatively, this criticism-averse government can also help transform public perceptions by responding more positively. For example, a recent newspaper editorial pointed out that in contrast to last year's total lockdown, which had devastating impacts on the economy, this year's lockdown in several states had struck a balance between the management of health and economic activity. This should be

relatively good news. But if the Centre reacts to it as a criticism of its decisions, it will be seen as protecting its narrow political image-mongering interests, not the larger national interest.

Similarly, it is unfair to expect the media to run only positive stories. This government already enjoys the backing of a largely pliant media: it is well-documented that a significant section of the Indian media over the past seven years has held a pro-government bias. Television channels are often eager to politicise issues. For example, on May 12, leaders of 12 Opposition parties wrote to the Prime Minister demanding immediate action, funds for oxygen and free vaccination. Some TV news channels were quick to focus on which Opposition parties had not signed that petition. When BJP MP Tejasvi Surya purportedly made a surprise visit to an agency running a hospital bed allotment scam in Bengaluru, it was initially well-received by the media — until a video surfaced which revealed he and his colleagues had turned it into a communally objectionable exercise. With all its failings, we can expect legitimate media platforms and fair-minded people to compulsively turn to a fairness-for-all approach.

Positivity studies on communications patterns show that people use more positive than negative language, both written and spoken. Given that, the government's expectation of what constitutes acceptable criticism is either unclear or unrealistic. Indeed, it is the government's interpretation of criticism that is negative. Well-meaning critiques should lend themselves to the positive inference that there is scope for improvement in implementing decisions, not as an indicator of an existential crisis. Above all, tackle the reality — and the perception and its articulation will take care of itself

The writer has led reputed institutes of media and communications in India and the United States, and is the founder of 'Being Responsible', which promotes media literacy. The views expressed here are personal.

LETTERS

REMDESIVIR SCARCITY

The antiviral drug Remdesivir has become a scarce commodity in view of the ferocity of the pandemic spread. Only those above 45 are given vaccine shots now and the roll-out for 18+ is yet to start. At this point in time there is a mad rush for Remdesivir. It was said that the Goodas Act will be framed against those hoarding the medicine. But things did not change. The drug continues to be sold in the black market for a premium. The state government decided to make available the drug through private hospitals. Gullible people are already being fleeced by the private medical facilities. We had to pay a higher price there for this injection too. The State government must cap the price for the sale of this drug and save the people from being charged more.

— **Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai**

NEED NORMALITY

No dramatic event in recent history has affected us as profoundly and pervasively as Covid-19. It has turned the entire world topsy-turvy, thrown daily life out of gear, wreaked havoc on everyone's plans and left serious scars on financial markets and the economy the world over. The pandemic has affected our psyche in three ways: It has influenced how we think, how we relate to others, and what we value. There are many questions like how long will this pandemic last, what about our work and income, and most importantly, still how many more are going to die. The combination of incertitude and danger is a recipe for severe angst. The invisible enemy has put our freedom on hold and our conventional routines tossed aside in favour of social distancing. However, when normality eventually returns, people will naturally want to spend as much time as possible in physical contact with family, friends and loved ones.

— **R. Sivakumar, Chennai**

REPEAL SEC.124 A

Apologies report, FIR against 17 for poster against PM. PM should be respected but when a few lose their kith and kin because they have been deprived of the vaccine, they become agitated and may criticise out of agony and sorrow. Even so, they should not have pasted wall posters demeaning PM's stature. They were fortunately not booked under 124 A as a YSRCP MP was hauled up in AP for lambasting his own CM. In fact the Cr. PC Sec.124 A became a bane of the public who criticise the powers that be and turned a boon for politicians. Mahatma Gandhi had said, 'Sec. 124 A is the relic of colonialism and should be repealed' and Pandit Nehru - 'it is obnoxious, the earlier it is removed the better for our democratic polity'. Yet successive governments have retained it and use it against their critics branding them as anti-nationals or conspirators who are destabilising their elected governments. PM Modi, who is large-hearted with a 56-inch chest, should allow criticism for the sake of betterment and repeal the noxious Sec.124 A.

— **Seshagiri Rao, Chennai**

Aakar Patel



Govt needed to have 'grip' over Covid: That is what PM lacks

He is a famous name in the history of warfare, but Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery does not have many battlefield victories to his name. In fact, his most famous engagement, called Operation Market Garden (after which the Hollywood movie *A Bridge Too Far* was made), was a disaster. But historians agree that Montgomery had something that all generals should have, and this is "grip". This is the faculty of being aware of the situation, being knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in the future and being conscious of what events to anticipate.

These are not qualities which we associate with our Prime Minister. His interest is not in the details but in the broad scheme. In a famous interview just before the 2014 general election he said to the journalist Madhu Kishwar: "Even today if my officers show me some paper, I say: 'Tell me what's in it in two minutes. For me, two minutes is sufficient for a 10-page document. This skill is something I have developed.'"

But while he has no interest in the details, his preference is not to stand aloof from on-ground operations but to insert himself through the bold and imaginative stroke. For instance, the BBC reported at the end of March this year that before the lockdown last year not a single ministry was consulted about the consequences.

The BBC filed 240 right to information applications with various Indian government departments — health, finance, disaster management — to find out if and how much they were consulted ahead of the lockdown.

The responses revealed that no experts or government departments were consulted. The government refused to give the BBC a statement explaining why the concerned departments were not consulted ahead of time. A second example of the Prime Minister's style of functioning is the famous demonetisation exercise of November 2016. Here also only a handful of people knew that this was about to happen. As a parliamentary democracy, India follows the principle of collective responsibility. But even the Union Cabinet was not told till the day

of the demonetisation — Tuesday, November 8, that India's ₹1,000 and ₹500 notes — 86 per cent of all currency by value — would be wiped out that evening. The government was not only unprepared for Prime Minister Modi's move; it was deliberately kept hidden from the government.

My point is not to say that this style is good or bad or whether it has advantages or disadvantages. The evidence is clear, and there is no point in discussing that here. The point is to examine whether it works in situations such as the one we find ourselves in. The problem of the Covid-19 pandemic cannot be approached through the single brilliant stroke. It needs the State to be aware of the situation, be knowledgeable about what resources are at hand and what may be required in future and being conscious of what events to anticipate. In a centralised system, where decision making is often the purview of a few people and sometimes that only of one man, this may be harder to do as we are now discovering.

The official position of our government in response to a shortage of vac-

cines and a shortage of oxygen and of ventilators is that nobody could have anticipated this. But the fact is that the rest of the world anticipated it. What we are receiving today as aid is not new material manufactured yesterday around the world. It is the surplus that was produced by many nations which had anticipated the crisis we are going through today. They dealt with it because of their preparedness and that is the reason this material became surplus. No nation keeps useless stocks of expensive things lying around in case India will urgently need them. The reason we don't have enough vaccines is that we did not order them at the right time because we didn't think we needed them. As the Prime Minister said to the World Economic Forum in late January: "India is among those countries which have succeeded in saving the lives of the maximum number of its citizens and the number of people infected with corona is rapidly decreasing." He added that "it would not be advisable to judge India's success with that of another country. In a country which is home to 18 per cent

of the world population, that country has saved humanity from a big disaster by containing corona effectively".

We had decided based on the evidence we saw that India was unique and had overcome Covid-19. Other nations thought of the issue as a longer problem, and not limited to the first wave. They ordered the vaccines on time and received them. They let their scientists determine whether the battle against the pandemic was won instead of a divinely inspired leadership. Once the science revealed that only precaution, healthcare preparations and vaccination could stop the pandemic, that is where their execution capacities were deployed.

The question is why we did not anticipate a second wave or a wave of such destructive power. The answer is that if the leadership must take full control over situations, then it must have grip rather than genius strokes. There may theoretically be times when the latter style is advantageous, but this era is not among them.

The writer is a journalist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,580.73	1.74
Nifty 50	14,923.20	1.67
S&P 500*	4,153.43	-0.49
Dollar (₹)	73.21	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.26	-0.20
Euro (₹)	89.00	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,547.348	0.73
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.45	1.08
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.645	0.01

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bharti Airtel posts ₹760 cr profit for Q4

Bharti Airtel reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 759 crore for Q4FY21 and an annual turnover of more than Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time. Airtel had posted a loss of Rs 5,237 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue rose 11.9 per cent to Rs 25,747 crore from Rs 23,019 crore. India revenue increased by 10 per cent in Q4 to Rs 18,337.8 crore from Rs 16,734.3 crore a year ago.

NEFT upgrade to disrupt services on weekend



The National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will be unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon. A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, the RBI said. "Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23," it said.

Federal Bank standalone net jumps 59%

Private sector lender Federal Bank reported nearly 59 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 478 crore for the March quarter against Rs 301 crore a year ago. Total income on a standalone basis was down at Rs 3,832 crore against Rs 4,108 crore. On a consolidated basis, the net profit for the quarter jumped by 65 per cent to Rs 500 crore. Income fell by 5.4 per cent to Rs 3,996 crore from Rs 4,223 crore.

Poonawalla exits Panacea, Serum picks up his stake

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla offloaded his entire 5.15 per cent stake in Panacea Biotech for Rs 118 crore through an open market transaction. The shares were picked by Serum Institute of India (SII). As per BSE block deal data, Poonawalla sold 31,57,034 scrips he held in the firm at a price of Rs 373.85 per share, taking the total deal value to Rs 118.02 crore. The shares were picked by SII at the same price.



■ FPIs net sellers by ₹2,256 crore Market cheers drop in daily Covid cases

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 17

A sharp drop in daily Covid infections to below 3 lakh cases triggered broad-based rally in the market, with investors expecting a return to normalcy sooner than expected before.

The Sensex gained 848 points, or 1.74 per cent, and closed at 49,580 after a bullish start on the first day of a new week. BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices also gained over 1.6 per cent each.

The market capitalisation of all stocks traded on the BSE touched a new all time high of Rs 213.64 lakh crore as investors' wealth soared by over Rs 3 lakh crore.

The Nifty-50 index too gained 245 points to close at 14,923.15.

The market seems poised to regain earlier highs with NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27 per cent from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021, as it recorded the lowest close of last 87 trading sessions since January 1, said analysts.

"The Nifty rebounded sharply as domestic coronavirus cases fell below the 3-lakh mark for the first time since mid-April. Extended lockdowns by majority states has helped in curbing the cases. Sentiments turned buoyant that soon restrictions/curbs would be eased once cases decline



GAINING STRENGTH

- ▶ Market capitalisation of the BSE touched a new high of ₹213.64 lakh crore as investors' wealth soared by over ₹3 lakh crore
- ▶ NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27% from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021

further," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,948.48 crore while foreign portfolio investors preferred to book profit and were net sellers of equities worth Rs 2,255.84 crore, as per the provisional data.

"Global cues were weak on the back of poor Chinese retail sales data and resurgence of Covid cases in some Asian countries. Gold scaled to three-month high as global inflation pressure rises," said Khemka.

Bank stocks led the rally on the bourses as the BSE Bankex closed 3.98 per cent up followed by Auto (1.90 per cent), Metal (1.93

per cent), Power (1.86 per cent) and Realty (1.59 per cent).

Barring telecom, all other sectoral indices closed in the green. The market expects the indices to regain earlier highs with financials leading the gainers list.

"It looks like we are going to head higher from here," because the authenticity of any move is measured by the quality of participation in it and today the banking space led from the front by giving a humongous intraday rally. When this pocket contributes heavily, the up-move can be considered a genuine one," said Sameet Chavan, chief analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking.

HOTELS' BODY JOINS OYO INSOLVENCY CASE

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has allowed hotels' body to intervene in the insolvency case against Oyo on behalf of its member hotels.

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) sought intervention on behalf of its affected members over an outstanding of about Rs 72 crore. Around Rs 200 crore of claims have been registered against Oyo, the FHRAI said.

The NCLAT has permitted it to make its oral submissions on June 2.

"The FHRAI has been receiving several complaints from member hotels with respect to the non-payment of debts by Oyo for years. The FHRAI has presently filed the application before the NCLAT on behalf of aggrieved hotels and restaurants across India who have filed their claims with the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP)," FHRAI vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said.

According to FHRAI, Oyo breached the terms of various kinds of agreement.

Vaccine costs to strain already creaking state budgets

ANIRBAN NAG &
VRISHTI BENIWAL
MAY 17

The world's worst coronavirus outbreak is set to stretch the already strained budgets of Indian states, making it more costly to borrow just when they need the money to cushion their economies.

The country's 28 states will have to foot about \$5 billion or more in vaccination costs after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal government suddenly made them responsible for inoculating most adults from May 1. Since they hadn't budgeted for the jobs or steps to tackle a second wave, their options to meet the additional expense are limited to cutting capital expenditures, selling public assets and boosting borrowing.

A simple calculation shows it will cost states Rs 35,400 crore (\$4.8 billion) to give two vaccine shots to about 590 million Indians in the 18-to-44 age group, at a combined cost of Rs 600 per person. If vaccinations are extended to those under 18 years old, the expense could rise to 0.25 per cent of gross domestic product, or about \$7 billion, according to Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd economist Madhavi Arora.

The additional burden couldn't have come at a worse time for states, which are facing higher yields on market borrowings this year amid the threat of widening fiscal deficits.

Failure by India's states

We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales"

— Palanivel Thiagarajan,
Finance minister, Tamil Nadu

to raise and spend enough money risks holding back the recovery from a rare recession last year. That's because states account for 60 per cent of total government spending on asset creation and infrastructure building, which drive jobs creation and consumption.

In addition, states are having difficulty attracting foreign investors despite paying yields that are typically higher than those on federal government debt. Global funds have used only 1.2 per cent of the Rs 67,600 crore investment limit available to them in notes issued by states as of May 10, down from 4.8 per cent two years ago, data from the Clearing Corp. of India Ltd show.

"Finances are bound to be affected," said T. S. Singh Deo, health and commercial tax minister of Chhattisgarh. "The axe will certainly fall on capital expenditure."

Modi's government has encouraged states to sell assets to fund spending plans in the current year. That's one way to bring down the debt burden,

said Palanivel Thiagarajan, an ex-Wall Street banker and newly appointed finance minister of Tamil Nadu.

"Everything is on the table," he said. "We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales."

The pandemic has changed states' budgets significantly. The average gross deficit for states that presented their budgets before Covid was 2.4 per cent of output, while after the lockdown it stood at 4.6 per cent in the year ended in March, the Reserve Bank said.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, saw the gap widen to 4.17 per cent of the state's GDP in the year ended March 31, compared to the prescribed limit of 3 per cent. Bihar, among the nation's most impoverished states, estimated the gap at almost 7 per cent.

They may miss their goal of narrowing the

budget gap this year. Although there's no national lockdown this time to stem the deadly second wave of the pandemic, several states have imposed local movement curbs that are hurting economic activity and revenue collection. That's nudging many economists to cut their double-digit growth forecasts for the current fiscal year.

There's "renewed uncertainty regarding the near-term economic outlook," said economists led by Aditi Nayar at Ica Ica Ltd. That "may modestly constrain the indirect tax collections of those particular states."

To bridge the gap, Rajasthan is planning to sell or lease out unused properties. Telangana is planning to sell land parcels to raise about Rs 14,500 crore, according to local media reports.

Still, there's no guarantee these deals will come through. Even the federal government has failed to achieve divestment targets for the past two years after failing to sell flag carrier Air India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp, a state-owned oil refiner. Those sales have been carried forward to the current year.

Punjab plans to cut capital spending to boost health care expenditure, its finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal said. "States have to fend for themselves," he said. "Even though we increased our health budget by 18 per cent this year, I see my health budget going up further."

—Bloomberg

MS BOARD HAD GATES INVESTIGATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

LINUS CHUA
MAY 17

Microsoft Corp's directors started a probe into Bill Gates' alleged involvement with a female employee that was deemed inappropriate and decided that the co-founder had to step down from the board last year, Dow Jones reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The software giant had received a concern last year that that Gates had



Bill Gates

tried to have an "intimate" relationship with an employee in the second half of 2019, Dow Jones cited a Microsoft spokesman as saying. The

board reviewed the matter with the help of an outside law firm, the spokesman added.

Board members handling the matter hired the law firm to conduct the investigation after receiving a letter from a Microsoft engineer who said she had a sexual relationship with Gates for years, Dow Jones said. Gates left before the probe was completed. A spokesperson for Gates couldn't be reached for comment. —Bloomberg

Siddharth Shriram passes away

New Delhi, May 17:

Industrialist and former chairman of Usha International Siddharth Shriram passed away on Monday due to Covid-19, according to people close to the family.

Shriram (76), who served as advisor to the board of Usha International after stepping down from executive role, was admitted to Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon for treatment.

A multi-faceted industrialist, Shriram served as the chairman of Mawana Sugars Ltd besides being the chairman of Usha



Siddharth Shriram

International, known for its sewing machines and home appliances.

He had led the Usha International Group in forming two joint ventures with Japan's Honda for passenger cars and power products.

However, in August 2012,

Usha International exited from its then joint venture Honda Siels Cars India, by selling its entire 3.16 per cent stake to the Japanese partner for Rs 180 crore.

Later, last year in April, Honda Motor Co and Usha International terminated their over two-decade old joint venture—Honda SIEL Power Products.

Born on January 18, 1945, Shriram was schooled in Welhem School and the Doon School at Dehradun, graduated in English Literature from St. Stephens College, Delhi University. —PTI

Sebi proposes trading in electronic gold receipts

New Delhi, May 17:

Markets regulator Sebi on Monday proposed an elaborate framework for setting up a gold exchange wherein the yellow metal will be traded in the form of electronic gold receipts and will help in having a transparent domestic spot price discovery mechanism.

Also, the proposed denominations—reflecting underlying physical gold—of Electronic Gold Receipts (EGRs) are 1 kilogram, 100 grams, 50 grams and subject to conditions, those can also be even for 5 and 10 grams.

Apart from issuing a consultation paper on the gold exchange, the watchdog has come out with draft norms for vault managers and they will be registered as a Sebi intermediaries.

The proposed gold exchange, encompassing the entire ecosystem of trading and physical delivery of gold, is extremely necessary to create a vibrant gold ecosystem in India, the Sebi said.

Presenting the Budget for 2021-22, finance minis-

ter Nirmala Sitharaman had said that Sebi will be the regulator for gold exchange and the Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority will be strengthened to set up the commodity market ecosystem. "Establishment of regular gold exchange is a landmark measure and to give due prominence to the historic step, it is believed that the terminology for the instrument should be unique and one that carries a global resonance," the Sebi noted.

The regulator has suggested that the instrument to be traded on the bourse can be termed as an 'Electronic Gold Receipt' (EGR) and that the entire transaction mechanism can be divided into three tranches.

In the first tranche, physical gold would be converted to EGR. The EGR will be listed for trading in the second tranche. In the third tranche, the EGR will be again be converted into physical gold and the owner will surrender the EGR to obtain the physical gold. —PTI

TVS SRICHAKRA ENTERS EUROPE

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MAY 17

Two and three-wheeler and off-highway tyre maker TVS Srichakra has entered the European market.

Its first product launch is that of Eurogrip Bee Connect scooter tyres, to be available in 40 different sizes in the coming months. This is the first line of tyres launched since TVS Srichakra set up its Product Design and Development Centre in Milan, Italy.



DOUBLE LIFE

Companies that made pledges have fewer Black employees

#BlackLivesMatter: An optics play for US firms?

ELLEN HUET & KAREN TOULON
MAY 17

After the murder of George Floyd last year prompted widespread protests, dozens of companies released public pledges to promote racial justice. However, their support of the Black community wasn't reflected in the demographics of their workforces.

A new study of diversity in the technology industry found companies that made statements of solidarity had 20 per cent fewer Black employees on average than those that didn't. The finding highlights a gap between what companies say about social issues and what they do in their own workplaces, said Stephanie Lampkin, the founder and chief executive officer of Blendoor, which conducted the study set to



be published on Monday.

Blendoor, a startup that helps companies recruit a diverse group of candidates, crunched publicly available data on 240 of the most prominent tech companies. Despite the shortcomings of many companies that put out

Black Lives Matter statements, the pledges could have a serious impact. Their financial commitments surpassed \$4.6 billion, more than double the amount of pledges made in the previous six years combined, according to the report.

Reviewing information released by companies over the past six years, Blendoor analysed trends in workplace diversity, inclusion policies and human-resources programmes, such as parental leave, flexible work arrangements and recruitment of underrepresented groups. It found, for example, that Pinterest Inc had the most robust policies and programmes for recruiting women; Mozilla Corp had the best for recruiting underrepresented minorities. McKesson Corp scored highest in Blendoor's rating of support-

ing women in leadership, while HP Inc tops the list for underrepresented minorities in leadership.

The analysis surfaced broader findings, as well, across hundreds of companies. Asian Americans have the widest gap between their representation in entry-level tech jobs and in leadership, and Asian-American women are the least likely to advance to executive roles. Women executives more commonly have C-level jobs that focus on areas such as HR, marketing or diversity, and those roles are among the least likely to be appointed to corporate boards. The analysis also found that 36 per cent of board directors are women or people of colour but that most of those are White women or Asian men.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Injured Jofra ruled out of Kiwi Tests

London: England pacer Jofra Archer, who recently returned to action after missing the now-suspended IPL, has been ruled out of the Test series against New Zealand as his elbow injury has resurfaced. The 26-year-old played a game for his County side Sussex against Kent but had to be pulled out of the game after bowling just five overs. Before this match, the fast bowler had also featured in a game against Surrey last week in a second XI game, bowling 29.2 overs. "England and Sussex seamer Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the est Series against New Zealand starting next month," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement read. — PTI

Returned Oz stars picked for WI tour

Sydney: Pat Cummins and Steve Smith were among the stars of Australia's Indian Premier League contingent who arrived back in Sydney on Monday, almost two weeks after the lucrative tournament was suspended amid surging Covid-19 infections in the host country. Welcoming their star players, Australia announced a preliminary 23-man squad for the upcoming white-ball tour of the West Indies in July. — AFP

Squad: Aaron Finch (c), Ashton Agar, Jason Behrendorff, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Moises Henriques, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Riley Meredith, Josh Philippe, Jhye Richardson, Kane Richardson, Tanveer Sangha, D'Arcy Short, Steven Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Mitchell Swepson, Andrew Tye, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa.

Honda's Espargaro comes home 8th

Le Mans (France): Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro encountered all conditions, while Marc Marquez returned to leading a Grand Prix but was ultimately left disappointed at the French MotoGP on Sunday. Australian rider Jack Miller of Ducati made a great start to overtake pole-sitter Fabio Quartararo and then held him off to win the race. Honda's Marquez who started sixth didn't finish the race, while Espargaro held on to his starting position of eighth. It was a dramatic first lap for Espargaro who threw himself into the heat of battle alongside Marquez and Takaaki Nakagami after a strong launch. Contact with Franco Morbidelli forced the Honda rider to drop back and out of the top five. Alex Marquez took top Honda honours for the LCR Honda Team in sixth.

Das is women's batting coach

New Delhi: Gutsy former India opener Shiv Sunder Das has been appointed the batting coach of the Indian women's team for the tour of England and he is looking forward to use his coaching stint at NCA to guide the youngsters during the trip. Das, who has played 23 Tests between 2000-02, has a decent average of near 35 with more than 1300 runs, including two hundreds and nine half centuries. "It will be good experience and I am looking forward to it," the former Odisha skipper said. — PTI

Curry captures 2nd scoring title

Los Angeles: Stephen Curry scored 46 points and claimed his second NBA scoring title as the Golden State Warriors won their sixth straight by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 113-101 on Sunday in San Francisco. Curry finished the regular season with a 32.0-point scoring average, claiming the league title over Washington's Bradley Beal who scored 25 points earlier Sunday to finish at 31.3 points per game. "I had a lot of good looks all night," Curry said. "We were in sync. The guys set great screens for me." The 33-year-old Curry won his first scoring title in 2016. He and Michael Jordan are the only NBA players to win a scoring title after turning 33. — AFP

TWIST & TURN

ICC says fixing allegations 'implausible', concludes investigation

Dubai, May 17: The ICC on Monday dismissed claims made by news channel *Al Jazeera* that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore "implausible as a fix". *Al Jazeera* in a documentary — 'Cricket's Match Fixers' — released in 2018 had claimed that India's game against England in Chennai in 2016 and the one against Australia in 2017 in Ranchi were fixed. The International Cricket Council (ICC) also cleared five people — filmed by the channel — of any wrongdoing saying even as they behaved in a questionable manner but no credible evidence was available to charge them.

During the programme, an alleged bookie Aneel Munnawar was seen making claims about his dubious connections and history of fixing matches including two Tests involving Virat Kohli's Indian team.

The ICC had launched an investigation into the claims. "The programme alleged that two matches were fixed: India v England in Chennai in 2016 and India v Australia in Ranchi in 2017. To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims," the ICC said in a release after it concluded its investigation.

"All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore implausible as a fix," the release added.

"No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code," the ICC said. — PTI



A screengrab of *Al Jazeera* documentary in which 'bookie' Aneel Munnawar claimed to have fixed matches.

'Sandpapergate' to be reopened

Melbourne, May 17: As Cricket Australia (CA) on Monday made it clear that it was open to a re-investigation into the 'Sandpapergate', former captain Michael Clarke said he won't be surprised if it comes to light that more players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in 2018. He also accused CA of sweeping the issue under the carpet.

"If you are playing sport at the highest level you know your tools that good it's not funny. Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it? Please," Clarke told *Sky Sports*



Michael Clarke

radio on Monday.

"I love how the articles in the paper are. It is such a big surprise that Cameron Bancroft has made a ... Actually, if you read his quotes, it is not what he did say as what he didn't say in regards to other people knowing

about 'sandpapergate'," he said.

Following Bancroft's interview, Cricket Australia's integrity team has already approached the pacer for more information.

"What's the surprise? That more than three people knew? I don't think anybody who has played the game of cricket, or knows a little bit about cricket, would know that in a team like that, at the highest level, when the ball is such an important part of the game," Clarke said.

"That's why there's going to be finger-pointing until someone writes

AUSSIE PLAYER CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE

Melbourne, May 17: Australian domestic cricketer Aaron Summers, who has also played in the Big Bash League, was produced in a court in Darwin on Monday after being charged with child abuse. The 25-year-old fast bowler was charged with two counts of possessing child abuse material and one count of grooming a minor.

Arrested last week, Summers appeared in the Darwin Local Court, with police alleging that his mobile phone contained child abuse videos.

Summers represented Deccan Gladiators in the Abu Dhabi T10 league and has also played domestic cricket in Pakistan, the first Australian player to do so. He turned out for Southern Punjab in the Pakistan Cup.

— AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates with the Italian Open trophy after defeating Novak Djokovic in the final. — AFP

Nadal the king of Rome, again

Rome, May 17: Rafael Nadal defeated world number one Novak Djokovic to win a 10th Italian Open title on Sunday.

Second seed Nadal won through 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in 2hr 49min against the defending champion to match Djokovic's record of 36 Masters 1000 titles and lay down a key marker two weeks out from the defence of his Roland Garros crown.

"I really wanted this title. This had been one of the first important titles I won in my career. I'd won 10 in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Roland Garros and really wanted this one too," said 34-year-old Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal were facing each other for the 57th time, having last played in the 2020 French Open final which the Spaniard won easily in straight sets.

The pair have won 15 of the last 17 Rome titles between them, while Nadal leads their head-to-head in finals in the Italian capital 4-2.

Despite losing his opening service game Nadal broke back in the third game hitting twice as many winners as the Serb with 21 in the set.

A dip in form in the second set allowed Djokovic, 33, to break twice and get back into the game.

But Nadal got back on track in the third with Djokovic having played nearly five hours on court on Saturday between his rain-delayed quarter-finals and semi-final matches.

The Spaniard saved two break points on his serve in the fifth game and broke for love for 4-2.

Djokovic saved a first match point in the eighth game but Nadal made no mistake on his second chance in the following to seal his 88th career title after winning in Barcelona earlier this month.

SERENA SAILS PAST TEENAGER

Serena Williams brushed aside the challenge of local teenager Lisa Pigato in the opening round of the WTA tournament in Parma on Monday.

Williams, ranked eighth in the world, beat the 572nd-ranked Pigato, making her WTA debut, 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between the two players.

The 39-year-old American had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her premature exit from the Italian Open, where she crashed out in the second round in what was her first match in nearly three months since her semi-final defeat in the Australian Open.

— AFP

DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG BOOK BERTHS

Berlin, May 17: Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg clinched Champions League qualification, while Hamburger SV's hopes of rejoining the Bundesliga were put on hold for another year.

Dortmund won 3-1 at Mainz and Wolfsburg drew 2-2 at Leipzig to ensure both sides will finish among the top four to qualify for Europe's top club competition. Leipzig, who secured second place behind league champion Bayern Munich, were already assured of playing in the Champions League next season.

Leipzig looked tired in their first game after losing the German Cup final to Dortmund on Thursday, but fought back with goals from Justin Kluijvert and a penalty from Sabitzer. — AP

OVER 80 PER CENT IN JAPAN OPPOSE OLYMPICS THIS YEAR

Tokyo, May 17: More than 80 per cent of Japanese polled oppose hosting the virus-postponed Olympics this year, a new survey showed on Monday, underlining public antipathy less than 10 weeks before the Tokyo Games.

The latest downbeat poll comes after Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency Friday as the nation battles a fourth wave of infections.

The surge in cases has put pressure on the country's healthcare system, with medical professionals repeatedly warning about shortages and burnout.

The weekend poll by the *Asahi Shimbun* daily found 43 per cent of respondents want the 2020 Games cancelled, with 40 per cent wanting a further postponement. Those figures are up from the 35 per cent who backed cancellation in a survey by the paper a month ago and the 34 per cent who wanted a further delay.

"I am one of those in the 80 per cent. I think the Olympics should be postponed. Is it that difficult to postpone it?" passer-by Sumiko Usui, 74, said.

— AFP

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Azhar bats for ousted Raman

New Delhi, May 17: Former India captain Mohammad Azharuddin on Sunday threw his weight behind WV Raman, saying there are very few sharper brains around in cricket than the recently-removed women's national team coach.

In a surprising move last week, former spinner Ramesh Powar replaced Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach.

While the move surprised many, Azharuddin too fully backed his former India teammate Raman, who has represented the country under the stylish Hyderabad captaincy.

"WV Raman's knowledge of the game and coaching skills can be very useful for many. There are very few sharper brains than him and he has many years of experience. Hyderabad cricket association will do its best to engage him and draw immense benefit," Azharuddin tweeted.

Raman's unceremonious

WV Raman's knowledge of the game and coaching skills can be very useful for many. There are very few sharper brains than him and he has many years of experience.

— MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN
HCA president

ouster opened a can of worms with both the Madan Lal-headed Cricket Advisory Committee and Neetu David-led selection panel coming under the scanner of BCCI bigwigs.

Following his ouster, Raman alleged that a "smear campaign" against him has gained unwarranted traction and urged the BCCI president Sourav Ganguly to intervene.

Raman wrote it will be "extremely disconcerting" if his candidature was rejected due to reasons other than "my incompetency as a coach".

— PTI



Luis Suarez celebrates after scoring a goal against Osasuna on Sunday.

— AFP

ATLETICO ON TRACK Suarez's late strike helps Madrid team edge closer to title

Madrid, May 17: Diego Simeone hailed Luis Suarez as "extraordinary" on Sunday after the Uruguayan scored the goal that could win Atletico Madrid La Liga, his late winner snatching a dramatic 2-1 win over Osasuna.

Atletico trailed Osasuna with nine minutes to go at the Wanda Metropolitano and faced a defeat that would not just have postponed their bid to be champions but allowed Real Madrid, who were beating Athletic Bilbao, to go top with one game left.

Instead, Atletico scored in the 82nd and 88th minutes to pull off a stunning turnaround. Renan Lodi smashed in an equaliser before Suarez proved the hero, firing in from eight yards to spark mass celebrations.

"He's extraordinary," said Diego Simeone. "He came here wanting to prove people wrong,

Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

wanting to show that he was a forward still at the top of his game. Who better than him to decide a match that seemed to be getting away from us?"

Atletico's players and substitutes piled onto Suarez in the corner and at full-time, some of their players dropped to their knees, not with ecstasy, but relief, the title now just one win away.

"These are moments of happiness," said Suarez. "It was one of the best first halves of the season. We missed a lot of chances, me in particular, but to win the league you have to suffer and today we stepped up."

To be crowned champions with a game to spare, Atletico needed Real Madrid to slip up at San

Mames but Nacho Fernandez put Real ahead in the second half and Atletico's priority quickly became preservation.

Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

MESSI'S FUTURE WITH BARCA DOUBTFUL

With Barcelona's season effectively over, Lionel Messi now has a big decision to make.

Should he finish out his career at the club that helped him become an all-time soccer great?

Or have the team's struggles to keep winning trophies convinced him that he can find more success in Paris or

Manchester?

Barcelona were left without any chance of winning the Spanish league on Sunday, bowing out the title race in demoralizing fashion after letting Celta Vigo overhaul a goal by Messi and rally for a 2-1 victory. Barcelona have one game left on the calendar, but with nothing to play for except third place in the league, the club's attention is now fully on the future of their inscrutable star.

Last summer, Messi had said he wanted to leave Barcelona after a campaign that finished without a title and a humiliating 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

When that exit was denied by the club, Messi said that he would focus on this season and put off any decision until this summer when his contract expires on June 30. — Agencies