

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | WEDNESDAY 19 | MAY 2021

## WEATHER



**Max:** 36°C  
**Min:** 28°C  
**Rainfall:** 3%

## ASTROGUIDE

**Pilava:** Vaikasi 5  
**Tithi:** Sapthami  
**Star:** Ayilyam  
**Rahukalam:**  
12 noon to 1.30 pm  
**Yamagandam:**  
7.30 am to 9 am  
**PRAYERS**  
**Fajar:** 4.28 am  
**Luhar:** 12.10 pm  
**Asar:** 3.23 pm  
**Maghrib:** 6.27 pm  
**Isha:** 7.43 pm

**SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM**  
**SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.43 AM**  
**MOONRISE TODAY 11.47 AM**  
**MOONSET TOMORROW 1.30 AM**

## CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+2,57,928)	(+4,387)
2,54,86,028	2,83,138

covid19india.org

### STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+33,059) 364  
**TN:** 16,64,350 18,369

### WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,46,69,749

### DEATHS

34,12,157

COUNTRIES  
AREAS WITH  
CASES 219

worldometers.info

## SC judge recuses from hearing ex-top cop petition

**New Delhi:** Supreme Court Judge Justice B.R. Gaval on Tuesday recused himself from hearing former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh's petition seeking transfer of all the departmental inquiries initiated against him by the Maharashtra government either to another state or to an independent agency like the CBI as he says that has no confidence in the probe by the state government.

## Shailaja's omission sparks debate in Kerala

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Days after leading the ruling LDF to a stupendous electoral victory, CPI (M) veteran Pinarayi Vijayan was on Tuesday elected its Parliamentary Party Leader for a second term as Chief Minister but the omission of 'rockstar' health minister KK Shailaja from the new cabinet sparked a debate.

## COUNTER POINT



**The positive sign is, no complaints from the people about beds, vaccine, oxygen...**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
with agency inputs  
MUMBAI, MAY 18

The Search and Rescue (SAR) operations to locate and bring to safety the 390 missing persons off Mumbai coast in the Arabian Sea was on till late night on Tuesday. Till Tuesday evening the Indian Navy and Coast Guard had rescued 317 people on board two barges that went adrift. At least seven people were killed in Gujarat as Cyclone Tauktae battered parts of the state.

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Naval Ships Beas, Betwa and Teg had joined INS Kochi and Kolkata in the search and rescue operations for Barge P-305, which sank 35 nautical miles from Mumbai (in the Mumbai Offshore Development Area). SAR has also been augmented with P8I and



Fishermen remove debris after a construction collapsed due to cyclone 'Tauktae' at a harbour near Una Town, Gir Somnath on Tuesday.

— PTI

naval helicopters, who continue to undertake aerial search of the area. Since the commencement of the SAR on Monday, 180 survivors have been rescued.



## STATE | 2

**HBL may get a fillip in vaccine production**



## WORLD | 5

**EU hits 200-million vaccine jab milestone**

## SPORT | 8

**Federer crashes out of Geneva Open**



# India reports record day of 4,329 virus deaths

■ **Number of new cases falls to around 2.60 lakh in a day**

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

There appears to be some light at the end of the dark tunnel of the Covid-19 second wave, as for the second consecutive day India recorded less than 3 lakh daily new cases while daily recoveries crossed more than 4.22 lakh for the first time. A decline of 1.63 lakh in the active caseload in the last 24 hours was registered, and 2,63,533 new cases. However, the death figures continue to be very high. A total of 4,329 fresh fatalities were recorded in 24 hours on Tuesday.

Several states that were earlier reporting very high cases are now showing a decline in daily trends while some others continue to show an upward trajectory. However, a Union health ministry official said only two per cent of India's total population has been affected by the disease so far and 98 per cent are still susceptible.

"Despite the high number of cases reported so far, we have been able to contain the spread to

## PM MODI CALLS FOR GREATER AWARENESS OF MUCORMYCOSIS

**New Delhi, May 18:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday interacted with leading doctors and deliberated on the recent challenge of Mucormycosis. He urged doctors to make extra effort in spreading awareness about it and underlined the need to strengthen the reach of telemedicine in tehsils and districts of the country by training students and interns.

"You understand the challenges of your district much better. So when your district wins, the country wins. When your

district beats Corona, the country defeats Corona," he said and commended officials who were working without taking any leave in spite of contracting Covid-19. He added that they are an inspiration to many and he understands the sacrifices made by them.

Mr Modi also said that work is being done rapidly to install oxygen plants in hospitals in every district of the country through the PMCCares Fund and these plants have already started functioning in many hospitals.

said. Nitiaayog member (health) Dr V.K. Paul said efforts at containment and testing are resulting in stabilization but still a few states continue to be "cause of concern". "There is a mixed picture but overall there is stabilisation and what we know

from scientific analysis is that the reproduction number is below 1 now, which means the pandemic is shrinking. We are hoping and keeping the case fatality rate reasonably under control. We have to be very mindful that when we are achieving a declining positivity rate it is a result of what we are doing and that doing cannot be slackened. We cannot again let this go out of hand," Dr Paul said. He added it has been seen that children were affected and that they are largely asymptomatic.

"Severe disease in children is uncommon but we have a protocol for that too. Children can have asymptomatic infection and they can also spread it. We have reasonable clarity on it," he said, adding Covaxin is beginning trials on children in 10-12 days.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday urged the Centre to stop flights from Singapore where a variant of Covid has been detected in children. Singapore has shut all schools at the moment.

# CONG WANTS TO TARNISH IMAGE OF INDIA, PM: BJP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

The Congress on Tuesday attacked the BJP for allegedly circulating a fake document and terming it as a Congress "toolkit". Congress leader Rajeev Gowda said the saffron party was propagating a fake toolkit on Covid-19 mismanagement and attributing it to the AICC research department. The party has written to the Delhi police and demanded that an FIR be lodged

against BJP president J.P. Nadda, Union minister Smriti Irani and party leaders Sambit Patra and B.L. Santosh for sharing a "forged document". Congress leader and lawyer Aman Pawar said: "We have submitted our complaint to the police and demanded arrests. If the police doesn't register an FIR, we will move court."

Claiming to have accessed a "toolkit" sent by the Congress to its leaders and workers on how to "defame" Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and the Centre over Covid management, the BJP shared the document on the social media Tuesday with the hashtag "#Congress Toolkit Exposed", and accused the Congress of maligning India's image, "commercialising" the global pandemic for political opportunity, and whipping up communal frenzy during the crisis.

Leading the attack, Mr Nadda said: "Dividing society and spewing venom against others... The

Congress is a master at this. India is seeing Congress' antics, while the nation is fighting Covid-19. I would urge the Congress to go beyond toolkits and do something constructive."

Ms Irani said: "My country, our country is at war with a virus. I can understand the Opposition would want to attack the government. But to singularly commercialise it as a political opportunity and deal in death... I never imagined the Congress was capable of such a low."

# Narada sting case accused check into Kolkata hospital

**RAJIB CHOWDHURI**  
with agency inputs  
KOLKATA, MAY 18

A day after getting arrested and chargsheeted by the CBI in the Narada sting operation case, three of the four accused TMC leaders, who are now in judicial custody, were admitted to SSKM Hospital one after another since early Tuesday complaining of respiratory distress at the Presidency Central Jail.

At around 3.45 am, state panchayat minister Subrata Mukherjee, Kamarhati MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterjee were rushed to the state government-run hospital from the prison. Mr Mitra and Mr Chatterjee were admitted to the Woodburn Block immediately. They were given oxygen sup-

port, and their condition is now stable.

Mr Mukherjee returned to the jail after feeling slightly better, but in the morning, he again felt discomfort and was brought to the hospital, where he was admitted in the same ward where Mr Mitra and Mr Chatterjee are being treated.

The fourth accused, Firhad Hakim, also felt discomfort at the prison, and doctors checked his health at the prison hospital.

On Tuesday afternoon, the TMC fielded Congress leader and veteran lawyer Abhishek "Manu" Singhvi to move the Calcutta high court seeking reconsideration of Monday night stay order by a division bench of acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice Arijit Banerjee on the special CBI court's interim

baill to the four accused as the CBI plans to file a caveat in the Supreme Court on the case.

Along with TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee and Siddharth Luthra, Mr Singhvi argued that the accused's representatives could not take part in the high court hearing. They also urged the high court to hear their appeal along with the CBI's plea for transfer of the Narada sting operation case. Both matters will come up for hearing Wednesday when the judicial custody of the four is due to end.

Shaba Hakim, one of the daughters of the minister, who met him at the prison, said: "My father is sad because he cannot work for the people now amid the pandemic despite being the administrator of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation."

# Make O<sub>2</sub>, vaccines, drugs in Tamil Nadu, says CM Stalin

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Chief Minister MK Stalin issued orders for the government to enter into joint ventures for producing medical oxygen, vaccine for Covid-19 and also life-saving drugs with a view to finding a permanent solution to tackle the Coronavirus crisis. Calling for memorandum of interest from private companies in the country and abroad before May 31, Stalin said that TIDCO would provide financial aid and support to the companies that are willing to invest more than ₹50 crore.

Also the Chief Minister announced that the cash relief of ₹2,000 provided to family hard holders would be extended to the 2,14,950 new card holders who had been included recently. So, those card holders would be entitled for a relief of ₹2,000 each in May itself and it would cost the government ₹42.99 crore.

The first installment of ₹2,000, out of the ₹4,000 relief announced by the government, paid in May to 2,07,66,950 card holders has cost the exchequer ₹4153.39 crore, a press release said.

Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary issued a warning to government officials taking illegal gratification for providing the free services to Coronavirus affected people. ■ **P2**

# Scheme 'CM in your constituency' begins

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Within 10 days of setting up the 'CM in Your Constituency' department to look into complaints from the public, the government has taken quick action on 549 petitions received from six districts by Chief Minister MK Stalin during his election campaign across the

State.

Marking the launch of the scheme on Tuesday, 10 beneficiaries were personally handed the relief sought by individuals after the petitions were sorted out by the exclusive department set up on May 8 to fulfil the DMK's election promise that it would address the grievances of people within 100 days of taking office. ■ **P2**



CM M.K. Stalin gives away a sewing machine to a lady as the initiative - 'CM in your constituency' took off today in his chambers in the Secretariat on Tuesday.

# Chaos reigns on Chennai roads

**G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR / DC**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

As chaos and confusion reigned on Chennai roads with police suddenly cracking down on motorists on Tuesday, preventing even frontline workers from going to work in vehicles while insisting on e-registration - the system was brought into force out of the blue - public anger turned against the government.

At many of 388 check points, erected overnight on the roads in Chennai, motorists heading for work were seen arguing with the police showing them identity cards and other documents to prove that they were part of essential services.

But in many places police were firm on rejecting all such claims and

demanding e-registration, which vehicles must have if they had to go from one police district to another. In the case of Chennai, there are 12 police districts and some people had to get the e-registration done to even go to their work place a few streets away.

When policemen refused to accept the regular passes that motorists had with them till Monday and asked them to return or pay a fine or have their vehicles seized, people started criticising the new government. People pointed out that the police who had been very gentle in the initial stages of the lockdown had suddenly turned very aggressive and foulmouthed and blamed it on the new government, saying that it had let loose the police on common people. ■ **P2**



Motorists were in for a rude shock on Tuesday as police insisted on e-registration for moving even beyond police station limits. There were huge bottlenecks at each checkpoint in the city leading to riled road users.

— DC

# Tauktae leaves trail of destruction as it makes landfall

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
with agency inputs  
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The Search and Rescue (SAR) operations to locate and bring to safety the 390 missing persons off Mumbai coast in the Arabian Sea was on till late night on Tuesday. Till Tuesday evening the Indian Navy and Coast Guard had rescued 317 people on board two barges that went adrift. At least seven people were killed in Gujarat as Cyclone Tauktae battered parts of the state.

According to the Indian Navy, 180 persons were rescued from Barge P-305 off Bombay High. This Barge went adrift off Heera Oil Fields on Monday with 273 persons onboard due to the extremely severe Cyclone Tauktae.

Naval Ships Beas, Betwa and Teg had joined INS Kochi and Kolkata in the search and rescue operations for Barge P-305, which sank 35 nautical miles from Mumbai (in the Mumbai Offshore Development Area). SAR has also been augmented with P8I and



Fishermen remove debris after a construction collapsed due to cyclone 'Tauktae' at a harbour near Una Town, Gir Somnath on Tuesday.

— PTI

naval helicopters, who continue to undertake aerial search of the area. Since the commencement of the SAR on Monday, 180 survivors have been rescued.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) stated that all drifted vessels, except P-305, are taken in control, and their crew is safe. Indian Navy and ONGC were actively engaged in rescuing the crew of vessel P-305.

Apart from P-305, cargo barge GAL Constructor with 137 personnel on board, accommodation barge SS-3 with 196 personnel on board and the Sagar Bhushan oil rig with 101 personnel on board also went adrift in Cyclone Tauktae on Monday. While

all the 137 people on board the cargo barge GAL Constructor have been rescued, there is no word yet on the progress of rescue operations for the accommodation barge SS-3 and the Sagar Bhushan oil rig.

The Indian Coast Guard tweeted, "#CycloneTauktae #NationFirst Update on grounded barge GAL CONSTRUCTOR. Effective coordinated rescue operations resulted in saving all the 137 precious lives from the distressed barge. Rescue mission accomplished. We Protect."

# Rocket from Gaza kills 2 in Israel

**Gaza city, Gaza Strip, may 18:** A rocket launched from Gaza killed two Thai workers in southern Israel on Tuesday, police said, hours after Israeli airstrikes toppled a six-story building in the Palestinian territory that housed bookstores and educational centers.

With the war showing no sign of abating, Palestinians in the region staged a general strike in

a rare collective action against Israel's policies.

Violence erupted at protests in the occupied West Bank, including in the city of Ramallah. Hundreds of Palestinians burned tires and hurled stones at an Israeli military checkpoint.

Troops fired tear gas canisters at the crowd, and protesters picked up some of them and threw them back.

— AP



## OTHER STORIES

**Tafe donates ₹1cr to CM Covid relief fund**

**Chennai:** Tractors and Farm Equipment Limited (Tafe) gave ₹1 crore to Chief Minister Stalin for purchase of 500 oxygen concentrators for the benefit of Covid-19 patients in rural terrain in the state.

In a release Tafe, manufacturer of Massey Ferguson and Eicher tractors, stated that the fund has been distributed to the state with a view to strengthen its fight against Covid-19 virus and to enable these oxygen concentrators to various PHCs in rural areas and villages in the state.

Tafe's CMD Mallika Srinivasan said, "The second Covid-19 wave has resulted in immense humanitarian suffering. We at Tafe offer our humble support to the efforts of the Tamil Nadu Government in combating the virus and providing quality care to the people."

**Man charred to death as his car hits transformer, catches fire**

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

A man travelling in a car was burnt alive after his vehicle ramed into a transformer and caught fire on VGP Shanthi Nagar main road on Pallikaranai police limits on Tuesday morning.

Thirty-eight-year-old Gaja Mohideen, who was in the car, was charred to death after the car caught fire after the collision. According to the police, Gaja Mohideen, a resident of Bharathi Street in VGP Shanthi Nagar in Pallikaranai was returning home in his car after personal work.

He was rushing on VGP Shanthi Nagar main road to get back home early due to the lockdown restrictions when he reportedly lost control of his car and ramed into a transformer that caught fire. The blaze spread immediately leaving the vehicle gutted.

The residents who witnessed the accident alerted the fire department and the local police. Fire and rescue services personnel from Medavakkam rushed to the spot immediately and doused the fire. However, the victim stuck inside the car was charred to death.

The body of the deceased was sent to the Chromepet Government hospital for post-mortem. Pallikaranai police have registered a case and launched an investigation.



The mangled remains of the half-burnt car.

# HBL may get a fillip in vaccine production

**T. SUDHEESH I DC**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

With Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Tuesday declaring that his government will initiate immediate steps to manufacture Covid-19 vaccines in the state, the defunct HLL Biotech Limited (HBL), a state-run health infrastructure under the Union ministry of health and family welfare at Chengalpeta, is expected to get a fillip.

The Chief Minister has directed that necessary infrastructure should be established in Tamil Nadu to find a permanent solution to the shortage of oxygen, oxygen concentrators, Covid-19 vaccines, hi-tech equipment and other Corona-related medicines. An expression of interest has been invited from Indian and foreign companies by May 31, which will

**The Chief Minister has directed that necessary infrastructure should be established in Tamil Nadu to find a permanent solution to the shortage of oxygen, oxygen concentrators, Covid-19 vaccines, hi-tech equipment and other Corona-related medicines**

be examined and steps will be taken to establish the infrastructure for producing life-saving drugs, oxygen and vaccines soon. The Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation will establish production units on a joint venture basis with companies which are ready to invest at least Rs 50 crore, Stalin said.

Dr Rex Sargunam, president, Tamil Nadu Health

Development Association, said the revival of health infrastructure like HBL was a need of the hour as the country is fighting a pandemic. The decision of the government to invite expressions of interest is a step in the right direction. Now the state government in consultation with the Centre should find out interested parties to utilise vaccine-producing infrastructure that has been lying defunct for years. If the HBL is made able to produce vaccines, the state can be self-sufficient in inoculating its population. The HBL has already built an Integrated Vaccine Complex (IVC) to develop, manufacture and supply affordable life-saving vaccines to the Government of India for its Universal Immunisation Programme. If the government ties up with private

players, the IVC can be made use of to ensure mass production of Covid-19 vaccine', he added.

HBL, which was commissioned in 2018, was expected to make the country self-sufficient in manufacturing vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis, Rabies, Measles and Hepatitis B apart from BCG and pentavalent combination vaccines under India's Universal Immunisation Programme. But even after two years, the ambitious unit failed to produce even a single dose of vaccine, reducing to the production of sanitisers and alcohol-based disinfectants.

It may be recalled that Union health minister Harsh Vardhan, during a visit to HBL in January, had said that the facility would soon be optimally utilised to produce Covid-19 vaccines.

**₹4K assistance scheme for new rice card recipients too**

**Chennai, May 18:** Chief Minister M. K. Stalin has ordered a payout of ₹2,000, the first instalment of the ₹4,000 pandemic assistance plan, also to people who have newly received their rice category ration cards, the government said here on Tuesday.

Now, 2,14,950 new rice ration cards that have been issued have come under use and Stalin has ordered payment of the first instalment to such families as well, a government release said. The payment, to families covered under the two lakh plus new cards, would be disbursed this month at an estimated cost of ₹42.99 crore. Stalin has already ordered disbursement of first instalment in May to 2,07,66,950 rice card holders at a cost of ₹4,153.39 crore.

The ₹4,000 Covid-19 cash assistance to people holding rice cards is an electoral promise of the DMK. — PTI

## Centre slammed for pushing NEP

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Condemning the Centre for pushing the National Education Policy-2020 amidst the pandemic, the All-India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations (AIFUCTO) has demanded the Centre to defer the implementation of NEP. A resolution, passed in the AIFUCTO virtual national executive committee meeting, stated that the Centre, instead of saving the lives of people, is pushing its

corporate and communal agenda to implement NEP-2020 in an undemocratic manner.

The AIFUCTO expressed serious concern over the mismanagement of the Covid situation resulting in large-scale casualties and sufferings in the country. The federation also demanded the government to implement an inclusive national vaccine policy after consulting all state governments. It sought inoculation of all teachers, employees and students of all academic institutions,

from KG to PG, on a priority basis. It sought issuance of regular salary and medical benefits to all part-time and contract teachers on par with permanent employees.

The State Platform for Common School System-Tamil Nadu (SPCSS-TN) has criticised the Union education minister for directly consulting the state secretary of school education to implement the NEP. It demanded Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to expedite the setting up of a state education

commission to formulate a state education policy.

In a statement, SPCSS-TN general secretary P. B. Prince Gajendra Babu welcomed the decision of the Tamil Nadu government not to participate in the meeting convened by the Union education minister on Monday, terming it the first step in the struggle to protect the rights of the state. The SPCSS-TN has urged other states to join hands with Tamil Nadu to uphold the democratic rights of the states.

**Orders passed for basic infra**

**From P1**

Also, a slew of public interest petitions demanding basic amenities were also looked into and necessary orders passed. Among them were M Munusamy's demand for an anganwadi centre at a cost of ₹10.1 lakh and Murugan's demand for a check dam across Sitheri canal at a cost of ₹4.6 lakh. Both the petitioners are from Thiruvallur district.

Ranipet district's Gunasekaran had wanted concrete road in Asanallikuppam, which was sanctioned at a cost of ₹1.89 lakh, and Bhuvnesh Kumar had asked for a public tap that was allowed to be set up at a cost of ₹1.1 lakh, an official press release said.

About 4 lakh petitions received during Stalin's election campaign were brought to Chennai from all the districts in 72 wooden containers and 275 cardboard boxes and handed over on May 9 to the department, which sorted them out district wise, categorised them and uploaded them in the

website manned by TNeGA.

So far 70,000 petitions had been uploaded with each of them getting a unique identification number, which had been sent to the petitioner through SMS, the release said, adding that, based on the details furnished, action was being taken by the district officials.

Among the individual beneficiaries, to whom Stalin handed over the relief, some are from Chennai. They are: Adambakkam Rani (old age pension), St Thomas Mount Nithya (widow pension), T Nagar U Sathyanarayanan (disabled persons' pension), Choolaimedu Thayaramma (Unmarried women's pension) Tondaiarpet Sumathi (sewing machine), Villivakkam Udhayakumar (hereditary certificate) and Thousand Lights Nandini (hearing aid).

Other beneficiaries are from Ranipet district. They are: Jayanthi (patta for housing plot), Muthuraman (assistance to build house) and Subash (aid for drip irrigation).



The city corporation conducts vaccination drive at an apartment complex in LIC Nagar, Madipakkam, on Tuesday. Neighbouring houses were also given vaccinations based on availability.

— DC

## Quarantine violators to be fined ₹2,000

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

At a time when the authorities push for home quarantine for the asymptomatic cases to tackle hospital bed shortage, implementing the quarantine norms in the Covid-infected families remains a challenge as the family contacts move around violating the norms.

Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) commissioner Gagandeep Singh Bedi said they would fine ₹2,000 those who violate the home quarantine norms.

Many of the asymptomatic Covid-19 patients and their family members are roaming free in the streets. Such irresponsible behaviour will spread the virus to a large number of people. If anybody in the Covid-19-affected families violates the quarantine norms, the local residents or neighbours can tip off the GCC officials on the number 044-2538450. Apart from fine, the violators will also be sent to government-run Covid-19 care centres. As many as 2,000 focus volunteers have been deployed

across the 15 zones to keep a vigil on the patients and their family members', he said. As part of the quarantine norms for Covid-infected families, the households should mandatorily keep themselves indoors wearing a mask and maintain social distancing till the isolation period of the patient ends. Earlier this month, the GCC had issued a notice saying that if a Covid-19 patient is advised home quarantine, all household contacts need to mandatorily quarantine themselves.

## SFI activists turn guardian angels for Covid patients in Thoothukudi

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
THOOTHUKUDI, MAY 18

"They are not just volunteers, but guardian angels sent by God to serve us," said Covid-19 patients about the young volunteers helping the corona patients at the Thoothukudi Medical College Hospital (TMCH).

Seen helping the patients at the Covid block wearing the PPE kit one might mistake them for hospital staff, but they are college students, affiliated to the Students' Federation of India (SFI).

A band of 27 SFI activists approached district collector K. Senthil Raj, offering to help the Covid patients in TMCH. The collector after consulting TMCH Dean Dr

**A band of 27 SFI activists approached district collector K. Senthil Raj, offering to help the Covid patients in TMCH. The collector after consulting TMCH Dean Dr Revathi Balan allowed them to serve the patients**

Revathi Balan allowed them to serve the patients.

Divided into two groups, the first batch of 20 students serve in the morning shift from 8 am to 4 pm. They are replaced by the rest of seven in the night shift, according to Dr Revathi Balan, who added that the SFI volunteers

also help the hospital administration in digitally uploading the data of the people coming for RT-PCR tests.

The students also help the hospital administration in collecting the bed occupancy data from all the 13 Covid blocks and make the admission process easy.

The problems faced by TMCH during the first wave of pandemic last year in providing food to the patients did not arise in the second wave, mainly because of the student volunteers, who judiciously distributed the food at every patient's bed. Earlier, it was an exhausting task for the patients to collect their food packets kept at the ground floor. "Many did not get food as some of the

patients, who came first, took additional packets," said a staff nurse.

Though their parents are scared about their children serving the Covid patients as volunteers, the students are satisfied. Joison, a volunteer, who is the Thoothukudi district secretary of the SFI, said that during the first wave they provided free food for the destitutes on the streets. Now they chose to work in the hospital as the situation warranted it.

The students who are working in the hospital for around a week now, however, take all precautionary measures including quarantining themselves from their family members after every day's service.

## Exempted industries must ensure safety of employees: HC

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

The Madras high court has expressed its hope that the industries that have been exempted from the rigours of the lockdown take independent measures to ensure the well-being and safety of the employees required to attend the office or manufacturing units.



The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice

Senthil Kumar Ramamoorthy was passing interim orders on the petitions filed by Workmen of Renault-Nissan and another.

The bench said the petitioners' grievances were manifold, including the government's decision to allow the automobile industry to function during the lockdown. The petitioners say that just because there may

be pending export orders would not mean that the safety or health of the workmen may be compromised to keep the manufacturing units running. The petitioners say that there was no justifiable basis for the automobile industry to be exempted from the strict lockdown conditions otherwise imposed all over the state in the wake of the second

surge of the pandemic, the bench added.

The bench said the state, doubtless, was monitoring the situation at the various manufacturing units and should take immediate appropriate steps as deemed fit in the larger public interest and to maintain public health. In the event the state finds Covid protocol not being maintained at the

exempted manufacturing units, immediate appropriate steps should be taken. The state should also monitor the working at various places and advise or restrict the functioning to the extent that may be necessary so as not to compromise public health, the bench added and posted to May 24, 2021, for the state's affidavit to be received.



# Politicos, netizens condole Ki Ra's death

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

## Have lost my godfather, says Sivakumar

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Renowned Tamil writer, novelist and recipient of Sahitya Akademi award K. Rajanarayanan, popularly known as Ki Ra, passed away on Monday night. He was 98 and is survived by two sons. Ki Ra pioneered the use of regional spoken dialects in literary narration, by first writing the story *Maya Mann* in 1958, and went on to become a celebrated writer, winning the Sahitya Akademi award for his work, *Gopalapurathu Makkal* (People of Gopalapuram) in 1991.

His style of writing that brought out the raw reality of the region that he was born in – Idaisaval village in Kovilpatti that was part of the united Tirunelveli district of yore – later on became popular with many other later year Tamil writers adopting the local dialects for storytelling.

Ki Ra had dropped out of school after seventh standard but went on to teach folklore at the Pondicherry University. Since then he made Puducherry his home, living in government quarters allotted to him during his teaching days.

The news of his death led to his fans flooding social media with obituaries, personal anecdotes and appreciations of his work. All politicians condole the death of the literary giant who had told an interviewer a few years ago that he did not want to go back to Idaisaval village. He had said that all his

Renowned actor Sivakumar in his condolence statement stated that he has lost his godfather. He added, "I lost my father when I was ten months old. Now, I am 80, and lost my guru Ki Ra who was 98. Ki Ra and Ganapathi Ammal were like a father and mother to me. I have known them for 35 years. I have also taken part in many events with him. He will live forever through his iconic writings like *Gopalla Gramam*, *Gopalla Gramathu Makkal*, *Karisal Kaatu Kadidhasi*, *Vattaara Vazhakku Sollagaradhi* etc. I sincerely regret not being able to go in person and pay tribute to him due to this Covid situation. I pray to the Lord for his soul to rest in peace."

**Ki Ra's praise was like Oscar award to me: Ganesh Babu**

Actor/director EV Ganesh Babu who played the lead protagonist in 2003 film *Oruththi*, which was the screen adaptation of Ki. Rajanarayanan's novel *Kidai* shares memorable

friends and women he knew were no more there in the village and hence found no meaning in returning to the land, whose charm and beauty he chronicled



Sivakumar with Ki Ra.



Ganesh Babu and Poorvaja in *Oruththi*.

experiences with the acclaimed writer. Oruththi was screened at the International Film Festival of India.

Speaking to DC, Ganesh Babu says, "His is an irreparable loss for the literary world. It was a big honor to have acted in a film, which



Ki Ra unveils Ganesh Babu's *Kattil* poster months ago.

was based on Ki Ra's story *Kidai*. And this was the only novel of the Sahitya Akademi winner to have been made into a feature film."

Sharing his experiences with Ki Ra while filming *Oruththi* he said, "Amshan Kumar who directed *Oruththi* spotted my acting in a film *Oorukku Noorper*, which was based on ace Jayakandhan's novel and brought me on board for the lead. I went through the entire novel *Kidai* and later met Ki Ra before commencing the film. The story is set in Kovilpatti and about an incident that happened 150 years ago. He gave only one piece of advice. He said that 'don't behave like a normal hero who sits in a chair sepa-

ately and joins the shot when the director calls and repeats the dialogues. Go to the real location and move with those people and live the character 'Ellappa' you play'. And I did the same and got a lot of accreditation for my performance. All credits go to him."

He goes on to add, "I have been in touch with Ki Ra for the last 17 years. A few months back, he released the poster of my upcoming directorial venture *Kattil* in Puducherry amidst journalists. He said I had created several characters through my books/novels. I am proud to say that Ganesh Babu gave life to one of them on celluloid through his act. It was like an Oscar award to me."

and expressed his condolences to his family, friends and fans.

AIADMK joint coordinator Edappadi K Palaniswami, MDMK

leader Vaiko, TNCC president K. S. Alagiri and PMK founder Dr S Ramadoss were among the political leaders, who mourned Ki Ra's death.



## Corona shatters tourism hopes in Nilgiris district

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC  
OOTY, MAY 18

The hopes of conducting summer festivals and flower shows in the second half of May, the popular tourist season here, have vanished with the Corona spreading its tentacles for the second consecutive year.

The summer in Nilgiris is very special. The tourist season between April and mid-June generally attracts at least a million visitors. The summer season brings good tidings to the tourism stakeholders in the hills as the livelihood of many families are linked to undisturbed tourism for a few months. The summer in Nilgiris means greenery, flowers, colours, tourist inflow and high revenue flow to the hills.

While Covid-19 in 2020 wiped out summer tourism in the Nilgiris with the tourism industry going penniless not only in last summer but till restrictions on tourism were taken off at the end of August.

This year, there was a hope that summer tourism will be normal and bring good tidings to the travel and tourism industry. The horticulture department too was readying its gardens such as the Government Botanical Garden and Government Rose Garden here, where the flowers have started blooming, to hold the summer flower show, rose show and related summer festival programmes in May. But, the continuing curfew and lockdown have shattered the hopes of the tourism industry.

## TN clocks 33,059 new Covid cases; 364 fatalities push toll to 18,369

**Chennai, May 16:** Tamil Nadu clocked 33,059 new Covid-19 cases, including 12 returns from various destinations, pushing the case-load to 16,64,350 while a record 364 deaths took the toll to 18,369, the Health department said on Tuesday. According to a medical bulletin, 21,362 people were discharged on Tuesday, taking the tally to 14,03,052, leaving 2,42,929 active cases.

Chennai accounted for 6,016 new infections, totalling to 4,50,267 till date. The metropolis also leads in the number of fatalities with 5,939 deaths. The number of samples tested in the last 24

hours was at 1,60,463, pushing the cumulative number of specimens examined so far to 2,54,33,956.

Elsewhere, Chengalpattu added 2,299 cases while Coimbatore clocked 3,071 new infections followed by Tiruvallur (1,890), Erode (1,568), Tiruppur (1,561), Tuticorin (1,352), Tiruchy (1,271) and Madurai (1,011) while the other districts clocked new infections in triple digits. Among the 364 deceased, 91 were without any pre-existing illnesses including a 27-year old man from Madurai who succumbed due to COVID-19 pneumonia, the bulletin said. —PTI

## 3 shops sealed for violating Covid norms

DC CORRESPONDENT  
PUDUKOTTAI, MAY 18

The revenue officials led by Dhantayuthapani RDO Illuppur sealed three shops including two hotels at Keeranur in Pudukkottai district on Tuesday, for violating the Covid-19 lockdown norms.

The officials conducted the raids in the hotels where they found the customers not keeping social distance and not wearing facial masks. They also conducted a raid at a milk booth and found its owner selling some other food commodities and seized 3 kgs of polythene covers.

## Youth roam in bike amid lockdown, held

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUCHY, MAY 18

Corporation health officials and police personnel on Tuesday detained some youths who were roaming around the city on two-wheelers during lockdown.

The traffic police took action against the bike-borne youths who were not wearing facial masks and helmets.

The corporation health department personnel conducted a Corona test for those who came to the fair price shop to receive Rs 2,000 as Corona relief. The officials also intercepted the youths roaming around on two-wheelers and also put them to Covid-19 test. They took their name, house address, mobile phone number and informed them that the Covid-19 test result will be sent to their mobile phone.

## School donates 02 bus for Covid duty

DC CORRESPONDENT  
THANJAVUR, MAY 18

Thamarai International school donated two of its school buses fitted with oxygen facility for transporting Corona patients on Tuesday.

The collector said that there are 28 government ambulances and 72 private ambulances. The two buses will be used for transporting patients.

# COFFEE-BREAK

**Your day today** By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam



**Aries:** Students will excel in studies. You will attract others with your behaviour in parties and at the work place. You would be given extra responsibilities at work place.



**Taurus:** Your bank balance will increase. Family harmony will be better than ever. Siblings may need your support which you would render without hesitation.



**Gemini:** You will be successful in the purchase of a property. You may have to render a great support to your spouse. You will have more than one source of income.



**Cancer:** You may have to spend for those who are in a foreign country. You have been working too hard for the past few days. You deserve a time out.



**Leo:** Misunderstandings may frustrate you. You may want to express yourself in writing today. People could be trying to take advantage of your kindness today.



**Virgo:** Your kindness may get you a few points with others, but if you get taken advantage of, your mood will certainly be spoiled and your faith in humanity may be questioned. Listen to your instincts.

### You share your b'day with

**Nawazuddin Siddiqui** is an Indian actor known for his work in Hindi cinema. He is an alumnus of the National School of Drama. Siddiqui's did his feature film debut with *Patang*.



**Libra:** It will be beneficial to work in close association with your family members at this time. Married people may face some tension in their relationship.



**Scorpio:** If you employ others, you should assign more responsibility to able subordinates. Alertness will keep you safe. You should relax with your family on this day.



**Sagittarius:** Avoid foods that can increase ailments. You should not abandon your plans. Colleagues may steer you in a new direction. Keep a low profile today.



**Capricorn:** Don't hesitate to convey romantic feelings when you get an opportunity. A desire to do things personally makes you successful. Timely help of family members will help you in removing loneliness.

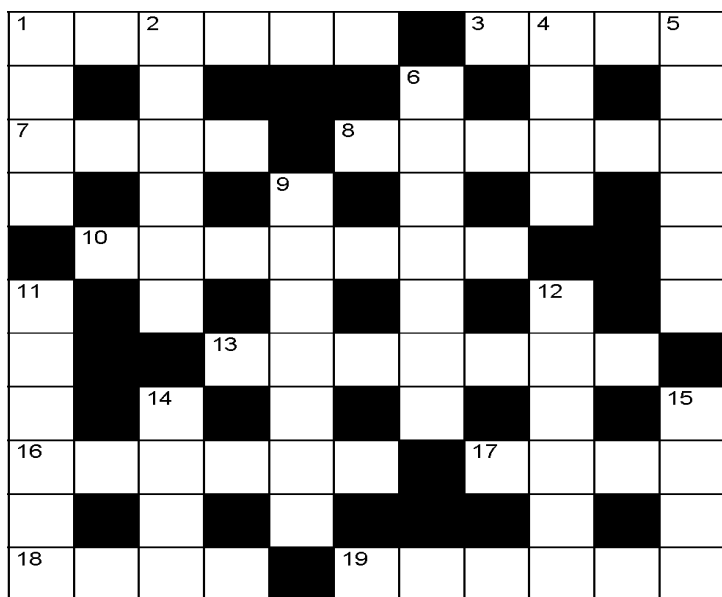


**Aquarius:** At work you may get exposed to a different cultural environment. Control your impulsive behaviour otherwise it will spoil your mood. You will make a mark at the professional front.



**Pisces:** You are likely to meet a person who will love you a lot. Make efforts to improve your health. You may try innovative ways to tackle business problems. An incoming flow of money is likely.

### QUICK CROSSWORD



#### Across

- Pill (6)
- Stimulus (4)
- Beer ingredient (4)
- Partial (6)
- Musical performance (7)
- Single out (7)
- ID documents (6)
- Anti-aircraft fire (4)
- Sicilian volcano (4)
- Pamper (6)

#### Down

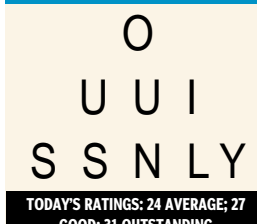
- Large book (4)
- Conviction (6)
- Sit for (4)
- Boil down (6)
- Put out of action (7)
- Crack (7)
- Basic commodity (6)
- Gramophone needle (6)
- Reach across (4)
- Burlesque (4)

#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

Across: 1. Barricade, 6. Gulps, 7. Idiom, 9. Nasty, 10. Played, 12. Secure, 14. Talc, 17. Sniff, 18. Realm, 19. Astronomy.

Down: 2. Atlas, 3. Ruse, 4. Chilly, 5. Dolly, 6. Genesis, 8. Modicum, 11. Prefer, 13. Coins, 15. Alarm, 16. Wren.

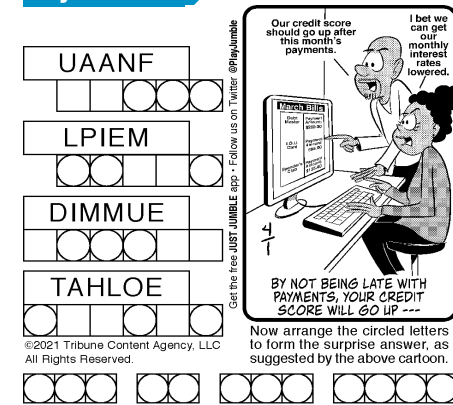
### Word Mine



**TODAY'S RATINGS: 24 AVERAGE; 27 GOOD; 31 OUTSTANDING**

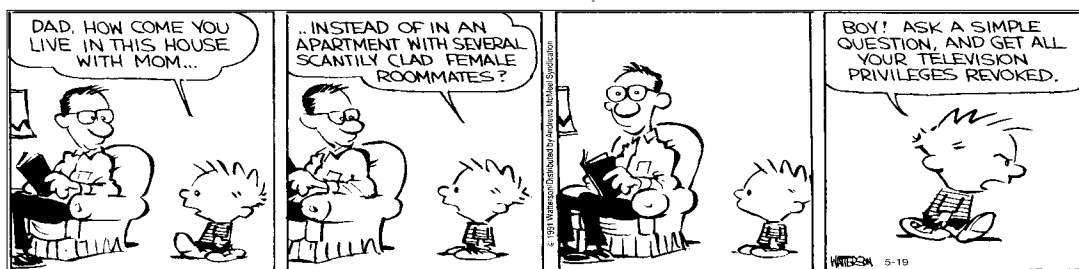
How many words of four or more letters can you make from the letters shown in today's puzzle? In making a word, each letter may be used once only. Each word must contain the letter at the top of the pyramid. There should be at least one nine letter word. Plurals, foreign words and proper names are not allowed.

### jumble



Yesterday's Jumbles: LADLE NINJA HAZARD BOTTOM  
Answer: She'd been making mittens for more than 60 years and was — AN OLD HAND AT IT

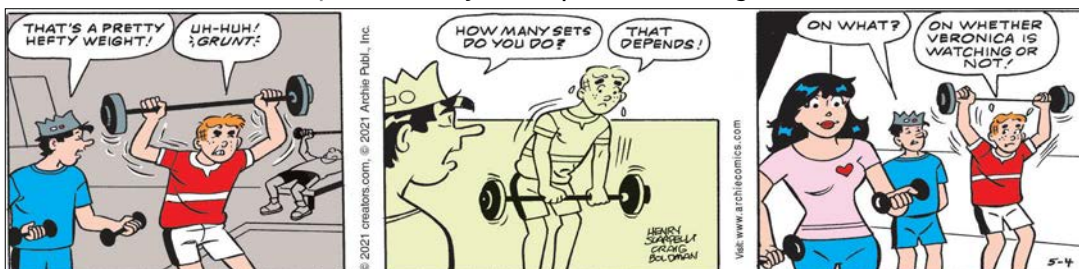
### CALVIN AND HOBBS | Bill Watterson



### THE WIZARD OF ID | Parker and Hartsd



### ARCHIE | Bill Henry Scarpelli & craig boldman



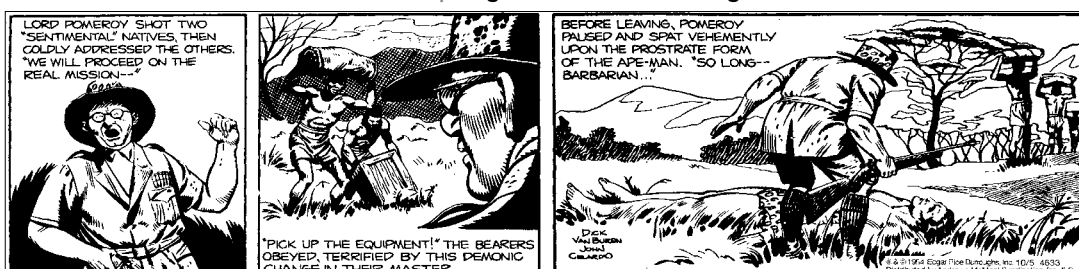
### BLONDIE | Dean Young and John Marshall



### ANDY CAPP | Reg Smythe



### TARZAN | Edgar Rice Burroughs



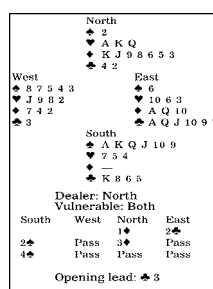
## THE FIRST CARD MAY TELL THE STORY

Mark Twain said, "Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please."

The declarer can usually get some facts from the first trick, in particular the opening lead. He should always ask himself what the leader has in that suit.

In today's deal, South is in four spades after the given auction. (Yes, three no-trump is safer.) What should he do after West leads the club

three, and East wins with the ace and returns the club nine? South did not like his diamond void, but he couldn't bid less than four spades. East wanted to mention his excellent club suit a second time, but he decided four clubs was too adventurous. If he had climbed that high, South would probably have still bid four spades, but four clubs doubled could have cost 1,100. South starts with 10 top tricks: six spades, three hearts



and the club king. However, he has to take care of that last winner. Given East's overall, West's club-two lead must be a singleton. (He would have led high from a doubleton.) So, if declarer puts up the club king at trick two, West will ruff it, and the contract will go down one. Instead, South must play a low club from his hand at trick two. East will probably lead a third club. Declarer plays low again, allowing West to ruff higher

than the dummy. Then, though, South wins West's return, draws all of the trumps and take those 10 winners, the club king still sitting snug and warm in his hand.

Read every lead, whether you are the declarer or a defender.

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## SHORT TAKES

### JOURNALIST, ACTIVIST BOOKED UNDER NSA

**Imphal, May 18:** The Manipur Police has booked journalist Kishorchandra Wangkhem and activist Erendro Leichombam under the National Security Act (NSA) for their allegedly derivative social media posts involving state BJP chief S. Tikendra Singh, following his demise due to Covid-19 last week, police sources said.

The duo, both in their 40s, was arrested on Thursday after they took to Facebook to extend their condolences, while also writing that cow dung or cow urine was no cure for Covid-19, in two separate posts.

The saffron party's state vice-president Usham Deban Singh and general secretary P. Premananda Meetei filed a complaint against Wangkhem and Leichombam, and shortly after the police picked them up from their residences here.

They were granted bail on Monday, but the government subsequently invoked the NSA.

Th Kirankumar, the district magistrate of Imphal West, said in his order that the two might "resume activities which are prejudicial to the security of the state and maintenance of public order on being released on bail".

Earlier, too, Wankhem, associated with news portal 'Frontline Manipur', had faced arrest on two occasions for his criticism of the BJP.

Erendro is the convenor of political outfit Peoples' Resurgence and Justice Alliance.

### JUSTICE GAVAI RECUSES FROM PARAM BIR CASE

**PARMOD KUMAR | DC**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

Supreme Court judge Justice B.R.Gavai on Tuesday recused from hearing former Mumbai police commissioner Param Bir Singh's petition seeking transfer of all the departmental inquiries initiated against him by the Maharashtra government either to another state or to an independent agency like the CBI as he has no confidence in the probe by the state government.

Justice Vineet Saran, heading the vacation bench also comprising Justice B.R.Gavai told senior lawyer Puneet Bali appearing for Param Bir Singh that his brother (Justice Gavai) has "difficulty in hearing the matter".

The court directed the listing of the matter before a bench of which Justice Gavai is not a member. The former Mumbai police top cop has alleged that he faced a "witch-hunt" as he had accused then Home Minister Anil Deshmukh "of telling his subordinate officers including now suspended assistant inspector Sachin Waze to collect ₹100 crore per month for him from Mumbai city including from those running bars and restaurants."

### SC NOTICE TO WB OVER POST-POLL VIOLENCE

**DC CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAY 18

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued notice to the West Bengal Government over the killing of two BJP workers on May 2 in the post-poll violence on a plea by the brother of one of the deceased and wife of the other deceased.

A vacation bench comprising Justice Vineet Saran and Justice B.R.Gavai issued notice to the West Bengal government on a petition by one Biswajit Sarkar - brother of BJP leader Avijit Sarkar and another by the widow of BJP worker Haran Adhikari. The court directed further hearing in the matter on May 25.

Appearing for the petitioner Biswajit Sarkar, senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani told the court that there was total inaction by the state machinery to control the violence.

"The activists murdered belonged to the BJP. It was encouraged by the state administration and police stood idly. It requires action and court monitoring," Jethmalani told the court (sic).

Jathmalani sought the post-mortem of Sarkar's body, which has not been cremated so far. Violence had erupted in parts of West Bengal after the election results were declared on May 2 giving a thumping majority to Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress. The BJP alleged that its activists were targeted by the Trinamul Congress workers



Migrants leave for their native states from inter-state bus terminal at Kaushambi in Ghaziabad on Tuesday.

—PTI



A medic, wearing a PPE, conducts random Covid-19 testing of street vendors near Charbagh railway station in Lucknow on Tuesday.

—PTI

## MP woman threatens to commit suicide

**Demands injection to treat husband suffering from black fungus in Indore hosp**

**Indore, May 18:** The video of a woman threatening to jump off the roof of a hospital in Indore in Madhya Pradesh if her husband suffering from Mucormycosis or black fungus infection does not get an injection required for its treatment went viral on Tuesday. A hospital official said the woman's 40-year-old hus-

band had been administered Amphotericin-B injections but he would need more shots and this had left her disturbed. "I am speaking from Bombay Hospital. My husband is admitted in this hospital with black fungus infection and has pain in his eyes and jaws. The injection (Amphotericin-B) is not available in this hospi-

tal. Where should I take him in this condition," the woman said in the video. "If I don't get the injection today, then I will jump off the roof of the hospital and commit suicide. I have no other option left," she says further in the video message addressed to Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, state health minister Prabhu

Ram Choudhary and Indore collector Manish Singh. Meanwhile, Bombay Hospital general manager Rahul Parasher said the woman was counselled but she is in a disturbed state of mind at present. "Her husband has been administered 59 Amphotericin-B injections but his requirement is more. These injections are

not available in the hospital at present and patients are being treated for Mucormycosis with other anti-fungal drugs," Parasher explained. On Monday, a minister had said 122 patients were admitted in Indore with Mucormycosis. The shortage of Amphotericin-B injections is being highlighted by patients as well

as political leaders over the past few days, including Congress Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh who has written a letter on this issue to the CM. Mucormycosis, a rare and dangerous fungal infection, is being seen in some COVID-19 patients as well as those who have recovered from the infection. —PTI

### EFFORTS MADE TO RAMP UP VACCINE SUPPLY, SAYS MODI

**New Delhi, May 18:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that continuous efforts are being made to ramp up COVID-19 vaccine supply in a big way, asserting that attempts are on to provide states 15-day advance schedule of the inoculation programme as it will allow them to prepare accordingly.

Interacting with state and district officials at a virtual meeting, he described them as "field commanders" in the fight against COVID-19 and said localised containment zones, aggressive testing and sharing correct and complete information with people are weapons to defeat it.

The meeting was attended by district magistrates from 46 districts across nine states.

People's convenience increases when information like bed availability for the sick or the vaccine availability are easily available, Modi said and also asked officials to curb black-marketing and take strict action should be taken against those who do so.

Noting that coronavirus infections are decreasing in some states and increasing in some others, he emphasised the need to be more vigilant in the face of decreasing tally and underlined that he has always stressed that the fight is about saving every single life.

Asserting that vaccination is a strong way to fight COVID, Modi said myths about it have to be collectively rooted out.

The health ministry is streamlining the system and process of vaccination, he said, stressing the need to stop vaccine wastage.

Noting that every district has its own unique challenges, he told officials that they had a free hand to innovate to suit their local needs and asked them to share their feedback about any change in policy they may want without any inhibition.

Hailing officials, the prime minister said many of them worked despite being COVID positive while some lost their family members but they gave duty their foremost priority. "You understand the challenges of your district much better. So when your district wins, the country wins. When your district beats Corona, the country defeats Corona," a PMO statement said quoting Modi.

● Interacting with state and district officials and hailing them at a virtual meeting, Modi said localised containment zones, aggressive testing and sharing correct and complete information with people are weapons to defeat it. —PTI

### SHAILAJA NOT PART OF PINARAYI VIJAYAN'S NEW CABINET

**Thiruvananthapuram, May 18:** CPI (M) veteran Pinarayi Vijayan was on Tuesday elected its Parliamentary Party Leader for a second term as Kerala Chief Minister but the omission of health minister KK Shailaja, who played a leading role in the state's fight against Covid-19, from the new cabinet created a flutter.

Vijayan's coalition government will have a fresh look with 11 new CPI (M) members, including his son-in-law P A Mohammed Riyas, national president of DYFI, in a reflection of the party's attempt to infuse fresh blood in the ministry. CPI(M) will have 12 members including Vijayan. CPI and Kerala Congress (M), who are among the other constituents of the Left Democratic Front (LDF), also named new faces— four and one, respectively, to represent their parties in the cabinet. The 77-year-old Vijayan's election comes days after he led the ruling LDF to a stupendous victory in the April 6 Assembly polls, where the alliance won 99 of the 140 seats. However, Shailaja's non-inclusion led to a debate and many eyebrows were raised over the matter.

Shailaja's surprise omission drew instant comparisons with the late KR Gowri Amma, the firebrand Marxist once tipped to head Kerala but never did. —PTI

## 270 docs have died of Covid in second wave of pandemic: IMA

**New Delhi, May 18:** The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday said 270 doctors across the country have succumbed to the coronavirus infection in the second wave of the pandemic so far.

The list of the deceased doctors includes former IMA president Dr K.K. Aggarwal, who succumbed to the deadly virus on Monday.

Bihar saw the maximum number of 78 deaths of medical practitioners, followed by Uttar Pradesh (37), Delhi (29) and Andhra Pradesh (22).

According to the IMA Covid-19 registry, 748 doctors succumbed to the disease in the first wave of the pandemic.

"Last year, 748 doctors across India succumbed to Covid-19, while in the current wave, in a short period, we have lost 270 doctors."

"The second wave of the pandemic is turning out to be extremely fatal for all and especially for the healthcare workers who are at the forefront," IMA president Dr JA Jayalal said. Padma Shri awardee and eminent cardiologist Dr K.K. Aggarwal has died of Covid-19, a statement posted on his Twitter handle said.

Aggarwal (62), the former national president of the Indian Medical

● Bihar saw the maximum number of 78 deaths of medical practitioners, followed by Uttar Pradesh (37), Delhi (29) and Andhra Pradesh (22).

● According to the IMA Covid-19 registry, 748 doctors succumbed to the disease in the first wave of the pandemic.

Association (IMA), was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here and was on ventilator support since last week.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal described his death as a "setback for the whole nation".

"Passing away of Dr. KK Aggarwal is a setback for the whole nation. He acted all his life for the health rights of common people especially poor, deprived or marginalized. A great human being. RIP! (sic)," he wrote on Twitter.

According to the statement posted on Twitter, Aggarwal passed away at 11.30 pm on Monday after a "lengthy battle with Covid-19".

"Even during the pandemic, he made constant efforts to educate the masses and was able to reach out to 100 million people through numerous videos and educational programmes and saved countless lives. He wanted

his life to be celebrated and not mourned," the statement said.

Aggarwal posted videos raising awareness about the deadly virus on his Twitter handle. Even while he was hospitalised, his team at the Heart Care Foundation of India kept uploading videos about Covid-19.

In January, Aggarwal's banter with his wife during a live session on a social media platform had left netizens in splits. In the video, Aggarwal's wife was heard scolding him for going to take the anti-Covid vaccine shot alone and not taking her along.

The former IMA president is survived by wife Dr Veena Agarwal, son Nilesh and daughter Naina. He had received the Padma Shri, the country's fourth-highest civilian honour, in 2010. He was also honoured with the Dr B.C. Roy Award. Aggarwal's name was mentioned in the Limca Book of Records for training the maximum number of people in the lifesaving technique of hands-only CPR at one go.

Aggarwal was born in Delhi on September 5, 1958. He completed his MBBS from MGIMS, Sevagram under the Nagpur University, where he was adjudged the best graduate in 1979. —PTI



Relative of a Covid-19 patient reacts due to non-availability of bed at a hospital in Kolkata, on Tuesday.

—PTI

## Odisha extends lockdown in state by 2 more weeks

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC**  
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 18

The Odisha government on Tuesday extended the lockdown restrictions in the state till June 1 to arrest the steady surge in cases of Covid-19.

The first two-week long lockdown that came into force in the state on May 5 is set to end on Wednesday.

According to chief secretary Suresh Kumar Mohapatra, after thorough consultation with health experts, the government decided to extend the lockdown for two more weeks.

Sources said the State

had exhibited a Test Positivity Rate (TPR) of 20 per cent but after nearly two weeks of lockdown, the TPR has now dipped to 18.2 per cent.

This apart, in another major development, the government revised the period of relaxation for availing of essential commodities from 6 am to 12 pm daily to 7 am to 11 am.

"The weekend shutdown will however continue as usual. Tighter restrictions will be clamped during the weekends and violators will be strictly dealt with," chief secretary Mr Mohapatra informed through a virtual press briefing.

### FIGHTING | COVID

**Over 1,000 children, parents reach out to govt helpline to tackle Covid woes**

## Kids, parents open up about Covid stress

**New Delhi, May 18:** From facing loneliness in Covid-19 isolation ward to exhibiting aggressive behaviour after parents contracted the virus, over 1,000 children and parents have reached out to government helpline seeking help.

With an objective of providing psychological first-aid and emotional support to children affected during the pandemic, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is providing tele-counselling to children through Samvedna

(Sensitising Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance) - a toll-free helpline launched to provide psycho-social mental support for affected children.

According to Women and Child Development Ministry officials, redressal of 1,009 complaints have been done between September, 2020 to May 7, 2021.

In a case from a Covid-19 isolation centre in Aurangabad, a 15-year-old child expressed frustra-

tion over not getting enough love from parents due to more number of siblings and called up to talk about her parents' pressure of getting her married early.

The counsellor spoke to the child and her parents and suggested to encourage her to focus on academics.

In another case, parent of a six-year-old child in Kanpur called to discuss the aggressive behaviour of their child who was lodged in an isolation centre after contracting the virus.

The counsellor suggested that the child engage in different activities like narrating stories or playing with toys. It was found that as the parents were keeping to themselves after the family tested positive, the child was feeling lonely and exhibiting aggressive behaviour.

A 17-year-old boy from Madhya Pradesh's Singrauli isolation centre called up and talked about being scared of loneliness. The counsellor advised him to spend time engaging in activities he is interested in and making a reg-

ular routine to get away from boredom.

This tele-counselling service is available on a toll-free number 1800-121-2830 from Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 1 pm and 3 pm to 8 pm and is exclusively for children who are willing to talk and are in need of counselling.

When a child/caretaker/parent dials Samvedna, they get to speak to a professional counsellor in a safe environment. Tele-counselling is provided to children under three categories: children who are in quarantine/isolation/Cov-

id care centres, children who have Covid positive parents or family members, and children who have lost their parents due to the pandemic.

This service caters to children from all over India in various regional languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Oriya, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, the Women and Child Development Ministry said.

This service was launched in September 2020 and aims to support children in the difficult times of pandemic. —PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## 23 RESCUED FROM SUSPECTED SMUGGLING BOAT

**San Diego, May 18:** Twenty-three people were rescued Monday from a suspected smuggling boat off the San Diego coast not far from where another vessel broke up a few weeks ago, killing three people, authorities said.

The small boat, known as a panga, was spotted shortly before 3 am by a US Border Patrol video system as it drifted near rocks off the coast of Point Loma. The Coast Guard responded but the craft refused commands to stop, authorities said. The boat got stuck in the surf line. San Diego lifeguards and harbour police were called and the Coast Guard pulled the vessel out of the surf and unloaded the people, authorities said.

## MALAYSIAN COPS KILL PHILIPPINE MILITANTS

**Kuala Lumpur, May 18:** Five suspected members of Philippine militant group Abu Sayyaf have been shot dead in a fire-fight with police on the Malaysian part of Borneo island, authorities said Tuesday.

Police were attacked by men armed with guns and machetes Monday when they raided a settlement near the town of Beaufort in Sabah state, and returned fire.

"Five male suspects were successfully defeated," said Sabah police commissioner Hazani Ghazali in a statement.

They were believed to be from the Abu Sayyaf group, police said, self-proclaimed Islamic militants whose stronghold is in the Muslim-majority southern Philippines, not far from Sabah.

One of them has been identified as Mabab Binda, a militant leader on the Philippine police's wanted list, Malaysian newspaper *The Star* reported.

## MORE THAN 50 DROWN OFF TUNISIA

**Tunis, May 18:** Tunisian authorities say more than 50 migrants have drowned off the coast of the North African country, while 33 others were rescued by workers from an oil platform.

Defence Ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said Tuesday that a boat carrying the migrants sank Monday off Sfax, on Tunisia's southeast coast. He said navy units were sent to search the water for missing passengers.

Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesperson for the Mediterranean coordination office of the International Organisation for Migration, said on Twitter that the 33 survivors were all from Bangladesh.

The boat departed from Zwara, Libya, on Sunday, he said. The nationalities of the people who died were not immediately clear.

## PIO PLEADS GUILTY TO WIRE FRAUD IN U.S.

**Washington, May 18:** An Indian-American in Maryland has pleaded guilty to wire fraud and identity theft in connection with a fraudulent investment scheme worth approximately \$1.26 million, according to the Department of Justice.

Manish Singh, 48, faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison when sentenced on July 30.

"In the midst of a jury trial, the defendant admitted that he deceived victims into believing they were investing more than \$1.2 million in a high-end fabric design business, when in reality, he fraudulently used their money to fund personal expenses," said Raj Parekh.

## EU hits 200-million vaccine jab milestone

Figure indicates it is on track to meet its target of fully vaccinating 70 percent of adults by late July

**Brussels, May 18:** At least 200 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines have been given in the European Union as of Tuesday, according to AFP data tallying up official figures given by member states' health services.

The milestone indicates that the European Union should be on track to meet its goal of fully vaccinating 70 percent of adults — meaning roughly 255 million people out of its total 448 million population — by late July.

As of 0830 GMT, at least 200 million doses have been administered in the European Union, according to the AFP data.

At least 52.9 million people have been completely vaccinated, with two doses in the case of the vaccines from BioNTech/Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca, or one dose for those inoculated with the single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

That figure amounts to 11.8 percent of the European Union population. The data showed that Malta was leading the European Union table, with 32.5 percent of its small population fully vaccinated, while Bulgaria was trailing badly, with just 6.1 percent having been inoculated.

Of the big European Union countries, Germany has 11.1 percent fully vaccinated, France has 13.5 percent, Italy has 14.6 percent and Spain has 15.4 percent.

Globally, the AFP data showed that 1.5 billion doses have been administered.

By way of comparison with other wealthy territories, Israel has 59 percent of its population inoculated with two doses, while the United States has 35 percent fully vaccinated, and Great Britain has 30 percent done.

The European Commission, contacted by AFP, did not immediately respond with comment about the vaccination milestone.

It did however say that its vaccine export authorisation mechanism had, between January 30 and May 11, approved 941 export requests from pharmaceutical companies producing Covid-19 vaccines in the European Union and rejected one —



A make-up artist applies the finishing touches to the wax statue of US President Joe Biden as it is unveiled at the Musee Grévin wax museum in Paris on Tuesday. The museum is expected to reopen on Wednesday after months of closure due to the Coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## Shuttered Oz becoming hermit nation, say experts

**Sydney, May 18:** Prime Minister Scott Morrison defended his "Fortress Australia" Covid-19 restrictions Tuesday, as experts warned that plans to keep the borders closed for another year will create a "hermit nation".

"Everyone is keen to get back to a time that we once knew," the conservative leader said in the face of growing calls for international borders to reopen.

"The reality is we're living this year in a pandemic that's worse than last year." Last March, Australia took the unprecedented step of closing its borders to foreign visitors

and banning its globetrotting citizens from leaving. That prompted the first population decline since World War I, stranded tens of thousands of Australian citizens overseas and separated hundreds of thousands of residents from family members.

But the country now has almost no community transmission and life for most is relatively normal. And the government's recent suggestion that borders could remain closed for another year has sparked fierce debate.

Australian Medical Association president Omar Khorshid on Tuesday warned:

"Australia cannot keep its international borders closed indefinitely." He called for improved quarantine facilities and vaccination efforts to permit borders to slowly open. "At some point, it will not be possible to justify the maintenance of border closures given their impact on lives and livelihoods," he said.

A University of Sydney task force examining how Australia can safely reopen this week went further, warning the country "cannot continue to lock itself off from the world as a hermit nation indefinitely". — AFP

## ALL GERMANS IN TWO HIGH-RISES QUARANTINED

**Berlin, May 18:** Health officials say they have quarantined the residents of two high-rise buildings in the western German town of Velbert after several people tested positive with the Coronavirus variant first detected to India.

Officials from the county of Mettmann said "there are currently several infections with the Indian virus variant in Velbert." They said several families who were in close touch with each other were affected and that everyone was being tested.

Local broadcaster WDR reported about 200 people in the two buildings were affected. They have been quarantined, are getting tested and the Red Cross is providing food and other help. So far, the Covid-19 variant that was first detected in India has not been found a lot in Germany, but is said to be more contagious than other variants currently more prevalent. — AP

## WOMAN HEADS CANADA VAX DRIVE

**Montreal, May 18:** Coordination of Canada's Coronavirus vaccination campaign is set to be taken over by another army general, the public health agency said Monday, after a probe into allegations of

sexual misconduct sidelined her predecessor.

Brigadier General Krista Brodie, a logistic expert who served in the Balkans and Afghanistan, is to replace General Dany Fortin. — AFP

## Myanmar arms ban meet put off

**United Nations, May 18:** A UN General Assembly meeting set for Tuesday to discuss a non-binding resolution on halting arms transfers to Myanmar was postponed indefinitely because there was not enough support to pass the text, diplomatic sources said Monday.

The authors "did not have the support they expected" in order to pass the motion with a large majority of the Assembly's 193 member countries, one diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

And they "wanted more time for negotiations," especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, another source said. The text was drafted at the request of Liechtenstein, with the support of 48 countries, including Britain, the European Union and the United

States — but with South Korea as the only Asian country signed on.

South Korea's support came after several weeks of negotiations in an effort to gain the backing of at least one Asean country.

The resolution, which would have been non-binding but politically powerful, called for the "immediate suspension of the direct and indirect supply, sale, or transfer of all weapons, munitions, and other military-related equipment to Myanmar." It asked for military authorities in Myanmar — which took control of government operations in a coup February 1 — to "end the state of emergency" and to "immediately stop all violence against peaceful demonstrators." — AFP

## Belarus raids independent news site

**Minsk, May 18:** Authorities in Belarus raided the offices of the country's largest independent news outlet and took down its website on Tuesday, management said, signalling a widening crackdown after historic opposition protests last year.

Journalists in the ex-Soviet nation are facing mounting pressure in the wake of the protests against contested elections won by strongman President Alexander Lukashenko. The long-serving authoritarian leader has drawn scorn from the West, and the United States and EU have slapped sanctions on him and his allies.

The Tut.by news portal on Tuesday became the latest media targeted by authorities in Belarus, with security agents searching the offices and homes of journalists working for the site, its editor-in-chief said.

The outlet was then taken offline entirely. "TUT.by co-founder Kirill Voloshin reports that the website's domain has been blocked," the news organisation reported on its Telegram channel.

AFP journalists said the site was unavailable in Belarus, Russia and France.

Editor-in-chief Marina Zolotova earlier said that members of a state financial investigations

department had searched her home and the homes of several of her employees.

"Representatives of security agencies also came to the newsroom," she said, adding that she was unable to get in touch with

several Tut.by employees. The state control committee's financial investigations department, which confirmed the searches, is a powerful enforcement body that has previously targeted the opposition.

— AFP

## JAPAN DROPS IMMIGRATION BILL REFORM

**Tokyo, May 18:** Japan's ruling lawmakers on Tuesday dropped a controversial push to change rules on handling asylum seekers and deportations after opposition pressure over the death of a Sri Lankan woman.

The proposed legislation included changes making it easier to deport unsuccessful asy-

lum seekers, something that was heavily criticised by rights groups. Opposition mounted after the death in March of a Sri Lankan woman — identified by supporters as 33-year-old Wishma Sandamali — in immigration detention.

She was detained for overstaying her visa after seeking police protection, reportedly to escape an abusive relationship.

Sandamali reportedly complained repeatedly of stomach pain and other symptoms, starting in January, and campaigners allege she was given inadequate medical care. The cause of her death has not been officially disclosed.

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— AFP

## BETTER CONVERSATION

## Songs and oral sources are used to fill gaps where no records exist

## Dutch slavery exhibition confronts brutal past

**Amsterdam, May 18:** A set of leg irons that once chained slaves by the ankles for punishment. A pair of Rembrandt portraits of a rich Dutch couple dressed in slavery-funded finery.

Dozens of objects like these go on show on Tuesday at the Dutch national Rijksmuseum as it opens a landmark exhibition on slavery highlighting the Netherlands' dark colonial past.

Focusing on the stories of 10 people ranging from enslaved people to slave owners, the show covers 250 years of Dutch involve-

ment in slavery in Suriname, Brazil, the Caribbean, Asia and South Africa.

Curators at the museum in Amsterdam say they want to start a "better conversation" in a country still reckoning with its role in colonialism, and with questions raised by the Black Lives Matter movement last year.

"This is national history, not just for a small group but for every one of us," Valika Smeulders, head of the Rijksmuseum history department, said during a preview.

"The colonial past is an important element in our

national history. So it was timely, as it was not done before, to present an exhibition on slavery." In a sign of the changing times, Dutch King Willem-Alexander will formally open the exhibition Tuesday. It will open to the public as soon as Coronavirus measures are lifted for museums, but be viewable immediately online and for school parties.

Called simply "Slavery", the exhibit traces the 10 individual stories using both objects from the Rijksmuseum's collection — some never seen before — and from other museums.

But it also uses songs and oral sources, which visitors listen to on an audio tour, to fill the gaps where no records exist.

"They tell about people who had to leave their children behind, or they feel they're treated as tools and not human beings," said Eveline Sint Nicolaas, senior curator in the history department. One story is that of Wally, a slave on the Palmeneribo plantation in Suriname, who took part in a slave revolt in 1707 and escaped but was then recaptured and burned to death.

Paintings of slaves on the

plantation sit alongside a manuscript detailing Wally's interrogation by slave owners.

Like the other stories in the exhibition, his tale is told in the auditorium by someone with a connection — in his case Dutch former world champion kickboxer Remy Bonjasky, whose ancestors are believed to have fled the same plantation.

Elsewhere sit the austere portraits of affluent Amsterdammer Oopjen Coppit and her husband Marten Soolmans, which they commissioned legendary artist Rembrandt to

paint in 1634.

Soolmans' family made a fortune from a sugar refinery supplied by slave plantations in Brazil. After he died, Oopjen remarried to a man who had once kept slaves in Brazil.

"We know Oopjen had several links with slavery and that's also very interesting," said Sint Nicolaas. "It really affected Dutch society in many ways, it wasn't history that just happened far away in the colonies." The exhibition features jarring contrasts of art and atrocity, brushstrokes and branding irons. — AFP

NORTHERN RAILWAY NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
Name of work and its location	30-Elect-35-T-R1-20-21-E3 Operation and Comprehensive AMC of inverter technology based/ digital scroll variable refrigerant flow/ volume (VRV/RV) type air conditioning system installed at Rail Bhawan New Delhi.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs.147.67 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Earnest Money	Rs. 00.
Date & time of submission of tender	10.06.2021, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	10.06.2021, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & notice board	www.ireps.gov.in & Sr. Divl. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
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PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited	
Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001 Corporate Identification Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813, Website: www.pspcl.in (Contact Number: 96461-18774)	
Tender Enquiry No. MQP-177/2021-22/PO(M)	Dated: 18.05.2021
Chief Engineer/Metering, C-3, Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala, invites E-tender for Design Supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning, Reading, Analysis and 8 year O&M of 1, 17,500 number Smart Meters, AMI system & Communication infrastructure with a network platform in Agar Nagar Special Division of Ludhiana City on Turnkey Basis (OPEX Model). For detailed NIT and tender specification, please refer to <a href="https://eproc.punjab.gov.in">https://eproc.punjab.gov.in</a> from 18.05.2021 from 05:00 PM onwards.	
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <a href="https://eproc.punjab.gov.in">https://eproc.punjab.gov.in</a>	
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NORTHERN RAILWAY Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement System				
Principal Chief materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-				
S.No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
1	06201002C	PIC IRON FOR FOUNDRY PURPOSE GRADE-3.4	244187 KGS	10.06.2021
2	14210858E	COMPRESSED OXYGEN GAS FOR INDUSTRIAL USE	558100 CUM	11.06.2021
3	022202509B	200AH LEAD ACID LOW MAINTENANCE BATTERY SET	20 SET	11.06.2021
4	09212384A	LOAD SENSING VALVE TYPE VTA	5380 NOS.	21.06.2021
5	09212199	SLACK ADJUSTER COMPLETE TYPE IRSA-600	2050 NOS.	21.06.2021
6	09212488	CENTRE PIVOT TOP FOR BLC WAGON	2464 NOS.	21.06.2021
Note: 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.				
Tender Manual No. : 11/2021-2022 Dated 18.05.2021				1056/21
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## DECCAN Chronicle

19 MAY 2021

### CBI's partisanship mars its actions over Narada

Those who are found to have broken the law must face the full force of the law. In a democracy no one is too high to be placed above this principle, which cannot but apply in the case of the West Bengal ministers and MLAs arrested in the Narada sting case that came to light in 2016 though the sting had been carried out two years earlier.

Where public servants are concerned — and the expression includes legislators — there is a moral dimension as well. They are keepers of public trust and exercise authority, including over public finances, in the name of the people. When they misuse their position for their private gain, the faith of the people in the system as a whole is shaken, and that is why they must not be permitted to get away when they do that.

However, in order that public servants are not harassed through motivated or frivolous complaints, or for vexatious ends, procedures are laid down for their investigation or arrest. The first step here is grant of sanction for their prosecution by appropriate authority.

In the case of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's ministers — Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee — and MLA and former minister Madan Mitra — ordinarily the Speaker of the Assembly should have been the proper authority to accord sanction for their prosecution. This is pretty much standard procedure.

Instead, state governor Jagdeep Dhankar, who appears to be fast acquiring a reputation for political partisanship losing over his status as high constitutional authority, was approached by the CBI and the arrests followed in five days flat.

The Assembly had just been constituted after the recent state election and the Speaker would have been place in a matter of days. Yet, the CBI chose to approach the governor for sanction although it could just easily have waited a few days more in such an old case. This cannot but re-confirm its status as the Centre's "caged parrot". Sadly, the governor did not send the file back either. This is so much the pity and does no good to India's claim to be a constitutional democracy.

Is it not a little curious that the CBI did not seek permission for the prosecution of Mukul Roy, who defected to BJP some years ago, and Suvendu Adhikari, who defected to the saffron party weeks before the recent election and is now the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly? This episode re-asserts the widely held impression that the BJP has become a dry-cleaner and acquiring its membership permits allegedly tainted politicians to come out smelling of roses.

This is a time when a responsible Centre should be working in partnership with states to fight the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government's priority evidently lies elsewhere.

It is signalling that after BJP's emphatic defeat at the hands of the Trinamul Congress in the recent state polls, the Centre would take the fight against the legitimate victors to the extremes through the blatant manipulation of procedures even at the cost of hurting the spirit of democracy. Centre-state relations become collateral damage in such a scenario. Development and people's welfare will be on the backburner as political fights escalate, probably in the end leading to street battles. Truly, all this means the willful negation of the mandate of the people.

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### Taxes & FDI: Change attitude

It is one of life's simplest aphorisms that you can't have the cake and eat it too. If the Government of India's approach to getting foreign investment is akin to having the cake, its attitude towards trade disputes in which foreign investors emerge victorious as in international arbitration is the equivalent of wanting to eat the cake. The Scottish oil exploration company Cairn Energy has exposed this contradiction in official India's approach even as it has escalated the process by moving to attach Air India's properties abroad on the legal premise that the national carrier is India's alter ego.

A law on retrospective taxation that the previous UPA government passed in 2012 had proved extremely damaging to the country's reputation as an investment destination. Vodafone hit the arbitration trail to expose India's income tax claims as arbitrary. The basic approach hasn't changed despite NDA being in the saddle when losing such claims in arbitration awards. Far from being graceful in defeat and settling, official India has pursued matters legally through appeal and this after having acted in a questionable and predatory manner in the Cairn issue by selling the company's assets and shares to monetise its claims.

Official India can lay a claim to a sovereign right to its tax laws but this does little for the image of a country desperately seeking foreign investments in industry as they come with considerable job generating qualities while also fulfilling the "make in India" criterion dear to the central government as a policy initiative best serving national interests. At one time, there were as many as 17 claims, stemming from disputes over undelivered incentives, retrospective taxation and payment disputes, with regard to investments under bilateral treaties through which capital flowed into India.

The impression India leaves in potential foreign investors is it is a difficult country to deal with because its track record is not that good in keeping its word and delivering on promises after attracting investments. Only a change in attitude can help correct that and settling Cairn's \$1.2 billion award would be one way to demonstrate that India is keen on facilitating ease of doing business.

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Sanjay Kumar



### The political fallout of the Covid crisis across India

Various factors contributed to the BJP's poor performance in the West Bengal Assembly elections and one can't relate its poor showing only to the severe Covid-19 crisis and its mismanagement across the country. But the political fallout of the Covid crisis and its mismanagement for the BJP can't be ruled out. The results of the Uttar Pradesh panchayat elections have already given a glimpse of the challenge the BJP may face in the near future. It faced a tough challenge from the Samajwadi Party in the panchayat polls. The severe health crisis that India is facing at the moment may not have yet made the extremely popular Prime Minister Narendra Modi unpopular, but disappointment among a large number of Indians has started building. People may not directly blame the PM for the present health crisis, though some do, but what seems to have disappointed many Indians is his continued campaign for his party in West Bengal, which saw eight phases of voting.

With Covid cases rising alarmingly in several states, and cities gasping for

oxygen, there were even demands to merge the last few phases of the West Bengal polls to reduce the campaign, but the Centre was silent and BJP leaders continued to address big rallies in that state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi cancelled his rallies, which seems to have done damage control over people's disenchantment with Mr Modi, but the Election Commission, that announced a ban on big rallies hours after Mr Modi's announcement that he was cancelling his rallies, created the perception among ordinary people that his move was guided by the EC's decision, of which he may have got a hint in advance.

What seems to have disappointed many people is Mr Modi's somewhat delayed effort in trying to address the Covid crisis, weeks after India plunged from one crisis to another - from non-availability of beds to the shortage of oxygen, not to mention the non-availability of ventilators for patients in desperate need of it for treatment. When the country faced these multiple health crises, what people saw was Prime Minister Modi addressing several election rallies in West Bengal. People saw

this as a huge contrast to last year's Covid crisis and Mr Modi's handling of it. Last year, when Covid-19 had just erupted in India, Prime Minister Modi was in full command, as he took charge and announced a nationwide lockdown. There was criticism of the way the lockdown was announced and implemented without giving advance notice, but overall Mr Modi was applauded for his bold decision which seemed to have prevented the spread of Covid-19 across India.

Now, when people were looking towards Mr Modi for his leadership in handling this crisis, he failed to establish a connect with people. Citizens remember that during last year's crisis, that was far less severe than this one, he led from the front, addressed the nation several times, and kept a connect with ordinary people. It is true that the Centre is trying its best to solve even this present crisis and started the import of Covid vaccines and oxygen, along with several other such steps, but these should have been done much earlier. Though the Centre took these initiatives, at the same time it always tried to shift the responsibility to state

governments, on the ground that health is a state subject. Putting the blame on state governments for the current health disaster was not appreciated by most people. It is important to note that there has been no change in the constitutional provisions — health was a state subject last year, as it is this year - so why did the Centre take all the praise last year and now, as things are going out of hand, is trying to pass the blame to the states?

What might complicate the issue further and contribute to the growing disenchantment of people with the Central government, Prime Minister Modi and the BJP, is the emerging controversy around the pricing of the Covid vaccines. Not that there were no controversies around vaccination earlier, there were news about a shortage of vaccines and India having exported vaccines to various countries, but the *tu-tu-mai-mai* between the states and New Delhi may increase further on the differential pricing of the vaccines. It is understood that as of now the same vaccine will be procured by the states at a higher price, but it would be available to the Centre at a lower price. This dif-

ferential price is understandable if it is between private and government hospitals, but it is hard for an ordinary citizen to understand why he has to pay a higher price if he is given a vaccine purchased by a state government and a lesser price if the same vaccine is purchased by the Central government.

What seems to have made people feel unhappy with the Centre is its lack of initiative in negotiating with the Serum Institute of India for a better price, and instead advising the states to negotiate the price themselves. The question is — why can't the Centre take the initiative on this? This is not a "normal" health crisis across the country, in the midst of a raging pandemic, the question of whether health is a state subject or not should not even arise. Some states may have erred in their preparations, but it is not the time to play the blame game. This is a time for all the states and the Centre to work together and fight a national calamity.

*The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. The views expressed here are personal.*

Subhani



### India can vaccinate swiftly by using 'mohalla method'



Probal DasGupta

The irony is stark. Millions scramble for oxygen cylinders and hospital beds, oscillating between life and death. Around the same time, several other millions decided the political fortunes of five states/UTs.

Earlier this year, Indians defied a mortal fear of the coronavirus and voted in large numbers, with a turnout of 70 per cent or higher across states. On jabs, though, it was different. A listless rollout plan curtailed the availability of vaccines and people's tentativeness only hastened the inevitable. In two weeks, a second wave swept India, spiralling into its biggest crisis. An overpowered medical infrastructure burst at its seams.

But that's not the point. While every life-saving equipment is a survival kit, it's the pace of vaccinations that will ultimately ensure India's endurance against the virus. The point is: the secret to winning this war lies in our learning from past experience, including elections.

January 13, 2011 was a historic day for India. A two-year old child in West Bengal was found crippled by polio but was later cured. It was the last time polio would strike here. That day, India became polio-free. Two years earlier, India housed half the world's polio cases. No one thought the country could ever eradicate it. However, aided by the state, Unicef and others, India's feverish campaign against polio, led by 2.5 million vaccinators, touched 200 million homes, with 700,000 vaccinations in each round. Despite its challenges of poor infrastructure, India relied on its strengths: a "mohalla", or community, outreach.

Today, only 12 per cent Indians have got their first dose, against 50 per cent in America. Currently, the vaccination rate is less than half million a day, sometimes falling further, given the shortage of vaccines. At this rate, it may take until summer 2022 to vaccinate 75 per cent of India. Are we prepared for more casualties until then?

A more dynamic and swifter pace of vaccinations is the antidote to arrest fatality numbers, build confidence and encourage a quicker economic revival. The polio experience is a test case. Juxtaposing the polling principle onto the vaccine execution plan gives it the kick it requires. The polling database, with details of citizens and their residences, is a ready master-sheet. In December 2020, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked (then) chief election commissioner Sunil Arora to identify people above 50 at the polling station level. A promising start was made, but the plan ignored key aspects of our election experience. We should replicate our polling expertise, that was used in the polio campaign: the "mohalla method".

Currently, the approach of using hospitals for vaccinations has proved counterproductive. A sudden desperation and opening up of vaccinations for the 18-44 age group has led to longer queues. This inevitably means a high probability of an infection while on a hospital visit. Using the CoWin platform to register and then showing up with identifiers like PAN or Aadhaar cards at selected job centres like schools, community halls or sports venues often used as polling booths will decentralise the process. Mumbai and Gurgaon recently started "drive-in" jabs. More such measures must be undertaken across the country. The aim should be to reach people, rather than herding them at overcrowded hospitals.

The "mohalla method" will increase vaccinated numbers in clusters. The knock-on effect is that as

neighbourhoods vaccinate, infections will slow down in clusters, creating identifiable safe zones. Earmarked vaccinated zones enable city administrations to loosen lockdowns methodically in areas where jabs have crossed high numbers and infections have fallen.

Using age as the sole criteria for prioritisation, instead of a combination of age, economic status and population density, was always expected to pose challenges. The prioritisation of senior citizens meant most people unlikely to go to work were vaccinated first. Next in line were the 45-plus population, many of whom can afford private vehicles. The most vulnerable population was the 18-45 age group — where more people use public transport. Given India has over 70 per cent people under 45, and most frontline workers including delivery personnel fall in this category, the approach meant most of India was unvaccinated against the second wave.

States with worse Covid numbers could form the bigger focus in this vaccination plan. At a city level, densely populated areas require more vaccine booths — based on voter lists from elections. Citizens who aren't on voters' lists in their neighbourhoods can use Aadhaar cards. This also helps those facing a tech challenge in online registrations.

The "mohalla method" demands deployment of substantial numbers of health workers, logistics, and vaccines. Cynics may say this isn't possible. But it actually works. India has over 12 lakh medical professionals, 7-8 lakh alternative medicine professionals, around two lakh medical students, diagnostic centre professionals,

armed forces doctors, nursing assistants to provide jabs, the local police and paramilitary to handle the logistics and the armed forces to provide administrative support. Every neighbourhood can plan 5-6 centres of 25-30 volunteers each. Neighbourhood clusters could be simultaneously vaccinated in around 45-60 days (given availability of healthcare resources, vaccine supplies and errors in calculation). We can reach a national jab rate of 10 million (one crore) a day, which means vaccinating the country in 4-5 months. In a worst-case scenario, if a third wave were to arrive in late 2021, most of India would have been vaccinated.

But do we have vaccines? Choosing just two vaccines and then exporting them when just eight per cent of India was vaccinated was bound to lead to shortages. India needs over two billion jabs. Scaling up is a no-brainer. J&J's Phase 3 trials are set to begin. Russia's Sputnik V is here and will be distributed by Dr Reddy's Labs. Bharat Biotech has ramped up its capacity from 200 million to 700 million doses a year. India has asked for a waiver on intellectual property and barriers on vaccines from Europe and America.

It's taken a catastrophe for us to realise we must speed up vaccinations. To execute the blueprint, the bottom line is to shed lethargic bureaucracy and ensure an efficient supply chain and execution. A crisis taskforce needs to have a crack team of senior experts from amongst medical professionals, the armed forces and civil services. Like the polio campaign earlier, a targeted media campaign involving cricket and movie stars must be the focus. The campaign must be on a war footing and the national leadership has to make this period count. The war isn't over till we have enough ammunition to fight for our citizens. And we must vaccinate to win.

*The writer, a retired Army officer, is the author of Watershed 1967, based on a forgotten war between India and China, and a member of the guest faculty at New York's Columbia University*

**We can reach a national jab rate of 10 million (one crore) a day, which means vaccinating the country in 4-5 months. If a third wave were to arrive in late 2021, most of India would have been vaccinated.**

### LETTERS

#### KI RA NO MORE

I had the very fortunate experience of meeting Ki Ra, a legend in Tamil Literature, in the 1970s and I cherish the same till date. Ki Ra had contributed a novel by name Kidai which deals with sheep shearing and it was part of a book named Arusuvai published by Late Mrs Lakshmi of Vasakar Vattam. I went to meet Ki Ra along with Saketh, son of Thi Janakiraman, the famed Tamil writer. We started talking in English and Ki Ra honestly admitted that he did not know English at all but he was one of the finest of modern writers in Tamil.

**Venugopalan S by email**

#### STALIN MUST UNDERSTAND

The CM of TN would have well understood that running a state administration as its head is not as easy as blaming the incumbent CM for every cough and sneeze in every act of the government while sitting in the opposition. In the last five years the state had witnessed many demonstrations of enmity, animosity and hatred towards Modi and the slogan "Go back Modi" was the refrain on the lips of every DMK cadre. Stalin would have realised that the state cannot survive on its own without the Centre's help and cooperation. With a sober well behaved and soft spoken person EPS as the leader of opposition one can hope to witness smooth conduct of Assembly proceedings with constructive debates and conciliation and consultation bidding adieu to the old habits of walkouts, acrimony and accusations, with anger prevailing over common sense and etiquette. A sensible chapter in the conduct of the newly elected MLAs is expected. They should be honest enough to concede and acknowledge the tremendous help rendered by the Centre during the testing period of the second tsunami of Covid.

**Kooduthuraiyan, Coimbatore**



quick  
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,203.73	1.26
Nifty 50	15,108.10	1.24
S&P 500*	4,159.06	-0.10
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.58	-0.30
Euro (₹)	88.95	0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,833.333	0.69
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.56	-2.74
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.976	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.654	0.014

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Credit Suisse to hire over 1,000 IT staff in India

Credit Suisse Group said it planned to hire over 1,000 IT employees in India this year to show its commitment to the country and its intention to establish it as a global technology innovation centre for the bank. The hires will comprise developers and engineers with capabilities in technologies such as cybersecurity, data analytics, cloud, API development, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

## Canara Bank registers ₹ 1,011 cr profit in Q4

**New Delhi, May 18:** Canara Bank on Tuesday reported a stand-alone profit of ₹1,010.87 for the fourth quarter ended March 2021 as provision for bad loans declined. The bank had posted a net loss of ₹3,259.33 crore during the corresponding January-March 2020 quarter. Total income on a standalone basis during January-March rose to ₹21,522.60 crore as against ₹14,222.39 crore in the year-ago period, Canara Bank said in a regulatory filing. The lender's provision for non-performing assets (NPAs) declined to ₹4,427.53 crore for the March 2021 quarter compared to ₹4,875.28 crore parked aside in the corresponding period of 2019-20. For the full 2020-21, there was a profit of ₹2,557.58 as against the loss of ₹2,235.72 crore during 2019-20.

## Maruti opens ₹126-cr hospital in Ahmedabad

Maruti Suzuki, in partnership with Zydus Hospitals, has announced the start of a multi-speciality hospital at Sitapur in Ahmedabad. With a total capital expenditure of Rs 126 crore, the hospital has been fully funded by the Maruti Suzuki Foundation—a CSR initiative of Maruti Suzuki. At present, it is being used as a Covid care facility to help treat patients in the region. The facility is expected to serve more than 3.75 lakh people.

## Ujjivan SFB Q4 net jumps 86% to ₹136 crore

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (SFB) reported an 86 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 136 crore for the fourth quarter from Rs 73 crore a year ago. Total income was down by 9 per cent at Rs 735 crore from Rs 810 crore. Net interest income also fell by 21 per cent to Rs 368 crore against Rs 467 crore. "The quarter was exceptionally good. Our disbursement was at an all-time high," MD & CEO Nitin Chugh said.

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■ Occupancies improve, but revenues nearly halve

# Covid hotels stay in biz on thin margins

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

In order to address the scarcity of beds, hospitality chains have tied up with hospitals to provide accommodation with care for Covid patients. While this has improved the occupancies, the revenues are significantly lower.

Since mid-April, several hospitality chains, including Taj Hotels, Ginger, ITC, Crowne Plaza, Radisson, Sarovar, Welcomhotel and Oyo, have opened their properties for Covid patients with mild symptoms as well those seeking isolation.

"At present, we have over 80 active quarantine and isolation facilities. Additionally, we have mapped and ensured readiness across 750 properties, which can be turned into quarantine centres across



the country, in case the need arises or demand increases," said Rohit Kapoor, CEO, Oyo India and South-East Asia.

"For mildly affected employees, we have isolation facilities with health-care service providers. This includes 24\*7 nurse care, on-demand pathology and pharmacy support, daily doctor visits, meals, among other services," he said.

According to Pradeep Shetty, honorary secretary

of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, more than 100 properties should be offering accommodation to Covid patients across key cities. "The occupancies should have been otherwise nil in these hotels due to the lockdown and Covid fears. Now the properties would be having around 30 per cent occupancies," he said.

However, the revenues are significantly low for the rooms. Some of the

state governments have capped the room rates for these facilities. As per the directive of the Delhi government, five star properties should not charge more than Rs 5,000 per patient per day and Rs 4,000 for four and three star properties.

"The average revenues per room would be around 50 per cent of the usual tariffs. Further, there could be some revenue sharing with the hospital partner," said Shetty.

According to Jaison Chacko, secretary general, FHRAI, there is also reluctance from the part of the staff. "We have been requesting the government to categorise hotel staff as frontline workers and provide them vaccination.

Most of the hotel employees are not vaccinated and this puts their lives at risk," he said.

# Sensex rises above 50000 pts, Nifty regains 15K zone

**RAVI RANJAN PRASAD**  
MUMBAI, MAY 18

The market trended higher for the second consecutive session on further drop in fresh daily Covid cases and gained over 1.2 per cent, anticipating limited impact of lockdowns currently in place in various parts of the country.

The Sensex gained 612.60 points, or 1.24 per cent, and settled well above the 50000 mark at 50193. The

Nifty-50 too crossed the 15000-mark to close at two-month high of 15108, gaining 184 points.

"Barring the rising daily deaths and slower vaccination drive, we observe more positivity around the Covid-19 situation. Daily cases have fallen below 0.3 million mark this week with visible peaking, driven by Maharashtra, UP, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana,

Gujarat, MP, Telangana, Jharkhand and Bihar. India's recoveries exceeded daily cases for the first time since mid-March and India's share in global recoveries rose to 53 per cent versus 50 per cent in daily cases," JM Financial said about Covid situation.

"Even as 25 states/Union territories (UT) comprising 90 per cent of GDP have lockdown-like curbs overlapping between May

12 and May 24, cases in 20 states/UTs comprising 70-72 per cent of GDP have peaked. Thus these restrictions could be eased soon," analysts from JM Financial said.

"NSE's India VIX index, an indicator of market volatility fell further by 1.89 per cent from 19.60 to 19.24 levels, a new low for 2021. Declining volatility is supporting the bullish market sentiment," said analysts.

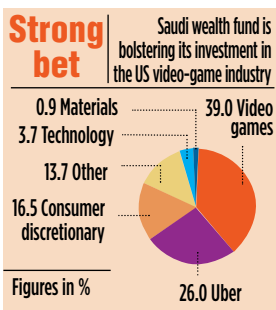
# Saudi wealth fund loads up on video-game makers

**PAUL ABELSKY**  
MAY 18

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund doubled down on its pandemic-era investments in video-game makers and added new bets as it raised holdings of US stocks by about a fifth to \$15.4 billion while exiting oil shares.

The Public Investment Fund brought its total commitment to video-game makers, including Activision Blizzard Inc, Electronic Arts Inc and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc to \$6 billion during the first quarter, according to regulatory filings. Those holdings were valued at \$3.3 billion at the end of the fourth quarter.

The PIF also added to its roster by buying \$141 million worth of stock in South Korean e-commerce



giant Coupang Inc, whose biggest backer is Japanese conglomerate SoftBank Group Corp.

Another new investment last quarter included Compute Health Acquisition Corp, a blank-check company set up by Intel Corp chairman Omar Ishrak, with the PIF buying an 8.7 per cent stake for \$75.7 million. The fund exited its stake in Suncor Energy Inc, Canada's top

integrated oil producer, selling 51 million shares.

The \$400-billion PIF is funded through a mixture of borrowing, cash and asset transfers from the government, and retained earnings from its investments. Chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and managed by governor Yasir Al Rumayyan, the fund has outlined a plan to grow its assets to over 4 trillion riyals (\$1.1 trillion) by 2025.

As the PIF is positioning itself to power the local economy, it's also made several high-profile investments in recent years, including a stake in Uber Technologies Inc and big commitments to Softbank's Vision Fund.

The Riyadh-based fund acquired more than \$3 billion worth of stock in the three US video-game mak-

ers for the first time during the fourth quarter. By contrast, its exposure to US equities in the third quarter fell by \$3 billion, mainly because the PIF sold stakes in exchange-traded funds that track the real estate and materials sectors.

Prince Mohammed is a big fan of video games, particularly "Call of Duty," Activision's best-selling franchise. He told Bloomberg Businessweek in 2016 that he was part of the first Saudi generation to grow up with the gaming technology.

In the first quarter, the fund more than doubled its Activision Blizzard stake to 33.4 million shares and almost doubled its holding in Electronic Arts, reaching 14.2 million shares at the end of March.

—Bloomberg

## LNG IMPORTERS DEFER DELIVERIES ON WEAK DEMAND

**STEPHEN STAPCZYNSKI**  
MAY 18

India's liquefied natural gas importers are asking suppliers to defer deliveries as measures to curb the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus have cut demand for the fuel.

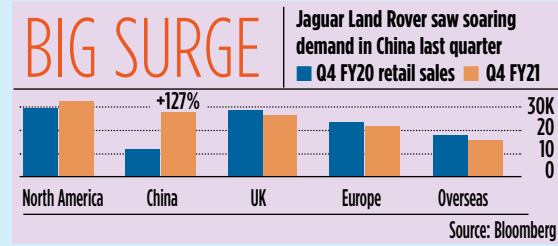
At least three companies, including Indian Oil Corp, have asked to delay shipments slated for May and June delivery, according to traders. Inventories at import terminals in western India, such as Dahej, are near full capacity, the traders said.

The deferrals illustrate the extent of the natural gas glut, which has worsened over the past several weeks. While Indian firms have been accepting most contracted LNG deliveries, they have disappeared from the spot market since the virus worsened last month and shipments became too pricey.

To make matters worse, a cyclone in the vicinity of mport terminals has also forced diversions.

—Bloomberg

# Tata Motors Q4 loss narrows to ₹7,600 cr



**MICHAEL GONSALVES**  
PUNE, MAY 18

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker, which owns British iconic luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), narrowed its losses in the March 2021 quarter.

The Mumbai-based passenger and commercial vehicle maker's consolidated net loss for the quarter came down to Rs 7,605.4 crore, mainly on account of asset write downs in its subsidiary JLR, compared with a net loss of Rs 9,864 crore in the year-ago quarter. The company has incurred cash write downs on assets worth Rs 9,606.1 crore during the quarter. This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. In total, the exceptional loss in Q4 related to JLR stood at nearly Rs 14,000 crore.

It posted a loss of Rs 9,894.2 crore in the corresponding period last year and profit at Rs 2,906.45 crore in the December 2020 quarter.

The carmaker's revenue from operations came in at Rs 88,628 crore for the fourth quarter, up 42 per cent from the revenue of Rs 62,492 crore clocked in

the same quarter last year.

On a standalone basis, Tata Motors reported a net profit of Rs 1,646 crore as against a loss of Rs 4,871 crore in the year-ago period.

For the full financial year 2020-21, the company reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 13,395 crore, against a net loss of Rs 11,975 crore in the previous year.

JLR sold 12 per cent more luxury vehicles in the March quarter as purchases more than doubled in China.

However, Tata Motors has flagged global supply-related challenges, where coronavirus cases are still high in many markets.

"Supply chain issues, in particular for semi-conductors, have become more difficult to mitigate and are now impacting production plans for Q1. The company is working closely with affected suppliers to resolve the issues and minimise the effect on customers," Tata Motors said in an exchange filing on Tuesday.

"While demand remains strong, the supply situation over the next few months is likely to be adversely impacted. We expect Q1 FY22 to be relatively weak," it said.

## DISRUPTIONS MAY DELAY COMPLETION OF HOUSING PROJECTS

**SANGEETHA G**  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Supply chain disruptions and worker migration due to localised lockdowns are affecting the construction of residential properties in key cities. The completion of more than 4 lakh housing units scheduled for this year might be delayed due to these disruptions.

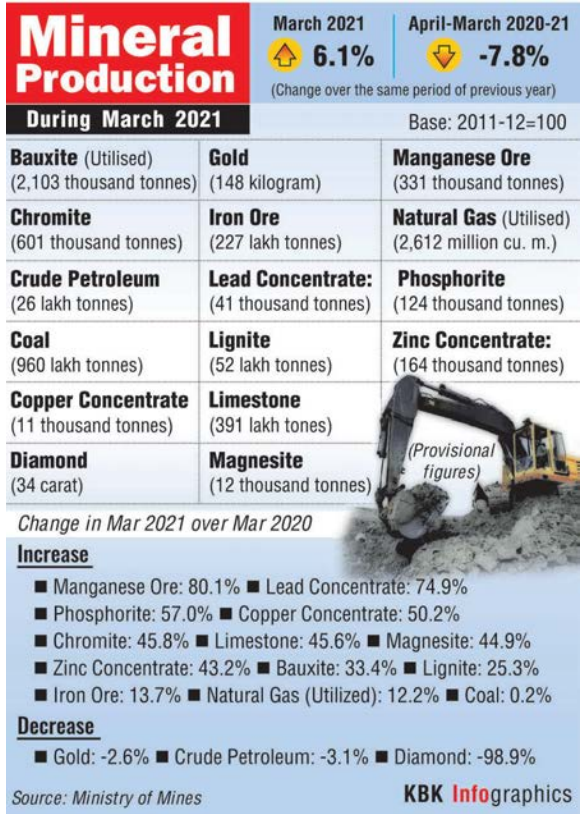
Over 4.22 lakh units are scheduled to be completed by 2021-end across the top 7 cities, according to Anarock Property Consultants. Of this, 72 per cent of the total homes to be delivered by 2021-end are already sold out. Though there is no outright ban now during the current localised lockdowns unlike the first lockdown last year when construction activity came to a complete halt, disruptions in raw material supply chain may cause some delay in completion.

"The tally of 4.22 lakh homes scheduled for delivery across the top 7 cities by 2021-end must, however, be viewed in context with the severe second wave of Covid-19 infections. All the top cities have been affected, and it is likely that a part of these project deliveries will be pushed to 2022," said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

The transportation of raw materials is getting affected due to restrictions. Further, the closure of stores selling non-essential goods and restricted timings are affecting the availability. Most of the construction sites are permitted to deploy only a fraction of the workforce by ensuring social distancing norms. This too has affected the pace of work.

Moreover, the migration of workers to their native places ahead of lock-down in some cities has considerably constrained the construction activity.

"Now, amid the ongoing second wave of Covid-19 and the various curbs due to the lockdown in various states, the sector is facing a gradual slowdown which has made it extremely difficult to sustain the momentum," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.



**STOCKING | UP** Once viewed as liabilities, fatter inventories are back in vogue

# World economy is running low on everything

**BRENDAN MURRAY, ENDA CURRAN & KIM CHIPMAN**  
MAY 18

A year ago, as the pandemic ravaged country after country and economies shattered, consumers were the ones panic-buying. Today, on the rebound, it's companies furiously stocking up.

Mattress producers to car manufacturers to aluminum foil makers are buying more material than they need to survive the breakneck speed at which demand for goods is recovering and assuage that primal fear of running out. The corporate buying and hoarding is pushing supply chains to the brink of seizing up. Shortages, transportation bottlenecks and price spikes are nearing the highest levels in recent memory, raising concern that a supercharged global economy will stoke inflation.

Copper, iron ore and steel. Corn, coffee, wheat and soybeans. Lumber, semiconductors, plastic and cardboard for packaging.



The world is seemingly low on all of it. "You name it, and we have a shortage on it," Tom Linebarger, chairman and chief executive of engine and generator manufacturer Cummins Inc., said on a call this month. Clients are "trying to get everything they can because they see high demand," Jennifer Rumsey, the Columbus, Indiana-based company's president, said. "They think it's going to extend into next year."

The difference between the big crunch of 2021 and past supply disruptions is the sheer magnitude of it, and the fact that there is - as far as anyone can tell - no clear end in sight. Big or small, few businesses are spared. Europe's

largest fleet of trucks, Girtelka Logistics, says there's been a struggle to find enough capacity. Monster Beverage Corp. of Corona, California, is dealing with an aluminum can scarcity. Hong Kong's Moxam Technology Ltd. is delaying production of a new product because of a dearth of semiconductors.

Further exacerbating the situation is an unusually long and growing list of calamities that have rocked commodities in recent months. A freak accident in the Suez Canal backed up global shipping in March. Drought has wreaked havoc upon agricultural crops. A deep freeze and mass blackout wiped out energy and petrochemicals operations across the central US in

February. Less than two weeks ago, hackers brought down the largest fuel pipeline in the US, driving gasoline prices above \$3 a gallon for the first time since 2014. Now India's massive Covid-19 outbreak is threatening its biggest ports.

For anyone who thinks it's all going to end in a few months, consider the somewhat obscure US economic indicator known as the Logistics Managers' Index. The gauge is built on a monthly survey of corporate supply chiefs that asks where they see inventory, transportation and warehouse expenses - the three key components of managing supply chains - now and in 12 months. The current index is at its second-highest level in records dating back to 2016, and the future gauge shows little respite a year from now. The index has proven unnervingly accurate in the past, matching up with actual costs about 90 per cent of the time.

To Zac Rogers, who helps compile the index as an assistant professor at

Colorado State University's College of Business, it's a paradigm shift. In the past, those three areas were optimized for low costs and reliability. Today, with e-commerce demand soaring, warehouses have moved from the cheap outskirts of urban areas to prime parking garages downtown or vacant department-store space where deliveries can be made quickly, albeit with pricier real estate, labour and utilities. Once viewed as liabilities before the pandemic, fatter inventories are in vogue. Transport costs, more volatile than the other two, won't lighten up until demand does.

"We're going to continue to see some price increases over the next 12 months," Rogers said.

A growing chorus of observers are warning that inflation is bound to quicken. The threat has been enough to send tremors through world capitals, central banks, factories and supermarkets.

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

**Covid-free Saha fit for English tour**

**New Delhi:** Wriddhiman Saha has recovered from Covid-19 and will be available for India's tour of England next month. Saha has reached his home in Kolkata after completing over a fortnight-long quarantine at a Delhi hotel. The wicketkeeper was picked for the England-bound squad subject to fitness. The 36-year-old was among the players who contracted the dreaded virus in the currently-suspended Indian Premier league while playing for SunRisers Hyderabad. "Wriddhiman is back home yesterday after two and half weeks of hotel quarantine in Delhi," a source close to the player said. Saha will have to return another negative RT-PCR test before joining the pre-departure bio-bubble in Mumbai, where the squad will undergo hard quarantine before boarding the flight to England. — PTI

**Women to play Test Down Under**

**New Delhi:** Indian women's cricket team are set to play a Test in Australia after playing one in England next month. India, who play their first Test in seven years from June 16 in England, will play another one during the tour of Australia. They will also play ODI and T20I matches Down Under. India last played a Test against Australia in 2006. "England and Australia are the two teams that still play Tests and going forward you will see a Test slotted in when they visit India or when India tour the two countries," a BCCI official said. "The idea was floated on the sidelines of the men's pink ball Test and later discussed in the Apex Council meeting (last month)." The tour of Australia is not yet announced but Australian pacer Megan Schutt said earlier this month the series is planned for mid-September. — PTI

**BCCI pays for Oz players' quarantine**

**Sydney:** The BCCI is footing the bill for the 14-day quarantine of Australian IPL players, who have arrived here from Maldives, Cricket Australia interim CEO Nick Hockley said on Tuesday. Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including top players such as Pat Cummins and Steve Smith, officials and commentators, landed at the Sydney airport on Monday after a forced stop-over at Maldives. The players had to spend 10 days in Maldives due to a ban imposed by the Australian government on travellers from Covid-ravaged India till May 15. Hockley said the BCCI has kept its promise and funded the whole operation. "Yes," Hockley told *Sydney Morning Herald* when asked if BCCI was paying for the mandatory quarantine. — PTI

**Owner to fund City fans' CL trip**

**London:** Manchester City owner Sheikh Mansour is to pay the travel costs of the newly crowned English champions fans attending the Champions League final in Portugal later this month the club announced on Tuesday. City have received an allocation of 6,000 tickets for the May 29 showpiece against Chelsea in Porto and Sheikh Mansour has said all those travelling on the official package will see their costs covered. Fans are permitted to stay in the country for just 24 hours due to Covid protocols. — AFP

**Cricketer Priya's mom dies of Covid**

**New Delhi:** India international Priya Punia, who is part of the UK-bound women's cricket squad, has lost her mother to Covid-19. The 24-year-old cricketer wrote a heartfelt post on social media after her mother succumbed to the deadly virus. "Today I realised why you always told me to be strong. You knew that one day I would need the strength to bear the loss of yours. I miss you so mom! No matter the distance I know you are always there with me. My guiding star, my mom... Love you always," Punia wrote on *Instagram*. — PTI

# GHOST FROM PAST

## Bancroft backtracks, other Aussies urge to end ball-tampering row

**Sydney, May 18:** Cameron Bancroft backtracked after dropping hints of other bowlers' involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal while the men in question, including top pacer Pat Cummins, claimed innocence and pleaded for an end to "rumour-mongering and innuendo" surrounding the incident that tarred Australia's cricketing reputation.

Bancroft kicked up a storm recently when he stated that it was "pretty self explanatory" when asked whether other bowlers in the team knew of the plan to use a sandpaper on the ball during the Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018.

On Tuesday, a *Sydney Morning Herald* report, quoting sources familiar with the situation, stated that Bancroft had no fresh information to give to Cricket Australia's integrity unit, which contacted him. CA had offered a reinvestigation after Bancroft's interview.

The men who were caught in the storm triggered by his statement were Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, who were all part of the team during the series. They issued a joint statement to deny any knowledge of the illegal plot.

"Bancroft, who is playing county cricket in the UK, had responded overnight on Monday in a conciliatory manner and indicated that he did not have significant new information to share with CA," the *Sydney Morning Herald* report stated.

"Bancroft is said to have told CA he is supportive of the investigation and satisfied with the outcome," it added.

The Australian bowling attack in the Cape Town



A file photo of Cameron Bancroft addressing a press conference in Perth to issue an apology for his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

Test also comprised all-rounder Mitchell Marsh.

According to the report, Bancroft also reached out to the affected bowlers in order to explain his recent comments.

"...Bancroft had claimed he was left flustered by the unexpected line of questioning and that there was no malice behind his remarks."

The joint statement issued by Cummins, Starc, Hazlewood and Lyon sought closure.

"We pride ourselves on our honesty. So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days in regard to the Cape Town Test of 2018," the statement read.

"...we feel compelled to

put the key facts on the record again: We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands."

The four bowlers said they learned valuable lessons and it is time to move on from the issue.

"None of this excuses what happened on the field that day at Newlands. It was wrong and it should never have happened."

"We've all learned valuable lessons and we'd like to think the public can see a change for the better in terms of the way we play, the way we behave and respect the game."

"We respectfully request an end to the rumour-mongering and innuendo.

It has gone on too long and it is time to move on," the statement said.

**WARNER CAN REVEAL MORE, SAYS BROAD**

England pacer Stuart Broad feels Australian cricket would be in for an "interesting time" if David Warner ever decides to write a book and open up about the ball-tampering scandal that led to him being barred from national captaincy for life.

Broad also agreed with Bancroft — who was banned for nine months for his role in the scandal — and then Australian bowling coach David Saker that the knowledge of the illegal play was not limited to the three men who were suspended for

their part in it.

"I have seen a couple of comments from David Warner's agent, too, and I think it will be an interesting time when he stops playing for Australia and writes a book," Broad said.

"There's no doubt the Aussies would have been hoping this episode was signed sealed and delivered. It was an incredibly tough thing for those three players to go through. I can't see it still being a conversation (when the Ashes start) in November, but I can see it being sung in the Barmy Army stands if they're allowed."

Broad said in his experience, a bowler is very sensitive to the condition of the ball. — PTI

## DE VILLIERS' SA RETURN RULED OUT

**Johannesburg, May 18:** Cricket South Africa on Tuesday announced that AB de Villiers won't be coming out of international retirement ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup in India, saying that he has decided "once and for all" to not change his mind.

Putting to rest speculations around his comeback, CSA said that "discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded with the batsman deciding once and for all, that his retirement will remain final."

The statement was reportedly made after CSA announced the team for upcoming tour of the West Indies, though it focussed largely on the squads for the two Test matches and five T20Is in the Caribbean islands rather than de Villiers' retirement.

In May 2018, de Villiers had announced his retirement from international cricket. He played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20Is before announcing the surprise decision.

However, last month the 37-year-old versatile cricketer said it would be "fantastic" to make an international comeback ahead of the T20 World Cup. — PTI

## Kane ready for showdown

**London, May 18:** New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is excited to face India in the World Test Championships (WTC) final next month as he considers showdowns against Virat Kohli's men to be a "fantastic challenge". India and New Zealand square-off in the final of the inaugural World Test Championships in Southampton from June 18.

"When we play against India, it has always been a fantastic challenge and so it is really exciting to be playing against them," Williamson said in a video posted by the ICC on its Twitter handle.

"It's really, really exciting to be involved in the final, obviously to win it would be that much better," said the 30-year-old considered one of the best current batsmen in the world.

Talking about championship and how it progressed, Williamson said, "We saw the contests in the WTC has brought real excitement. "...the games were really tight such as in the India-Australia series and our series against Pakistan as well where you had to really fight hard to get the results, which is really great."

New Zealand pacer Neil Wagner admitted India possess fast bowlers who



India skipper Virat Kohli and his New Zealand counterpart Kane Williamson.

can exploit the English conditions but said the wickets can change anytime and become flat also.

"India has a lot of quality fast bowlers who have done well in different conditions, they can swing (the ball) under overcast conditions but when the sun comes out it (wicket) is flat and nothing happens."

"(English) Conditions can change throughout and so I am not getting carried away too much,

trying to control the controllable."

India batsman Hanuma Vihari, who is in England for a county stint with Warwickshire, said it would be a great feeling to play for his country in the WTC final.

"I am excited but I would want to be in that moment and not to get too much carried away by the importance of the situation," he said.

"But as a sportsman, to play for India in the final

of inaugural World Test Championships is always a great feeling," said the 27-year-old batsman who is currently playing county cricket in England.

The majority of the Kiwi players have reached the UK as they play a two-match series against England starting June 2 before the WTC final.

The Indians are expected to reach here in the first week of June. — PTI

## Faf received death threat for Cup debacle

**New Delhi, May 18:** Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has revealed that he and his wife received death threats after a mix-up with AB de Villiers led to the latter's run out during their 2011 World Cup semi-final defeat to New Zealand.

Played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Dhaka, South Africa lost the match by 49 runs to be knocked out of the tournament, which was won by co-hosts India.

"I received death threats after that (match). My wife received death threats. We turned on



Faf du Plessis

social media and we were blown away. It became very personal. There were some very offensive things said that I won't repeat," du Plessis was

quoted as saying by *ESPNcricinfo*.

"It makes you introverted towards people and you put a shield up. All players go through this and it

forces us to keep our circles very small. It's why I've worked so hard on creating a safe space within our camp," he added.

**SOUTH AFRICA ANNOUNCE SQUAD**

South Africa named 19 players for two Test matches to be played in St Lucia and 20 players for five T20 internationals in Grenada. — PTI

**Squads: Test:** Dean Elgar (c), Temba Bavuma (vc), Quinton de Kock (wkt), Sarel Erwee, Beuran Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi,

Anrich Nortje, Keegan Peterson, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Preenelan Subrayen, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams. **T20:** Temba Bavuma (c), Quinton de Kock (w), Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, George Linde, Sisanda Magala, Keshav Maharaj, Janneman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams.

## Fed dumped out in Geneva Open

**Geneva, May 18:** Roger Federer lost the first match of his comeback-proper on Tuesday as the Swiss tennis great tumbled out of the Geneva Open on his first outing in two months.

Federer lost 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in the second round to Spanish clay court specialist Pablo Andujar to wreck the 39-year-old's hopes of stringing a run of matches together ahead of the French Open, Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics.

Federer returned to the courts in March, having been out for more than a year following two knee surgeries, winning his first match in Doha before losing his second.

He was hoping to find some form on the Geneva clay but tumbled at the first hurdle.

Federer waved to the few dozen masked spectators dotted around the Eaux-Vives centre court, with the attendance limited due to local coronavirus restrictions.

Fans gathered in the woods outside the tennis club for a glimpse of Federer through the fence.

Federer seemed at ease in his movement but took a bit of time to get into his groove, getting only 40 percent of his first serves in during the first set, which he lost by overhitting a second serve.

In the second set, Federer won his first service game to love then broke for a 2-1 lead.

He began to show flashes of the old magic, throwing in occasional backhand drop shots.

He overhit his first set point but made no mistake with the second.

Federer broke to go 2-1 up in the second set, drawing Andujar to the net and beating him with a backhand passing shot.

Andujar broke back to make it 4-4 and held serve to leave Federer serving to



Roger Federer

**Federer returned to the courts in March, having been out for more than a year following two knee surgeries, winning his first match in Doha before losing his second.**

stay in the match.

Andujar had two match points but Federer pulled it back to deuce before misfiring to hand his opponent victory.

**SERENA LOSES IN STRAIGHT SETS**

Serena Williams' disappointing return to tennis continued when she lost in straight sets to 68th-ranked Katerina Siniakova in the second round of the Emilia-Romagna Open on Tuesday.

Top-seeded Williams, who accepted a wild-card invitation for the Parma tournament after losing her opening match at the Italian Open last week, was beaten 7-6 (4), 6-2.

She had beaten teenage qualifier Lisa Pigato 6-3, 6-2 in the previous round for her first victory since defeating Simona Halep in the Australian Open quarterfinals in February. — AFP

## ENGLAND REST IPL STARS FOR SERIES AGAINST KIWIS

**London, May 18:** England on Tuesday rested IPL stars including Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow for the upcoming two-Test series against New Zealand while Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes were not considered for selection due to injuries. England named a 15-man squad for the series starting June 2.

"Multi-format players Moen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran and Chris Woakes are rested after completing a quarantine period following the cancellation of the Indian Premier League earlier this month. They will spend some time resting before joining up with their respective counties in due course," said the ECB in a statement referring to the four players who had to undergo a 10-day quarantine upon their return from India.

Gloucestershire wicketkeeper-batsman James Bracey and Sussex seamer Ollie Robinson have been called up to the Test squad for the first time. Stokes (fractured finger) and Archer (right elbow) were not considered for selection as they are recovering from injuries. — PTI

**Squad:** Joe Root (captain) James Anderson, James Bracey, Stuart Broad, Rory Burns, Zak Crawley, Ben Foakes, Dan Lawrence, Jack Leach, Craig Overton, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, Dom Sibley, Olly Stone, Mark Wood.

## Shuttle umpire Sudhakar dead

**DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 18**

Sudhakar Vemuri, renowned badminton official, passed away in Hyderabad on Tuesday morning due to Covid-19. He was 71 and left behind by his wife and two daughters.

Sudhakar umpired at three consecutive Olympics — Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, the only Asian to do so.

The respected umpire also officiated in several tournaments including two Asian Games in 1982 (New Delhi) and 1994 (Hiroshima, Japan), one Special Olympics in 1995 (Connecticut, USA), Thomas and Uber Cups, Sudirman Cups and World Championships.

He was the deputy chairman of Badminton Asia's Technical Officials Committee.

National badminton coach Pullela Gopichand led the tributes as condolences poured in from the badminton fraternity. "A much loved, revered and respected figure in Indian badminton has left us. His



Sudhakar Vemuri

loss saddens us all ever so deeply," Gopi said.

"A colossal figure in the badminton circuit, he passed on his wisdom to several upcoming players and officials. He leaves an unparalleled legacy of integrity, honesty and commitment to badminton, and will remain irreplaceable in the hearts of those who knew and loved him," Gopi added.

World champion P. V. Sindhu too expressed her sadness. "I am shocked to hear that Shri Sudhakar Vemuri sir, international badminton umpire has passed away. I extend my deepest condolences to his family," she tweeted.

Badminton Association of India and Asian Badminton also condoled Sudhakar's demise.