

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | 21 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 34.9°C
Min: 23.6°C
RH: 48%
Rain: 13 mm

Forecast: Rain or thundershower likely.
Max/Min temp. 38/26°C



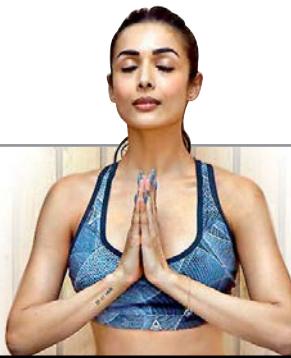
WORLD | 9

Israel vows to intensify strikes



SPORTS | 12

Rahul Dravid is India coach for Lanka series



TABLOID

World Meditation Day: For that state of Zen

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha
Navami till 11.06 am

Star: Poorva Phalguni till 3.16pm
Varjyam: 10.05 pm to 11.36 pm
Durmuhurta: 8.21 am to 9.12 am; 12.38 pm to 1.30 pm

Rahu Kalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR

Shawwal 8, 1442 AH

PRAYERS

Fajr: 4.35 am

Zohar: 12.22 pm

Asar: 4.44 pm

Maghrib: 6.48 pm

Isha: 8.03 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.43 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.43 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 12.43 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 12.59 AM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

SSC grades to be declared today

Hyderabad: The TS Secondary School Certificate (SSC) grades will be declared on Friday at 11 am on bse.telangana.gov.in, said an official from the state education department on Thursday. The exams were cancelled last month and all students were declared passed. The results have been prepared on the basis of their performance in internal assessments.

■ Full report on Page 3

New tax e-filing site from June 7

New Delhi: The income-tax department is expected to launch a new e-filing web portal for taxpayers, which they use to file routine ITRs and perform other tax-related works from June 7, officials said on Thursday.

The existing web portal www.incometaxindiaefiling.gov.in will be shut for six days between June 1-6. Officials said the new portal www.incometaxgov.in will be made more user-friendly.

India sought 40K FB users' data

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

Bharat Biotech boosts capacity

Hyderabad: Bharat Biotech has decided to boost its vaccine manufacturing capacity for Covaxin by adding yet another production line at its Ankleswar-based subsidiary Chiron Behring Vaccines. The Hyderabad-based company has already been producing its Covid vaccine at its Hyderabad and Bengaluru facilities.

■ Full report on Page 3

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Govt hospitals hog limelight

After KCR's visit to GGH, ministers tour hospitals in districts

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 20

Government hospitals and the public health sector are getting more prominence after the Chief Minister took over the health portfolio from Etala Rajendar on May 2.

A day after the CM's visit, several ministers made a beeline to government hospitals in their respective districts to interact with doctors, staff and Covid patients, so as to instil confidence among them and ensure better treatment facilities on par with private hospitals.

As the CM's Gandhi Hospital visit evoked a good response from vari-

ous quarters, he wanted to continue his government hospitals yatra along with finance minister T. Harish Rao. The two would visit government hospitals in district headquarters starting with Warangal MGM Hospital on Friday. Energy minister G. Jagadish Reddy visited the government hospitals in Nalgonda district on Thursday. Roads and buildings

minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy visited hospitals in Nizamabad district. Endowments minister A. Indrakaran Reddy went to hospitals in Adilabad district, Panchayat Raj minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao and women and child welfare minister Sathyavathi Rathod did so in Warangal, transport minister Puvvada Ajay in Khammam and agriculture minister Singireddy Nirjan Reddy in Mahabubnagar district.

Government hospitals and the public health sector are getting more prominence after the Chief Minister took over the health portfolio from Etala Rajendar on May 2.

He has roped in two key ministers — K.T. Rama Rao and Harish Rao — to handle crucial issues of Covid vaccination, injections and recruitment of health staff in government hospitals etc. Rama Rao was appointed as chairman of the state task force on the procurement of vaccines and medicines. He is working on getting increased supplies of vaccines from the Centre and is also engaged in discussions with vaccine makers. Harish Rao is dealing with the day-to-day administration of the health department on behalf of the CM.

■ Page 2: Medical fraternity upbeat over CM's visit

ITR FILING DUE DATE EXTENDED TILL SEPT. 30

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

The CBDT has also extended the ITR filing deadline for companies by a month till November 30.

For individuals whose accounts are not required to be audited and who file their income tax return using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms the deadline to file ITR is July 31. The deadline for taxpayers, like companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31.

The deadline for issuing Form 16 by employers to employees has been extended by a month till July 15, 2021. — PTI

■ Full report on Page 11

KCR clears V-Cs for 10 varsities, awaits Gov. nod

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The government has referred the names to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan for approval. Following her nod, the appointment orders will be issued in a day or two.

will issue orders appointing V-Cs in a day or two.

Administrative and academic activities of all those varsities have been badly affected in the last two years. They could not fill teaching and non-teaching vacancies in the absence of regular V-Cs. A majority of the posts continue to remain vacant.

When the V-Cs of these 10 universities retired in July 2019, the state government appointed IAS officers as in-charge VCs, a decision that drew sharp criticism from academicians, the teaching com-

munity, student unions and opposition parties. At one stage, even the Governor expressed displeasure over the inordinate delay and urged the government to expedite the process.

In the meantime, some petitions were filed in the High Court over the government's failure in appointing V-Cs. The court also rapped the government for the delay on various occasions.

The pace at which Chandrasekhar Rao is filling up vacancies and nominated posts in the government has raised hopes of disgruntled TRS leaders, who are eyeing them. TRS leaders, who failed to secure party tickets to contest Assembly and Lok Sabha polls and those who lost elections, are lobbying for nominated posts in corporations.

Following the Governor's nod, the government

secretary and treasurer and was available at the HCA office at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

Azhar contends Kante does not fulfil the criteria, and threw the rule book at his rivals as he alleged "violations of the constitution of HCA & procedural infirmities in the hiring of the CEO."

"It is only logical to assume that the hiring process was done under the collective responsibility and watchful eyes of the Vice-President, Secretary, Joint Secretary, Treasurer and Councillor. Neither me, the players' council representatives nor the CAG representative were kept in the loop on this hiring," the HCA president said, accusing them of conspiring to bulldoze the Constitution.

■ Page 5: Hiring process wasn't followed, says Azhar

Stinking HCA scrap rises to the top

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

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

First, it was the appointment of Ombudsman and Ethics Officer on which the two groups weren't on the same page. Now it is the newly appointed CEO who is caught in the crossfire.

Azhar has taken strong objection to the nomination of Suneel Kante for the top executive post and has written to secretaries

R. Vijayanand

Mohammed Azharuddin

HCA president Mohammed Azharuddin has taken strong objection to the nomination of Suneel Kante for CEO. He alleged "violations of the constitution of HCA and procedural infirmities."

The rival group put out Kante's CV that lists him holding an MBA degree and having worked for companies such as Tata Technologies, Ernst & Young and EXL with stints in the UK and the USA.

of affiliated clubs, listing out the anomalies in the appointment, which the other group claims was done at the AGM that continued after the president ended it abruptly (after a ruckus) and walked out

with his supporters without completing the agenda.

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

with his supporters without completing the agenda.

During this period, they may get a fever lasting more than 24 hours. It could be associated with rashes over the body, red eyes, red inner mouth; severe stomach pain with vomiting, diarrhoea, severe dullness, cold and seizures.

Prolonged use of multivitamins can harm the child. Consult a paediatrician for required dosage. Eight glasses of water a day is a must for children.

Some children have a slight fever even after the recovery from Covid-19. In such cases, a paediatrician should be consulted.

Paediatricians advise parents to keep children hydrated and physically active

Covid may spark inflammation among kids

SANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

drome in children (MIS-C) that is affecting children recovering from Covid-19 or whose family member had been infected by the virus. Childcare specialists have recommended vitamin D tablets for children who have been barred from playing outside and cannot be in sunlight. They should be exposed to indoor fitness activities, such as stretching exercises and yoga. Further, all children must be kept well-hydrated. Experts have also cautioned about the multisystem inflammatory syn-

secretary and treasurer and was available at the HCA office at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

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■ Page 5: Hiring process wasn't followed, says Azhar

diarrhoea and vomiting.

Some of the children may have a moderate disease with fast breathing and/or oxygen level being 90-94 per cent. These children need to be hospitalised.

Dr Shivaranjani said newborn babies can also get Covid like the older kids. But the percentage of babies getting the severe disease is more than that in older kids. Such babies would feed poorly and remain dull.

■ Page 2: Get kids physically engaged, say doctors

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■ Page 2: Get kids physically engaged, say doctors

Navy confirms 37 from barge dead

Barge's engineer blames loss of lives on punctured life rafts and captain's attitude

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 20

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

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

"In one of most challenging SAR Ops in aftermath of #CycloneTauktae 325 survivors have been rescued & 37 #BNV recovered off Mumbai & Gujarat Coasts. Vigorous SAR efforts continue for the missing crew of Barge P305 which sank off Mumbai with 05 IN ships, aircraft & helos deployed," the Indian Navy spokesperson tweeted on Thursday.

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



Rescued crew members of the barge P305, being brought to an Indian Naval Ship off the Mumbai coast on Thursday. — PTI

According to barge's Chief Engineer Rahman Shaikh, everyone on board could have been saved had many of the life rafts not had punctures and the captain taken the cyclone warnings seriously.

On Thursday morning the Coast Guard said another missing tug — Sangeeta, with a crew of 10 — had been located about 10 nautical miles west of Maharashtra's Tarapur. Another Navy ship INS Talwar was the 'On Scene Coordinator' off Gujarat coast and assisted Support Station 3 (SS-3) and Drill Ship Sagar Bhushan, which were being safely towed back to Mumbai by ONGC support vessels, an official said.

According to barge's Chief Engineer Rahman Shaikh, everyone on board could have been saved had many of the life rafts not had punctures and the captain taken the cyclone warnings seriously.

The Directorate General of Shipping had already ordered an investigation into

Centre: Fungal infection prolongs morbidity

From Page 1

The Union health ministry said a new challenge has emerged in the form of black fungus disease. This has been reported from many states, from amongst Covid19 patients, especially those on steroid therapy and deranged sugar control.

"This fungal infection is leading to prolonged morbidity and mortality amongst

Covid19 patients," Lay Agarwal, joint secretary in the Union health ministry, said.

The treatment of this fungal infection requires multi-disciplinary approach consisting of eye surgeons, ENT specialists, general surgeon, neurosurgeon and dental maxillo facial surgeon, among others, and institution of amphotericin-B injection as an antifungal medicine.

TMREIS EXTENDS LAST DATE FOR ADMISSIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Telangana Minorities Residential Educational Institutions Society (TMREIS) has extended to May 31 the last date for online submission of applications for admission into classes V, VI, VII, VIII and Intermediate first year for academic year 2021-22. TMREIS secretary B Shafiullah requested stu-

dents and parents to utilise this opportunity and submit online applications through the TMREIS mobile app or [www.tmreis.telangana.gov.in](http://tmreis.telangana.gov.in).

Applications can also be submitted at offices of the schools and junior colleges by those who do not have internet facilities. Further details can be gathered from TMREIS website or by contacting district minority

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IN BRIEF

Rly: RT-PCR report must for Maha

Hyderabad: The railways has issued an advisory to passengers whose destination is Maharashtra that they must carry an RT-PCR negative report, which is a requirement of the Maharashtra government. The RT-PCR negative certificate will have to be issued up to a maximum of 48 hours before the time of entering Maharashtra.

3 held for black marketing drugs

Hyderabad: Three men, including a pharmacist, were on Thursday held for selling anti-fungal injections that are used to treat black fungus for ₹50,000 per vial, as against the MRP of ₹305. Officials from north zone task force team in Panjagutta also seized five injection vials and three mobiles from them. The accused, Falaram Kashaiah and Sugali Vinod Kumar Naik, both 23, and Mohd Khaja Nizam, 30 were nabbed from Pochamma basti in Panjagutta while in possession of amphotericin B injections, said the police. "Noticing the high demand for the injections, they hatched a plan and with the help of Mohd Khaja Nizam, who works at MNR Pharmacy, started targeting gullible people and sold each vial for ₹50,000," police said.

HC STAYS ACHARYA'S PLEA ON CBI ACTION

DC CORRESPONDENT

HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Justice K. Lakshman of Telangana High Court on Thursday rejected a plea from retired IAS officer B.P. Acharya to stay all the trial proceedings of the CBI court against him vis-à-vis his alleged involvement in Jagan's "quid pro quo" matters.

The CBI had named Acharya an accused in one of the cases filed against AP Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in relation to his quid pro quo cases.

The CBI court has recently rejected the plea of Acharya to not take cognizance of the chargesheet filed in the issue of 8.81 acres of land allotted to the Lepakshi Knowledge Hub. Challenging it, he approached the High Court and pleaded for interim relief as to stay all other proceeding till the case was decided. However, the court rejected his plea and adjourned the case to June 17.

SSC 2021 GRADES TO BE DECLARED TODAY

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC

HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The TS Secondary School Certificate (SSC) grades will be declared on Friday at 11 am on the official website bse.telangana.gov.in. This was stated by an official from the state education department here on Thursday.

The exams were cancelled last month and all students were declared passed. The results have been prepared on the basis of their performance in internal assessments.

The government had announced that grades would be awarded duly considering the performances in internal assessment marks for 20 per cent (only one formative assessment was conducted instead of two due to Covid-19) and 20 per cent of internal marks would be scaled up to 100 per cent marks.

Over 5.5 lakh students who have been promoted to the next class will receive their grades as a one-time measure. Last year too, about 5.3 lakh SSC students were assessed for results based on year-long performance due to lockdown that came into force in March.

EDUCATION | AID

Under the scheme, the govt provides 250 grants for Spring, Fall semester admissions in a year

Over 800 students in long wait for CM's scholarship

ATHER MOIN | DC

HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Two years ago, when Saiyada Butool Munawari got the news of her acceptance at Underwood University in the US for the MS (Nutrition) programme, her family in the city was excited.

Though expensive, the family believed that her plan to study in the US was within their grasp. This was thanks to the Chief Minister's Overseas Scholarship Scheme. In the hope that the ₹20 lakh that Munawari would get through the

scheme would see her through her studies, at least for the most part, the family sent her to the US in mid-2019 to begin her studies at Underwood.

"The scheme promises that ₹10 lakh of the ₹20 lakh will be given upon producing the official admission and related documents. But that did not come. We, however, managed to pool enough money for her to go and begin her studies, hoping that the grant will be released," her brother Syed Umair Mehdi told Deccan Chronicle.

However, their hopes were

dashed. The second installment of another ₹10 lakh, that was to be given once a student submits proof of clearing the first semester courses, also did not come. "We have to bear not only the fees, but also the food and accommodation expenses. We sent her abroad in the hope that the government will release the amount. Our request is that this be done immediately, so we can repay the loans we took from others," he said.

"Though the university gave some relaxation in payment of fees in the wake of

the pandemic, the new academic semester is on and we have to pay her semester fee again," he said.

It is not just Munawari and her family waiting for release of funds under the CMO student help scheme. In all, around 800 students have been waiting, many since the 2019 academic year, for grants under the scholarship scheme.

Though the minorities welfare department sought applications during October-November 2020 from such community students for aid under the scheme, it is yet to

finalise the eligible students' list. This has left in the lurch those who got admissions to various postgraduate and doctoral courses in foreign universities for the Fall and Spring semesters between January-December 2020.

The department invites applications under the scheme once a year for both Spring and Fall semester admissions abroad.

The state government started the scheme in 2015 under which selected candidates get ₹20 lakh in grant towards fees and living expenses subject to the candidate joining

the classes. While ₹10 lakh is to be paid to the students upon production of the landing permit/I-94 card (immigration card), the second installment shall be payable on submission of the first semester results. Under this scheme, the government provides scholarships to 250 students for each spring and fall season in a year.

Yet another student, Kausarunnisa, too has a similar case. According to Masood Mansoor of Shah Ali Banda, his niece is pursuing masters in engineering from La Trobe University, Sydney.

She is expected to complete her course soon. "With her father dead, her mother is paying the fees from the savings she did for her marriage," he said.

Department director Shahnawaz Qasim said the government has sanctioned ₹72.54 crore to disburse the amount among the students selected in 2019. He clarified that, due to the pandemic, parents of the students took time to provide credentials. Now, the processing is almost over and funds should be released in a fortnight, he said.

BHARAT BIOTECH TO BOOST COVAXIN PRODUCTION

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Bharat Biotech has decided to boost its vaccine manufacturing capacity for Covaxin by adding yet another production line at its Ankleswar-based subsidiary, Chiron Behring Vaccines. The company has already been producing its Covid-19 vaccine at its Hyderabad and Bengaluru facilities.

The company said it plans to produce 20 crore doses of Covaxin per annum in the GMP facilities that are already operational for the production of vaccines.

The product availability at Ankleswar, the company said, will commence from October 2021.

The additional manufacturing at Chiron Behring would effectively take the volumes up to 100 crore doses per annum, with its own established campuses.

All eyes on medical report by military hosp on rebel MP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 20

All eyes are on the report of the medical examination of Narsapur MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju that has been submitted by the Military Hospital, Secunderabad, to the Supreme Court.

The three-member medical board appointed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court had already submitted a report stating that there were no external injuries. It also ruled out any assault as claimed by the MP.

"Local examination edema of both feet were present, discoloration of plantar aspect of both feet were present (sic)," said the report which the High Court incorporated in its order.

The rebel YSR Congress MP, however, moved the apex court seeking medical examination by the All India Institute of

Medical Sciences, New Delhi. The court referred him to the Military Hospital, Secunderabad. It received the medical report in a sealed cover and is likely to deal with it during the hearing of the bail petition moved by the MP's son on Friday.

The stakes for both Raju and the AP Criminal Investigation Department are very high as any wrong in their respective claims may prove costly for them. The state government on the other hand has distanced itself ever since the CID booked Raju on charges of sedition.

The CID which denied allegations of use of third-degree methods on the MP, justified the sedition charges by submitting several videos of his utterances which could foment communal strife and cause public unrest.

Lockdown impact



Police personnel seize the vehicles of those violating lockdown rules near GPO in Abids, Hyderabad on Thursday. — DC



Buffaloes walk on the Paradise flyover slowing down the traffic at 11 am while police were busy checking the vehicular movement during lockdown hours. — GANDHI

4 HELD FOR ILLEGAL SALE OF DRUGS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Mohd Muzaffar Khan, both 22, and businessmen Mohd Hakeemuddin (31) and Syed Saiduddin (32).

Akbar and Muzzafar were nabbed from Hussaini Alam area for selling the injections for ₹25,000 to ₹35,000 per vial. Hakeemuddin and Saiduddin were picked up from Asifnagar. "They have completed a diploma in D-Pharmacy and planned to make money by exploiting the situation of Covid-hit families," police said.

TS RECORDS 3,660 NEW COVID CASES, 23 DEATHS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The number of new Covid cases stood at 3,660 on Thursday after 69,252 tests were carried out, according to the health department. It said that 23 patients had died of the disease during the day.

The caseload now stands at 5,44,263 and the toll at 3,060. The recovery rate was stated to be 91.03 per cent.

The GHMC area recorded 574 cases, followed by the districts of Ranga Reddy at 247, Medchal Malkajgiri 218, Khammam 217, Nalgonda 166, Karimnagar 147, Warangal Urban 131, Bhadrak Kotagudem 121, Peddapalli 120, Mahbubnagar 128, Nagarjunakonda 118, Siddipet 116 and Mancherial 108.

There are 97 micro containment zones, 14 in Siddipet and Warangal Rural districts each, 12 in Warangal Urban and Jogulamba Gadwal each and 11 in Hyderabad.

THE CASELOAD now stands at 5,44,263 and the toll at 3,060.

IN BRIEF

LB Nagar gets 59 mm rainfall

Hyderabad: The city and the rest of the state received moderate rainfall. The TS Development Planning Society said Hasthinapuram in LB Nagar received the highest rainfall of 59 mm followed by 52.3 mm at Vanasthalipuram. In the state, Pebbar topped with 93.3 mm. The IMD-Hyderabad has extended caution for thunderstorms accompanied with lightning and gusty winds of up to 40 kmph till May 24 in Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy, Jagtial and Nalgonda. IMD-Hyderabad director Dr K. Nagarathna said, "There are mainly westerly winds over the state. Under their, it is predicted that the state will witness more light to moderate rains at isolated places in the state."

Sunset in Hyderabad

A golden hue fills the Hussainsagar Lake in Hyderabad during sunset on Thursday.

— DEEPAK DESHPANDE

Final yr medicos join Covid battle

HARLEEN MINOCHA | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

In a follow-up to the directives from the central and state governments to final year medical students to join duty and serve in Covid wards, over 250 students from medical colleges in the state would do special training outside of their regular fields so as to help those in need.

The government's directive prompted a team of doctors and public health experts in the state to hold special online webinars to inform and teach students on practical treatments and differences between handling and risk assessment during the first and second Covid waves.

been taking these classes for the past five days. They started it with about 30-40 volunteers from final year medical courses, and are now adding about 100 every day.

"My idea to start this

training was to help lift off a part of the burden on our medical practitioners. These students on the way to become healthcare workers need to be able to help the needy efficiently. For that, they need expert training from as many

doctors as possible before they jump into the real world. So far, practitioners like Dr Karuna Madap, a pediatrician and another doctor from AIIMS Rishikesh have helped with the classes," said Dr Vijayender.

Several students from among these 250 have started helping patients reaching out to Seva Bharathi with tele-consultation. A final year student, Spoorithi, taking the special training, said she has helped about 10-15 patients with different problems relating to Covid.

"It has been really helpful. Since last year, we have barely been able to get any practical training. A lot of us are not even sure that we will be able to handle the situation. This has given us an opportunity as well as the confidence to go ahead and help," she said.

Shri DWARKADAS V. SHAH (06/04/1928 - 18/05/2021) With profound grief we inform that a fountainhead of wisdom, courage and nobility has left us for his heavenly abode.
Deeply mourned by: FAMILY 040 2475 4678 (CA-3619)

PROPERTY ROW AFTER COUPLE DIE DUE TO COVID-19

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, MAY 20

He said that ₹10 lakh ex gratia is given to the kin of persons who die of Covid in other states.

Citing the remarks of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao that Ayushman Bharat was useless, Reddy said that very few families would be covered by it and it was not at all useful.

The Congress leader lamented that Covid-hit families were paying huge amounts to hospitals, including about ₹25,000 for an ambulance, ₹50,000 for an oxygen bed, and ₹1.5 lakh for a ventilator bed. He said that the people have been opting for private hospitals as there was no infrastructure in government hospitals.

Reddy said that as RAT are producing unreliable results, it was time to go for RT-PCR tests.

Lockdown lays low the highs of marijuana

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The strict lockdown has cast a dry spell for substance abusers in the city. The movement of marijuana and other contraband has halted. Excise officials say they have not booked a case in the last 20 days as the smugglers are getting caught at check-posts.

The latest bust was made in Kakinada wherein a gang from Hyderabad was caught with 240 kilos of ganja while the men were en route to their homes.

Officials from the state excise department said the movements of drugs in the city has come down drastically due to the lockdown.

"For the last 20 days, we did not come across any such cases of smuggling, peddling or selling of

drugs in the city. The AP police have stopped two such consignments the last fortnight, wherein a gang of four, including a minor, was found carrying 240 kilos of marijuana on May 19 at Kakinada. Another 600 kilos was seized from two men at Krishnavaram toll plaza.

Both were headed for the city and were intercepted by the local police, said the official.

The Dhoopet prohibition and excise station, under which areas including Mangalhat, Seetarambagh, Jiyaguda, Jummerat Bazaar, Upper Dhoopet and Lower Dhoopet come, is notorious for its stand-off with ganja smugglers.

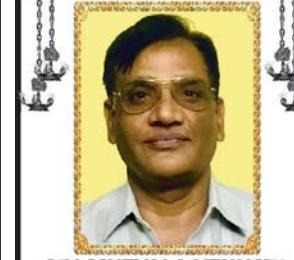
According to officials, the ganja is smuggled into the city from Odisha and Andhra Pradesh in large quantities. "It is

then supplied to clients in various parts of the city from Dhoopet by families and individuals," an official said.

Apart from arresting the persons involved in the sale of the contraband, cops are also detaining and counseling those who are coming to the area to buy ganja.

"This drug is mostly procured by youngsters, mainly engineering and management students, IT company professionals, foreign students and also daily wagers in the city. The drug trade is profitable as there is a huge margin and it is attracting several people from Dhoopet into the trade," officials said.

They said a kilo of the contraband costs up to ₹20,000 in Dhoopet, whereas they buy it for ₹4,000 to ₹5,000 per kilo in Araku.

IN THE LOVING MEMORY

SRI MUTYALA VENKATA NARASIMHA TATAJI GARU
D.O.B: 31-10-1964 D.O.D: 20-05-2021

Wife: Mrs. M. Venkateshwari & Family Members

BS Reddy, Arun Agarwal, Ravi Goenka

(S/2122/D00217)

SHRADHANJALI

OBITUARY

Mr. MITTA VASANT RAO
Manager Retd.
(Food Corporation of India)

Expired on 19th May 2021

Grieved family members

Sons Vinod, Vijay, Vikram,

daughter Kalpana and

their spouses and grandchildren

Mitta brothers and sisters

(S/2122/D00217)

23rd Day Ceremony

Smt. Koduth Pooswamy

DOB : 02-01-1942 DOD : 29-04-2021

You will live in our hearts forever

our inspiration and strength

Inserted by: K.P. Janardhan Family,

K.P. Prabhakaran Family,

Malini & Family, Sandhya & Family

and Relative's

Ph: 9246597805, 9391136733

3rd ANNIVERSARY

Smt. V. LAKSHMI THAYARAMMA

D.O.B: 21-5-1918

W/o V. Radha Krishna Moorthi,

DGM Telecom [Retd]

Your sweet memories will

remain in our heart forever.

Inserted by: Family Members

Cell: 9440044088, 9440066242

10th DAY CEREMONY

TEKPALLY NARSING RAO

DOD : 11-05-2021

You are always source of

Inspiration and Strength

Inserted by: Malela Narsing Rao

(DRDO), Jayanthi Rao

(Son-in-Law & Daughter)

Anuradha, Shirthi

(Grand Son & Grand Daughter)

Ph no: 9423486916

OBITUARY

Ronald J. D'souza (Ronnie)

D.O.B: 23-04-2021

We miss your smiling face and

generous heart that you left behind.

Online Holy Mass at S.F.S. Church

North Lalaguda Sec.-bad. on Saturday,

22 May 2021 at 6.30 am.

Inserted by: Grieving Wife, Son,

Family members & Friends.

10th DAY CEREMONY

PERUMALLA JAYA PAUL

D.O.B: 21-04-2006

"Remembering fondly in every

Moment of our Lives"

Inserted by: FAMILY MEMBERS

10th DAY CEREMONY

TEKPALLY NARSING RAO

DOD : 11-05-2021

You are always source of

Inspiration and Strength

Inserted by: Malela Narsing Rao

(DRDO), Jayanthi Rao

(Son-in-Law & Daughter)

Anuradha, Shirthi

(Grand Son & Grand Daughter)

Ph no: 9423486916

OBITUARY

Late Shri KOPPU JACOB JOSEPH

S/o Koppu Joseph Agapali

DOB: 21-10-1932 DOD: 29-Nov-2002

You lived a glorious life and

thought us how to live.

WE MISS YOU

Remembered by:

Sons and Daughters-in-law

Daughters and Sons-in-law

Grand Children.

10th DAY CEREMONY

TEKPALLY NARSING RAO

DOD : 11-05-2021

You are always source of

Inspiration and Strength

Inserted by: Malela Narsing Rao

(DRDO), Jayanthi Rao

(Son-in-Law & Daughter)

Anuradha, Shirthi

(Grand Son & Grand Daughter)

Ph no: 9423486916

OBITUARY

SRI MUTHYALA VENKATA NARASIMHA TATAJI GARU

D.O.B: 31-10-1964 D.O.D: 20-05-2021

We miss you and always in our heart

to be with us.

Wish you a happy 100th Birthday

in heaven to the loving& wonderful dad.

You shall forever remain in our hearts,

we all always love you dad.

Inserted by:Sons, Daughters - in - Law

Grand Children, great grand Children,

Relatives & Friends

Ph : 9394705565.

OBITUARY

SRI BODA SIVADASS

Asst Mechanical Engineer (C/W) Sc. Ry (Retd)

D.O.B: 21-5-1921 D.O.D: 18-07-2008

Wishing you a very happy 100th Birthday

IN BRIEF
**AP against VSP
privatisation**

Vijayawada: The AP Assembly passed a resolution opposing the privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant Industries minister Mekapati Gautam Reddy, proposed the resolution and it was passed unanimously. Gautam Reddy said that considering the sensitivity of the issue and widespread agitation, the government had acknowledged the need for supporting the cause of protecting RINL.

**FOREST CORP
ADVISED TO GO
COMMERCIAL**

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

Directors and board members urged the Telangana State Forest Development Corporation (TSFDC) to branch out into the manufacture of paper boards used in the making of tetrapacks and explore the possibility of supplying timber to IKEA, the Swedish do-it-yourself furniture maker.

The corporation was also asked to reduce its dependence on eucalyptus plantations and look at raising other species of trees in its plantations.

These were among the issues discussed at the corporation's annual general body meeting held virtually and chaired by Vanteru Pratap Reddy. He said the TSFDC had earned a net profit of ₹95.49 crore.

Of the 1,000 tonnes of fuel wood the corporation had said that it would provide for cremation of Covid-19 victims, 150 tonnes was so far were used by municipalities.

A new headquarters for the corporation was also proposed to be built that will also include an eco-tourism office complex and integrated central nursery to supply tree saplings and mosquito repellent plants.

**ED SEIZES ASSETS
WORTH ₹31.63 CR
OF EBIZ(DOT)COM**

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 20

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday attached assets worth ₹31.63 crore under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act in a pyramid scheme, in which eBizdotcom Private Limited allegedly cheated the public.

The attached assets include interest accrued on 105 fixed deposits which have already been attached, bank balances, mutual funds and gold jewellery found in the locker of the main accused Pawan Malhan, managing director of eBiz.com and his son Hitik, the ED said.

On September 17, 2019, ED had provisionally attached immovable properties worth ₹34.60 crore and bank balances amounting to ₹242.25 crore in 124 bank accounts belonging to eBiz.com and its promoters. The 2019 provisional attachment of ED for a total value of ₹277.97 crore was confirmed by the PMLA Adjudicating Authority and ED has already taken possession of the same.

"The investigation revealed that they were running a pyramid fraud in the guise of a multi-level marketing network by introducing a few worthless products like CDs containing free computer education packages, suit lengths etc. The purpose of introducing such sub-standard overpriced products was only to masquerade their pyramid fraud as a direct-selling product company," ED said.

The had collected around ₹1,064 crore from around 12 lakh subscribers through a chain of agents nationwide.

Jagan ensures cash transfers



N. Vamsi Srinivas

Some capital expenditure or asset building in simplistic form, might suffer but the electorate's choice of cash transfers over it will keep the bondage intact. As such, the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led state government did well in asset creation in the crucial education and health sectors, both tangible in the form of buildings and equipment and intangible by way of incentivising mothers to send their children to school. On top of it, the availability of cash, thanks to DBT, came in handy for the poor in facing the Covid-19 pandemic.

With revenue growth projections being close to reality for the current fiscal, excluding the exponential growth projected in state's own tax revenue, the Chief Minister seems to be confident about cash transfers this year too. He went on to announce an additional scheme for the economically backward classes women.

The state might have witnessed a huge gap between the budget outlay and actuals for 2020-21, ₹1.85 lakh crore being

ANALYSIS

● AP PRESENTED its budget with an outlay of ₹2.29 lakh crore.

realised out of the ₹2.24 lakh crore outlay, but it has become a regular feature for successive governments ever since Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy, then Chief Minister of combined Andhra Pradesh, came up with a ₹1 lakh crore budget some two decades ago. The outlay for this year will be ₹2.29 lakh crore.

If the dream versus reality is left to the Opposition of the day to criticise the government, a close look at the Revised Estimates for 2020-2021 reveals that the finance department could manage the heavy load of DBTs with the revenue receipts, which grew at a very low rate due to the lockdowns, standing at ₹1.85 lakh crore.

The unforeseen expenditure due to Covid-19 management had to be factored in while the huge pendency of payments which will be carried forward to the current fiscal, again a

regular feature, was discounted.

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

This year, the state will borrow ₹6,000 crore less than last year's ₹50,000 crore from the open market. The borrowing from the Centre was also slashed to ₹2,000 crore from ₹5,000 crore. It showed a meagre ₹2,000 crore hike in the share of Central taxes from ₹24,441 crore, all coming close to the reality.

This was possible partly due to the government offloading some of its loan burden to power utilities and other corporations. For instance, of the total power subsidy of ₹8,000 crore, the government agreed to pay only ₹6,000 crore.

However, the exceptions to realistic projections are grant in aid from the

Centre and state's own tax and non-tax revenues. The state fell ₹21,000 crore short of the projected grant-in-aid from the Centre last year but it continued to project ₹25,000 crore excess this year. Similarly, the state projected ₹85,000 crore from state tax revenues against ₹57,000 crore realised last year and ₹7,000 crore from non-tax revenue against ₹3,300 crore.

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

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

It will ensure successful implementation of cash transfer schemes that had built an emotional connect between him and the beneficiaries as reflected in the ruling party wiping the principal Opposition Telugu Desam out in the local bodies.

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

The state might have witnessed a huge gap between the budget outlay and actuals for 2020-21, ₹1.85 lakh crore being

Algae infested Hussainsagar



Hussainsagar lake water has turned green due to the presence of algae in large quantities.

— GANDHI

Hiring process wasn't followed, says Azhar

FROM PAGE 1

"The rule says there shall be an appropriate induction process laid down by the Apex Council for the CEO and the managers, which shall include a fair and transparent process of appointment," Azhar added.

"As per the advertisement issued on October 27, 2020, for CEO & CFO, the six requirements were:

Management degree with sufficient experience in different layers of organisation;

knowledge of budget planning and financial prudence;

operational knowledge of cricket operations;

ability to implement innovative administrative methods;

should possess the ability to handle regulatory bodies and should be a team player."

"Twelve CVs were received on email between October 27, 2020 and November 11, 2020. The CV of the selected candidate announced by the Secretary is not in the list of applications

received on email. I would be surprised if the 12 applicants were even called for an interview. Shortlisted applicants should have been tested by a panel of experts from the fields of cricket, finance, management, legal, compliance & administration. None of this was followed."

Ironically, in the previous episode, it was Azhar who went ahead with the appointment of an ombudsman which was challenged by the group over procedures and violations of norms.

Azhar says there's an enquiry initiated against some members of the Apex Council and that they should get their names cleared by the authority before administration can resume and Council meetings convened.

The opposite group is levelling charges, raking up Azhar's past and pending CBI cases on match fixing and betting.

This ugly confrontation is definitely dragging Hyderabad cricket through mud, and the game looks far from gentlemanly now.

The rival group put out Kante's CV that

lists him holding a Master in Business Administration degree and having worked for companies such as Tata Technologies, Ernst & Young and EXL with stints in the UK and the USA.

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approached a TRS leader for recommendation, but even that did not help. This is not case only with Ananthaiah but many other chilli farmers.

There are 18 cold storages in Khammam with total storage capacity of 22 lakh quintals. However, all the space in these storages is reportedly full of various farm produce harvested in the previous season, including chillies. These stocks had arrived in the godowns before the lock-down.

Mandadapu Sudhakar, a farmer said the govern-

ment should at least lease private godowns if the chilli crop is to be stored safely.

Following repeated pleas from farmers, Khammam Agricultural Market Committee is planning to open the market from May 24 for limited hours. Gudavarthi Srinivasa Rao, a chilli trader said farmers have about two lakh quintals of chilli with them.

If the government opens the market, it would be of great help to the farmers, sources said.

AGRI WOES

Purchasers stay away, harvest faces weather risk

RAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, MAY 20

Getting a place in a cold storage to keep their harvested produce, particularly chillies, is turning out to be a Herculean task for farmers, who have raised the crop over 56,000 acres in Khammam district.

N. Ananthaiah, a farmer from Konigerla, has been trying continuously to get a place for storing his harvested chilli in any of the cold storages in Khammam. He even

approached a TRS leader for recommendation, but even that did not help. This is not case only with Ananthaiah but many other chilli farmers.

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Tender Notice No. 74-W-4-1-430-A-WA-SERD Dated - 19.05.2021 1077/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

1st Corrigendum to EPC tender notice No.

01-W/Dy.CE/C-IV/LKO dt. 28.01.2021.

Following corrections are made in above tender:

	Existing	Modified
Bidding Start Date	22.05.2021	12.07.2021
Tender Closing Date Time	05.06.2021, 11:00	26.07.2021, 11:00
Tender Opening Date	12.06.2021	02.08.2021
Other terms and conditions remain same.		
No. 01-W/Dy.CE/C-IV/LKO Date : 20.05.2021		1084/2021

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

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.N.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	16210349	COMPLETE WINDOW ASSEMBLY WITH INNER.	490 NOS	14.06.21
02	16200374	HYDRAULIC MOTOR FOR 700 HP	27 NOS	15.06.21
03	16210387	MOTOR HYDRAULIC FOR VENT FAN ENGINE	31 NOS	16.06.21
04	02212511	LOW MAINTENANCE LEAD ACID BATTERIES 75 AH	96 SET	16.06.21
05	19210644	SET OF DAMPER FOR WAG-9H	10 SET	18.06.21
06	12211555	125 AMPERE 1000 VOLT HRC FUSES	583 SET	18.06.21
07	16200179	ELEMENT FILTER FOR EMD LOCO	1373 NOS	21.06.21
08	16210115	LEVELING VALVE	345 NOS	21.06.21
09	16213633	TAPEDED ROLLER BEARING	139 SET	22.06.21
10	07211494	DOUBLE ACTING HYDRAULIC SHOCK ABSORBER	1624 NOS	23.06.21

Note:- 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details.

2. No Manual offer will be entertained.

DECCAN Chronicle

21 MAY 2021

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

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

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

It is going to be a long and tough game to play the virus in rural settings as every single factor is in its favour. Compared

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

The government will have to quickly roll out a programme for the rural areas, and the lack of health infrastructure is going to be a major issue there. However, no challenge is insurmountable if there is political will.

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

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

The WhatsApp conundrum

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

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

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

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Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 500 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.52/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatalachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Cochin: 77, Vivekananda Road, Rammagai, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255

Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. H/SD-348/2006-08

Mahir Ali

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

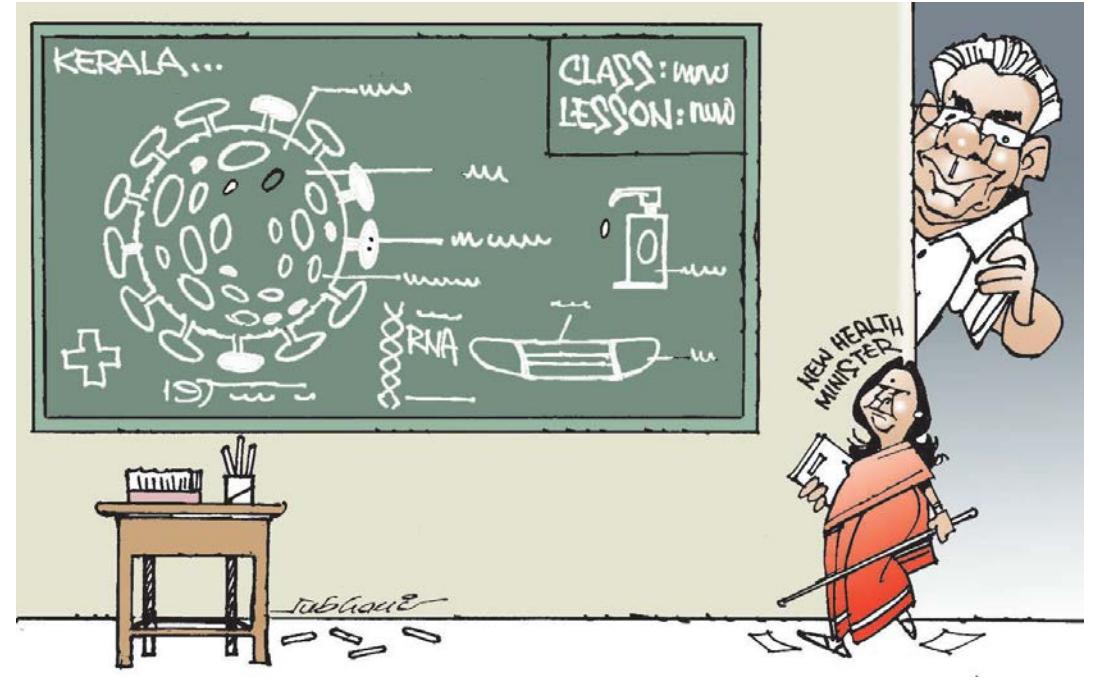
In the wake of the horrendous Holocaust, the biggest global powers found Israeli exceptionalism acceptable. The consequences for the land's indigenous inhabitants were barely taken into consideration. The plethora of potential risks involved in implanting a mainly European-run

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

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

By arrangement with Dawn

Subhani



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

Anand K. Sahay

Far & Near

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

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

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

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

However, in the context of the Narendra Modi government's conspicuous failure to tackle Covid-19's second wave, as well as its striking failure to offer the country hope — with crematoriums and graveyards becoming increasingly out of reach, oxygen, medicines and hospital beds running short, and hundreds of (presumably Hindu) corpses floating downstream from UP in the holy Ganga — RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's piercing words, although couched in calm delivery, may give the government cause for anxiety.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the other hand, the BJP can't fail to notice that it's the spread of the RSS itself in a communalised polity that ineluctably promoted the BJP's rise as a mass party. At every level of the party and government, the levers are in the hands of RSS personnel.

It's evident that the RSS-BJP leadership is shot through with contradictions. What factors give one the upper hand and not the other, at a time when the BJP holds national power, is a complex subject and needs attention. Which entity will prevail is a matter of great interest to the entire country.

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

LETTERS

BEWARE THIRD WAVE

We must be very cautious now to avoid the third wave of Covid-19. If it happens, the damage will be beyond imagination.

Politicians should forget about George Orwell's 'All animals are equal but some are more equal' philosophy. Much damage has already been done. So many families have lost bread-earners. We should follow protocols strictly.

Nitesh Mandwariya
Hyderabad

'SURPRISE' VISIT

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekhar Rao's 'surprise' visit to Gandhi Hospital, DC, May 20. Even our PM made a 'surprise' to a Valmiki Colony near his official residence during his first term and got it widely covered in the media the following day. Our politicians are not Lord Rama of Ayodhya who went incognito to hear what people have to say about his rule.

N. Nagarajan
Hyderabad

COVID CITIZEN CARE

India is a welfare state, but only in the books. The real welfare work is being done by NGOs and Sikh community who are arranging food deliveries, oxygen and providing quarantine facilities. Elsewhere, the dead are being cremated for free. Government's extravagant expenditure on Central Vista, mega statue, etc., seems to have dwindled the finances.

P.R. Ravinder
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Ramagundam power plant to work from next month

HYDERABAD, MAY 20. Mr. A. Krishnaswami, Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Electricity Board, today announced that the Ramagundam Thermal Station would start functioning from next month.

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

He said that at present the work of firing the boiler was in progress.



IN BRIEF

POLICE THRASH WOMAN FOR NOT WEARING MASK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ONE DETAINED FOR REMDESIVIR BLACK MARKETING

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 20

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

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

Govind was, however, let off after interrogation.

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

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

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

SONIA URGES MODI TO HELP OUT COVID ORPHANS

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

NDRF to set up spl. unit to deal with pandemics

DC CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI, MAY 20

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

So what the Home Ministry now plans is to put in place what is being described as a "modern and professional unit" that can deal with all health related pandemic in future. Even now both central para-military forces and defence forces had worked over time in setting up temporary hospitals and health car facilities, transporting oxygen and other essential items.

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

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

2nd Covid wave hits K'taka hard

Bengaluru, May 20:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Out of 68 infected, only one person died.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Cumulatively, 20.55,010 tests were conducted on Wednesday in the country.

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

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

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

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

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

Ten states account for

72.25 per cent of the new deaths.

Tamil Nadu saw the maximum casualties (594). Karnataka follows with 468 daily deaths.

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

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

- PTI

67 MORE DIE OF COVID IN JAMMU & KASHMIR

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MAY 20

Even as 67 more patients died of Covid-19 in Jammu and Kashmir during the past 24 hours, the authorities said the silver lining in the ostensibly gloomy situation is that over two lakh people who had contracted the virus have recovered completely over a period of time in the Union Territory.

The officials said that while 67 patients died of Covid-19 including 41 in Jammu region and remaining 26 in the Kashmir Valley, 4,169 new positive cases of the coronavirus surfaced in the Union Territory since Wednesday evening.

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

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

chief minister on this topic".

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

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

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

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

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

FIGHTING | COVID**Coronavirus cases in the country peaked in Sept. and there was a decline in cases from Oct.****3rd wave likely if vaccination not ramped up: Scientist**

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

The Indian Institutes of Technology-Hyderabad professor cited a paper by Indian researchers on infected people with decreasing antibodies, which give some sort of immunity in six months. "If the antibodies are lost, then there is a chance of immunity going down. In this case, vaccination has to be ramped up and Covid-19 appropriate-behaviour must be practiced. If not then there is a possibility of a third wave in 6-8 months," Vidyasagar said. "We are also adding the aspects of immunity and vaccination in our model for our future forecasts," he added.

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

A recent sero-survey by

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

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

Using more stringent measures (more than 30

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

IN BRIEF

INS RAJPUT TO BE DECOMMISSIONED TODAY

New Delhi, May 20: After 41 years of service, the first destroyer of the Indian Navy, INS Rajput, will be decommissioned on Friday. The Kashin-class destroyer, built by the erstwhile USSR, was commissioned on May 4, 1980.

The ship participated in several key missions in the last four decades, including operation Amar off Sri Lanka that was launched to assist the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) and Operation Cactus to resolve a hostage situation off the Maldives.

In addition, the ship participated in numerous bilateral and multi-national exercises. It was also the first Indian Naval Ship to be affiliated with an Army regiment -- the Rajput regiment.

"INS Rajput will now be decommissioned at a solemn ceremony at Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam. In her glorious 41 years, the ship had 31 Commanding Officers at her helm," Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

INS Rajput was constructed in the 61 Commandants shipyard in Nikolaevo (now Ukraine) under her original Russian name "Nadezhny", meaning "hope". The keel of the ship was laid on September 11, 1976 and she was launched on September 17, 1977.

UNIONS GIVE CALL FOR BLACK DAY ON MAY 26

New Delhi, May 20: A joint forum of ten central trade unions on Thursday gave a call to observe 'Black Day for Indian Democracy' on May 26 by wearing black badges and putting up black flags to press the government for their demands on May 26.

Their demands include free vaccination for all, free ration and ₹7,500 per month for the poor, repealing three farm laws and minimum support price for crops and withdrawal of four labour codes passed by Parliament last year. These codes are not implemented so far because rules under those are yet to be notified.

"It is time to call a spade a spade. We begin by observing 26th May as the Black Day for Indian Democracy, wearing black badges, putting up black flags. We resolve on this day, not to rest till we achieve our demands, not to rest till a message is driven home that the toiling people will not remain passive bystanders, watching the Modi Government do as they please," a joint statement said.

The 10 central unions in the joint forum are Indian National Trade Union Congress, All India Trade Union Congress, Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India United Trade Union Centre, Trade Union Co-ordination Centre, Self-Employed Women's Association, All India Central Council of Trade Unions, Labour Progressive Federation and United Trade Union Congress.

DAVINDER SINGH DISMISSED FROM SERVICE

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC SRINAGAR, MAY 20

Davinder Singh, the tainted Jammu and Kashmir police officer who had hit the headlines after his arrest with a senior commander of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen in January 2020 has been dismissed from services by the Union Territory's Lieutenant Governor.

Two schoolteachers too have been fired over their alleged anti-national activities.

Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha, has over the past few weeks sacked half a dozen government officials on such charges in what the officials say a renewed campaign to clean the administration of undesirable elements "in the interest of the security of the state".

A government order issued on Thursday said that the Lt. Governor is satisfied after considering the facts and circumstances of the case and on the basis of information available that the activities of Singh, who last served as Deputy Superintendent of Police with the Anti-Hijacking Squad at the Srinagar airport, are such as to warrant his dismissal from service.

Singh, a resident of Tral area of southern Pulwama district, is facing charges under various anti-terror laws for helping separatist militants including Hizb's commander Syed Naveed Mushtaq alias Naveed Babu.

Track infection spread among youth: PM

Prime Minister says Coronavirus challenge remains as long as infection exists even at minor scale



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with District Magistrates of 54 districts from 10 states with high caseloads of Covid infections on Thursday. - PTI

New Delhi, May 20: Continue to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour.

When the tally goes down, people start thinking that there is no need to worry now, he said, cautioning against it.

Modi called for collective responsibility in this regard among the government machinery, social organisations and elected representatives.

The challenge remains as long as the infection is present even at a minor scale, he said.

Noting that the pandemic has made their work more demanding and challenging, he said new strategies and solutions are needed to meet them and described the virus as *dhoor* (rogue) and *bahu-rupiya* (impersonator), a reference to its various mutations that has kept experts on edge.

Our strategy should be dynamic, and be undergoing continuous innovations and upgrade, he said.

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

Asking officials to analyse data separately for urban and rural regions besides those for tier 2 and

3 cities, Modi said it will help them prepare their strategy accordingly.

The prime minister stressed that officers use local experiences and also work together as a country. He also called for working to keep villages corona-free. Modi praised the officials for their efforts in making the good use of existing resources to fight "the biggest disaster in 100 years".

The officials, who interacted with Modi via video-

conferencing, were from Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

He had spoken to a group of field officials on Tuesday too.

The prime minister emphasised on giving importance to people's ease of living as well and said the facilities for free ration for the poor and other essential supplies must be provided.



Indian Navy carries out the rescue and search operations for the missing crew members of the barge P305, off the Mumbai coast. - PTI

Tragedy at sea: Barge's chief engineer blames captain, client

Mumbai, May 20:

Rahman Shaikh, chief engineer of the P-305 barge that sank off the Mumbai coast during cyclone Tauktae, alleged on Thursday that its captain did not take the cyclone warning seriously, leading to the death of at least 49 crew members.

He also questioned the vessel's seaworthiness.

P-305 which housed personnel engaged in maintenance work of an offshore oil drilling platform of state-run oil and gas major ONGC, sank on Monday evening.

Recovering from injuries, Shaikh said in a video shot by his brother Aalam that Balwinder Singh, the captain, insisted

that wind speeds will not be very high and the cyclonic storm will last only for an hour.

The captain said the wind will not go over 40 knots (about 75 kmph). It will start at 11 and end at 12. The entire incident happened because of the captain and client," the 48-year-old Rahman Shaikh said in the video, shared by Aalam.

Balwinder Singh is among the 26 people still missing. He is said to have jumped into the waters without a life jacket.

P-305, an accommodation barge for personnel engaged in maintenance work on Heera oil drilling platform of ONGC, de-anched and drifted in cyclonic winds of over 100

kmph on Monday and hit an unmanned oil rig.

The collision ripped a hole in the barge with 261 persons onboard, resulting in water seeping in.

Many of the survivors

said they jumped into the sea with life jackets on. Rahman Shaikh and many others had to spend more than 24 hours in water before being rescued by the Indian Navy.

Citing his brother, Aalam Shaikh said the crew tried to pump out the water but the hole was too big.

"When it was out of control, the team went up, where they found that the captain was missing," Aalam Shaikh said.

They then distributed life jackets and jumped

out, he said, adding that Rahman and a team of six people were the last to leave the barge.

Rahman is employed by Ocean Divers, parent firm of Durmast which was appointed by Afcons Infrastructure.

In a statement, Afcons, a Shapoorji Pallonji Group company, said it had chartered the vessel from Durmast and added that chartering is not the same as sub-contracting.

"...the responsibility for the marine side of the operations, namely safe vessel operation, navigation and vessel management, comes under the scope of work of the vessel owners," the Afcons statement said.

- PTI

Tainted Khaki: The cop is accused of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl

IPS officer chargesheeted in Pocso Act

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MAY 20

The Criminal Investigation Department of Assam police has charged an IPS officer of 2012 batch of Assam-Meghalaya cadre for allegedly sexually assaulting a 13-year-old girl child of a colleague after a birthday party at his residence.

The chargesheet has been filed against Gaurav Upadhyay under IPC's Sections 354, 354A (assault or criminal force to outrage modesty, sexual harassment) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act on March 31.

Upadhyay was appointed Superintendent of Police of Chirang district in the state on May 14. The officer was earlier posted at police headquarters in Guwahati.

The incident took place when Upadhyay, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, was posted as Karbi Anglong police superintendent.

According to the chargesheet, the girl's mother, a senior police officer, had gone to Dipu, headquarters of Karbi Anglong, along with her daughter and nine-year-old son in December 2019 to attend the birthday party of Upadhyay's son. After the party, Upadhyay took the senior officer and

her children to show them his office building near his official residence.

Upadhyay allegedly forcibly kissed the girl on her lips twice in presence of her brother when their mother excused herself to go to the washroom.

Around 2.30 am, Upadhyay dropped the three at a hotel where he had booked a suite for them. Upadhyay allegedly touched the girl inappropriately on the pretext of showing her a video on his mobile phone in the sitting room of the suite while her brother and mother were in the bedroom. Upadhyay tried to kiss the girl, but she rushed to the bedroom and

closed the door.

Upadhyay had invited the family for breakfast the next morning but the girl fearing a similar assault reported the incident to her mother and refused to go. The mother confronted the IPS officer who apologised for his behaviour the following day. The mother filed a case on January 3, 2020, at a women police station in Guwahati before the case was transferred to the CID.

"During the investigation, sufficient evidence has been found to prove that the accused police officer committed aggravated sexual assault. The accused person used crimi-

CMs not allowed to speak: Didi

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, MAY 20

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday directly accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of barring her and other Opposition party CMs from speaking up for their demands on Covid-19 pandemic at a virtual meeting chaired by him.

This was also the first time the Trinamool Congress supremo came face to face with Mr Modi officially after her party came to power for the third time in the state by defeating the BJP in the Assembly election.

Tearing into Mr Modi, Ms Banerjee alleged, "Ten CMs, including me, were present with some district magistrates there. We however did not allow the DMs from our state to attend it since a CM, if present, gets the priority over them. In a federal structure, though the CMs were invited, they were

not allowed to speak about their public demands. They were made to sit like puppets and bonded labourers. Only the PM kept talking without even giving us a chance. It was just a casual and a superfluous meeting."

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

The TMC chief wondered, "Why is the PM feeling so insecure and scared? Why is he fleeing away? In his speech, he claimed that Covid-19 deaths are decreasing. Then why are so many deaths there? Why are bodies being thrown away in the river? Namami Gange has now become Mrityupuri Gange."

Odisha gears up to tackle cyclone 'Yaas'

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 20

The Odisha government on Thursday said it had taken a slew of measures on a priority basis in view of the development of cyclonic storm 'Yaas' in the Bay of Bengal.

"The state government has put in place a slew of measures to face the possible situation during and after the cyclonic storm that is developing in the Bay of Bengal," the state revenue department said in an official communication.

State special relief commissioner Pradeep Kumar Jena asked all the departments concerned of the government machinery to ensure readiness with full preparedness of manpower and other resources for any exigency arising out of the storm that is likely to intensify into a cyclone from a low pressure between May 22 and May 25 before advancing towards Odisha-Bengal coast in northwest direction by May 26.

The state special relief commissioner informed that the exact track and intensity of the cyclone was not yet clear as different weather forecasting models were suggesting different pictures.

The state energy department has been notified to keep manpower resources on alert and equipment on standby. Public works department has been entrusted to work out a detailed plan for clearing of roads, tree cutting and other associated restoration works, the Mr Jena said.

The panchayati raj and water resources department has been asked to make necessary preparations to ensure an unhindered drinking water supply and plan to pre-position water tankers wherever necessary to help people during the aftermath of the cyclone.

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Merchant vessels, fishing boats alerted

RAJIB CHOWDHURY | DC KOLKATA, MAY 20

Bengal, stated that it is closely monitoring the weather development and has initiated preventive measures. Though fishing ban is enforced in the east coast of India, Coast Guard Dornier and ships at sea are intimating the fishermen operating close to coast and those at sea about likely formation of cyclonic storm over Odisha/West Bengal coast and directing these fishing boats to return back to harbour for safety.

It added, "Additionally, Radar Stations of ICG in the states of West Bengal and Odisha have also started transmitting weather warnings over VHF at regular intervals both in English and in vernacular language to alert Merchant Vessels and fishing boats operating at sea. ICG has also requested the State government of both West Bengal and that of Odisha to sensitise fishers and accounting of fishing boats present in harbour."

SHORT TAKES

IMPEACHMENT VOTE AGAINST SLOVENIA PM

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

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

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

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

13 KILLED IN AFGHAN ROAD BOMBINGS

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

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

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

NIGERIA'S BOKO HARAM LEADER BADLY WOUNDED

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

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

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

2012 CAMPAIGN FINANCING: SARKOZY ON TRIAL

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

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



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

Israel unleashes strikes as chances of truce rise

Bibi pushes back against US calls to wind down offensive

Stop hostilities at once, says UN chief

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

The session is expected to hear from about 100 speakers, including 12 ministers mainly from Arab and Islamic countries.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told Thursday's in-person meeting in the assembly chamber that he and the UN Mideast envoy are engaged in "extensive diplomatic efforts" in the region, including with Egypt, Jordan and Qatar, to stop the fighting.

He called on all members of the international community "to do everything in their power to enable the parties to conflict to step back from the brink."

The UN chief also called on Israel and Hamas "to allow for mediation efforts to intensify in order to bring the fighting to an end." Guterres implicitly criticised Israel and Hamas for violating "the laws of war" which ban indiscriminate attacks.

He urged Israeli authorities to abide by the laws, "including the proportionate use of force" and called on them "to exercise maximum restraint in the conduct of military operations."

He urged Hamas and other militant groups "to stop the indiscriminate launching of rockets and mortars from highly populated civilian neighbourhoods into civilian population centres in Israel."

— AP

EXPECTED COSTLY BATTLE: ISLAMIC JIHAD LEADER

Beirut, May 20: The leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group says militant factions in Gaza went into the latest battle with Israel knowing it will be "costly" but also knowing that it is the only road to freedom and to protect Jerusalem.

Ziad Nakhaleh said in a televised speech from Beirut on Wednesday that neither nuclear weapons, warplanes nor peace agreements with some Arab states could bring Israel's security and peace. He added that militant groups in Gaza have "made miracles that you can see with your own eyes and you live them every moment when you run to shelters."

Nakhaleh was referring to thousands of missiles and rockets that Gaza militants have fired toward Israel. Nakhaleh said that after Israel's moves that threatened the eviction of Palestinian families in east Jerusalem, "we were in front of two choices, to surrender and to give them everything or fight them over everything."

— AP

Palestine cries genocide

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

Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers that "every country in the world has a responsibility to ensure that peace, justice and freedom prevail." He urged the assembly to ensure that Israel is held accountable for killing innocent Palestinians and is not provided with arms.

He said the presence of a dozen ministers, almost all from Arab and Islamic

countries, sends a clear message: "Stop the violence." He responded to Israel's claims of acting in self-defence by saying: "How can an occupying power have the right to defend itself when a whole people under occupation is deprived of the very same rights?" He said the Palestinians have informed the Biden administration.

— AP

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

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

Even as the diplomatic efforts appeared to gather

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

— AP

US man survives mauling by bear

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

— AP

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

— AP

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

— AP

Another 10 launches are planned to deliver the station's other two modules, various components and supplies, and a three-person crew. The launch of Tianhe, or Heavenly Harmony, was considered a success although China was criticised for allowing the uncontrolled reentry of part of the rocket that carried it into space.

Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit. Earlier this month, China also landed a probe and its accompanying rover on the moon's less explored far

Mars and has begun sending back pictures from the surface of the red planet.

Lavrov says talks with Blinken constructive

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

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

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

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

— BUT SIGNS have emerged that the two sides are seeking to appease each other.

Russian diplomatic missions following tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats.

"We've agreed to continue our joint actions — which are developing rather successfully — on regional conflicts where US and Russian interests overlap," he also said.

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

He said however that the two had agreed to prepare proposals for the top-level summit, including those on strategic stability.

He said he had reiterated Moscow's suggestion of beginning broad dialogue with the United States on strategic stability, stressing that Blinken did not refuse.

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

— AP

MOBS ATTACK SYRIANS HEADING FOR PREZ VOTE

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

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

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

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

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

China 2nd protest over US navy move

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

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

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

The US refuses to recognise China's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea and regularly conducts what it calls freedom of navigation operations to assert its right to sail in international waters. China on Wednesday issued a complaint over the Wilbur's passage through the Taiwan Strait, also calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region. While the strait is in international waters, China claims self-governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the US Navy's presence near the island as providing support for its independence-leaning democratically elected government.

Along with building the world's largest navy and coast guard by numbers of vessels, China has fortified its island holdings in the strategically vital South China Sea.

It has ignored rival territorial claims by its smaller Southeast Asian neighbours, as well as an international arbitral ruling that declared most of China's claims in the South China Sea invalid.

An emboldened China faced with the scaling up of US military operations in the area has increasingly raised concerns about a possible clash or confrontation, whether intended or not.

— AP

Nasa says Beijing failed to meet standards regarding debris

Beijing, May 20: China delays mission to space station

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

The Tianshou-2 cargo spacecraft was expected to have been launched early Thursday morning. China Manned Space announced the delay on its website but didn't say when the uncontrolled reentry of part of the rocket that carried it into space.

Usually, discarded rocket stages reenter the atmosphere soon after liftoff, normally over water, and don't go into orbit.

— AP

Nasa Administrator Sen. Bill Nelson said at the time that China had failed to meet responsible standards regarding space debris.

China's space programme has suffered relatively few setbacks since it first put an astronaut into orbit in 2003, although the space station launch was delayed by the failure of an earlier version of the massive Long March 5B rocket.

China also recently brought back lunar samples, the first by any country's space programme since the 1970s, and also landed a probe and rover on the moon's less explored far side. China earlier launched two smaller experimental space stations. It has been excluded from the International Space Station largely at the insistence of the United States, which is wary of the secrecy surrounding the Chinese space programme and its close military links.

Despite that, China has entered into increasingly close cooperation in space with various European and other countries.

— AP

SHORT TAKES**BANDITS KILL 11 IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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

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

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

Aruanu said on the same day three herders were killed by bandits who attacked Marrahan Jos village.

KEY ARREST IN BID TO ASSASSINATE MALDIVES EX-PREZ

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

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

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

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

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

WWII BOMB IN FRANKFURT DETONATED

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

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

TEXAS EXECUTES INMATE WHO KILLED GREAT AUNT

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

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

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

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

FOSSIL STUDY

Vaccines stop variants but overseas travel unsafe: WHO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— AFP

SHOOTING: TWO KILLED IDENTIFIED

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

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

— AP



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

Nurse who cared for Boris quits, criticises UK govt

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

Jenny McGee, originally from New Zealand, said from a Channel 4 documentary titled 'The Year Britain Stopped'.

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

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

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

EU finalizes Pfizer deal for 1.8 billion vax doses

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

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

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

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

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

Navalny health improves: Aide

Moscow, May 20: Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has recovered after he ended a 24-day hunger strike last month demanding adequate medical treatment, a top aide and the head of Russia's prison service said Thursday.

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

ment at a civilian hospital.

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

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

more or less."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOSIL STUDY The team reconstructed the region's evolutionary history by carbon dating the remains

Colonists drove mass reptile extinction on Guadeloupe

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

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

Corentin Bochaton of the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique said that he and his colleagues studied 43,000 reptile bone remains from the Caribbean archipelago's six islands.

"What we found is that we have massive biodiversity in the past record, with several species we were unaware were present there in the past, and also several species that were never described before," lead author of the

team Bochaton said. The team analysed the remains of 16 taxa, or animal groups across 31 sites from Guadeloupe, which is a part of France. These were sorted into four periods: the Late Pleistocene (32,000 to 11,650 years ago), the Holocene before the arrival of humans (starting 11,650 years ago), the Indigenous habitation period, and the modern period.

By carbon dating the remains and their surrounding sediment, they were able to reconstruct

the region's evolutionary history, and found that the mass extinction occurred over only the last 500 years. The islands could have been first inhabited by humans as far back as 5,000 years ago.

Columbus arrived in Guadeloupe in 1493, while French colonisation started in 1635 and led to the

disappearance of Guadeloupe's indigenous people within 20 years.

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

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

As to what led to the eradication of species such as the curlytail roquet and the Marie-Galante Boa, the authors believe the colonists' cats, mongooses, raccoons and even rats were mostly to blame.

Seven beheaded in Guatemala prison clashes

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

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

Authorities suspect one of the gangs attacked the other in retaliation for an incident that took place several days ago

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

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

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

Apple CEO Cook to testify today

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

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

The trial revolves around the allegations as a desperate attempt by Epic to boost its own profits by breaching a contract covering a small portion of the 1.8 million apps in its store to pay the commissions.

Apple says the commissions help it pay for the technology powering its products, including the security and privacy protections that has helped make iPhone so popular.

Cook will be taking the stand as Apple prepares to wrap its case. — AP

Court tells Ghosn to repay salary

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

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

The salary he was ordered to repay covers payments made to him by the Dutch joint venture from April until November 2018.

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

The salary he was ordered to repay covers payments made to him by the Dutch joint venture from April until November 2018.

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sugar exports subsidy cut to ₹4,000/ tonne

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

Bosch Q4 net jumps six-fold to ₹482 crore



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

Mindtree to buy L&T's NxT Digital Business

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

Nucleus Software gets Bank of Sydney contract

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

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

MICHAEL GONSALVES

PUNE, MAY 20

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

"This easy-to-use test combines with Mylab's AI-powered mobile app so that a user can know his/her positive status,

submit the result to ICMR directly for traceability, and know what to do next in either case of result," Jain said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gold to gain from crypto fall, dollar weakness

SANGEETHA G

CHENNAI, MAY 20

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

"Cryptocurrency is neither a currency nor an asset class. But we have seen enormous amounts of speculative money going into them in the past one year as Bitcoin value moved up from \$8,000 to \$60,000 levels.

Single day drop of 40 per cent has made investors realise that cryptocurrency movement has been just speculation," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

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



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

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

commodities and currencies, Angel Broking.

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

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

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

FY21 ITR filing deadline extended till Sept. 30

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

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

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

return using ITR-1 or ITR-4 forms the deadline to file ITR is July 31. The deadline for taxpayers, like companies or firms, whose accounts are required to be audited is October 31.

In a circular, the CBDT said an extension of time limits is being given for certain tax compliances "to provide relief to taxpayers in view of the severe pandemic."

Also, the deadline for financial institutions to furnish the Statement of Financial Transaction

extended by a month till July 15, 2021, the CBDT said.

The due date for filing the tax audit report and transfer pricing certificate has been extended by a month till October 31 and November 30, respectively. For filing belated or revised return of income, the due date is now January 31, 2022.

Besides, the deadline for financial institutions to furnish the Statement of Financial Transaction

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

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

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

'Not very social' ByteDance founder to hand CEO reins to college buddy

ECHO WANG & YINGZHI YANG

MAY 20

Zhang Yiming announced he will step down as CEO of TikTok-owner ByteDance, saying he lacked the social skills to be an ideal manager and naming his college roommate Liang Rubo as his successor to navigate a rising tide of Big Tech regulations.

In a surprise announcement to employees on Thursday, Zhang said the change would enable him "to have greater impact on longer-term initiatives". He will move to a "key strategy" position at the end of the year, ByteDance said.

The 38-year-old will be succeeded by Liang, a long-time colleague and the current head of human resources at ByteDance, one of the world's biggest private tech companies with an estimated value of about \$300 billion in recent years.

Zhang, who turned ByteDance into a social media force, said he was not in fact a social person.

He blamed the day-to-day challenges of a CEO as being a hurdle to research and innovation, while calling Liang "an invaluable partner" with "strengths in management, organization, and social engagement".

ByteDance, which employs over 100,000 people worldwide, had been preparing for a much-anticipated IPO this year, but halted the plans in April. —Reuters



Zhang Yiming

technology firms. In April, they handed e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd with a \$2.8 billion fine for anti-competitive practices, and last year suspended fintech affiliate Ant Group's initial public offering (IPO).

Anti-trust regulators have also told Tencent Holdings Ltd they are preparing to fine the gaming giant as much as \$1.55 billion.

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DBS HAS FUNDS TO BUY CITI INDIA UNIT: BERNSTEIN

CHANYAPORN CHANJAROEN

MAY 20

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

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

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

DBS has pledged to make more income outside its home turf, where the bank derived 70 per cent of its \$8.47 billion profit in 2020.

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

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

In April, DBS said it would pay \$1.1 billion for a 13 per cent chunk in China's Shenzhen Rural Commercial Bank Corp., and Gupta has indicated an interest to raise the size of that stake. —Bloomberg

THAILAND PRIORITISES WORKERS FOR JABS TO REVIVE ECONOMY

RANDY THANHTHONG-KNIGHT

MAY 20

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

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

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

BADGE OF HONOUR Verification application to appear in Account Settings tab Twitter starts verification for blue tick

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Twitter highlighted that it has also started enforcing that policy by automatically removing the verified badge from accounts that are of high public interest, and gives Twitter users more context about who they're having conversations with.

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

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

The coveted 'blue badge' is one of the ways Twitter helps people

SHORT TAKES

Legendary Milkha Singh is Covid +ve

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

"A couple of our helpers earlier tested positive and so all the family members did the tests. Only I returned positive on Wednesday and I am surprised," Milkha said.

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

Shooting coach Monali dies at 44

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

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

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

Bhuvneshwar's dad passes away

New Delhi: India pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar's father, Kiran Pal Singh on Thursday died at his Meerut residence after battling liver cancer for the last eight months. He was 63 and is survived by his wife Indresh Devi and son and daughter Bhuvneshwar and Rakesh respectively.

According to ESPNcricinfo, Singh was first detected with the illness in September last year when Bhuvneshwar was playing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in UAE for the IPL. "It is understood that Bhuvneshwar's return from the IPL in UAE, where he was representing Sunrisers Hyderabad, was mainly due to his father's health condition," the report said.

Singh was undergoing treatment, including chemotherapy, at the All Institute of Medical Science here after consulting doctors in the UK. — PTI

Archer doubtful for India series

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

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

Medical insurance for sportspersons

New Delhi: The government has decided to widen its medical insurance cover for sportspersons by increasing the number of beneficiary athletes and including contractual coaches and support staff from this year in the wake of the pandemic.

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) on Thursday said that with this decision, the coverage would increase to more than 13,000 athletes, coaches and support staff. Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said the well-being of athletes, coaches and support staff are his ministry's priority.

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

REJUVENTUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But ten minutes later Ruslan Malinovskiy blasted in the equaliser.

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

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



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

Liverpool move into top 4, Spurs' Euro hopes dented

London, May 20:

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

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

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

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

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

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

third in the 88th minute.

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

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

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

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

MBAPE DAZZLES AS PSG CROWNED WITH FRENCH CUP

Paris, May 20:

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

Goals from Mauro Icardi and Kylian Mbappe won a largely uninspiring final for PSG who now go into the weekend's final round of French league fixtures with 10th league title still a possibility.

PSG have now won the French Cup six times in the last seven seasons having reached the final every year since 2015. It was also the second trophy of coach Mauricio Pochettino's managerial career.

— AFP



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

INDIAN FOOTBALL TEAM AWAIT COVID TEST RESULTS AFTER REACHING DOHA

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

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

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

matches," it added.

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

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

Perez had a best lap of 1 minute, 12.49 seconds on the sinewy 3.4-kilometre circuit that snakes around the principality. Ferrari driver Carlos Sainz Jr. and Max Verstappen, Perez's teammate, were next. AlphaTauri driver Pierre Gasly had the fourth fastest time. He was followed by F1 champion Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes teammate Valtteri Bottas.

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

PEREZ LEADS 1ST PRACTICE SESSION, HAMILTON FIFTH

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



Hemant Kenkre

Silly Point

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

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

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

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

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

Ball management, on the field of play, is as old as the game. Picking the seam with a overgrown thumbnail to help movement or using foreign substitutes from bottle caps to strips laden with Vaseline is a been-there, done-that situation, if one peers into the history of cricket.

The

Aussie pack of

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

The

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

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

As a schoolboy one was

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

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

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

Dravid to coach India on SL tour



Rahul Dravid

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ball specialists.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India not safe for T20 WC: Hussey

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

Batting coach Hussey was among three members of the Chennai Super Kings contingent who contracted