

IN BRIEF

EC POSTPONES MLC ELECTIONS IN BOTH TELUGU STATES

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

Keeping the Covid pandemic situation in mind, the Election Commission has postponed the Legislative Council elections from the MLA quota elections in both the Telugu states. Announcing the decision in a statement on Thursday, the CEC said that elections will be held only after the Covid situation improves.

Three MLC seats will be vacant on May 31 in Andhra Pradesh. In Telangana state, the tenure of six MLCs will end this month. It includes that of Legislative Council chairman Gutta Sukhender Reddy, deputy chairman Neti Vidyasagar, former deputy chief minister Kadiam Srihari, Fariduddin, Akula Lalitha and Bodakuntla Venkateswarlu. The term of Prof. M. Srinivas Reddy, who was nominated in the Governor's quota, is also ending this month.

The six MLCs under the MLAs' quota and one under Governor quota must be in place by June 16 in Telangana state.

UFRTI URGES CM TO TO EASE VAX NORMS IN TRIBAL AREAS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

The United Forum for RTI Campaign-AP (UFRTI-AP) has urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to ease norms in tribal areas towards distribution of essential commodities through the public distribution system (PDS) and further to get Covid-19 vaccination. The forum lamented that many tribal people do not have ration and Aadhaar cards which are essential to get Corona vaccination and essential commodities.

The UFRTI-AP Co-Conveners, Chakradhar Buddha, Emmanuel Dasari and J. Srinivas Goud Chalapati, said that they had written a letter to the Chief Minister on Thursday, seeking exemptions for PDS rations and Corona vaccines in tribal areas.

They said that AP has a considerable tribal population (5 million as per 2011 census), and they are primarily located in the 35 Scheduled Mandals spread across different districts of the state. These areas are also home to Particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs).

AUTHORISATION MADE MANDATORY FOR ENTRY INTO TS

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 13

The Telangana state government on Thursday made authorisation mandatory for the entry of Covid patients from other states.

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar issued a memo in this regard, which was communicated to the chief secretaries of neighbouring states. The government invoked the provisions of Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897 and Disaster Management Act, 2005 in support of its decision.

Referring to several people rushing to the city for hospitalisation without prior tie-up with any hospital, the Chief Secretary said such patients would not only lose precious time in moving from one hospital to another but also potentially spread the infection of different strains.

The Chief Secretary's communication to the chief secretaries comes after the Telangana High Court described stopping ambulances at the state's borders as inhuman and against the Constitution. The court gave clear direction to not stop ambulances at the borders.

The Chief Secretary, however, came up with a procedure according to which the hospital should apply in the prescribed format to the state government, giving details of the name of the patient, age, attendant name, mobile number and type of bed reserved and care required.

They should send these details to control room with phone number 040-24651119, WhatsApp to 9494438251 and email to idsp@telangana.gov.in.

On receiving the details, the control room will issue authorisation based on which the patient can come to Telangana state for hospitalisation. The Chief Secretary asked the neighbouring states' administration to give wide publicity of the arrangement for the benefit of people.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy releases YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan third phase funds to farmers at his camp office in Tadepalli on Thursday. Minister K. Kannababu (right), MP Balasowri (second from left) and special chief secretary (agriculture) Poonam Malakondaiah are also seen. — BY ARRANGEMENT

Farmers thank CM for Rythu Bharosa money

Say it eased their dependence on high interest loans

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 13

Farmers in the district expressed delight after Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy released cash assistance into their accounts under the YSR Rythu Bharosa-PM Kisan Scheme on Thursday.

An amount of ₹275.23 crore was released and it will benefit around 5,00,216 farmers for the third straight year. This comes as a timely relief to the aggrieved farming community in the wake of corona pandemic.

Each farmer received ₹7,500 under the direct benefit transfer scheme. Each year, every eligible farmer gets ₹13,500 in two installments. Around 7.11 lakh farmers are eligible to receive the benefit in the district under the Rythu Bharosa scheme for the financial year 2021-22.

Thanking the Chief Minister, Kuruva Pedda Eswarayya, a native of Chinna Tekur in Kallur mandal, said that he cultivates onion in his three and a half acres of land. "Every year for the past three years, I have been getting ₹13,500. My financial position has stabilised and I need not scamper around for loans to save standing crops," he said.

Golla Yellappa, another farmer from Gudur village, said it was a timely gift from the empathetic Chief Minister, who kept up his word.

"I have five acres of cultivable land and it is the only source of my livelihood. Even Rythu Bharosa Kendras have been assisting us in selecting the right inputs for farming activities," he said.

Maddileti from Rudravaram pointed out that "growing crops in Kharif season is a nightmare as we have to pool resources. Taking loans was the only option. But the financial assistance

5L farmers benefited in Godavari districts

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 13

Farmers have expressed their satisfaction over the Rythu Bharosa scheme and said that the financial aid from the State government is easing their financial burden to some extent.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the first spell of Rythu Bharosa scheme on Thursday and interacted with a few farmers through video conference.

From East Godavari District, a farmer, Penke Govinda Rajulu of Z. Bhavaram in Karapa mandal, said that he has two acres of land and he took another three acres on lease. Earlier, he was cultivating the paddy by borrowing money at high interest rates. After the Bharosa scheme was launched, farmers like him were relieved from debt to some extent. He also said that previously, they used to get pesticides and fertilisers from a distance of 20 to 30 km, but now, they are able to get them in their own village.

He said the Rythu Bharosa amounts would reduce the burden of interest on their debt.

BC Welfare Minister Ch. Srinivas Venugopala Krishna said that every farmer is being paid ₹13,500 per year which will reduce bring down the

burden of high interest rates.

As many as 7,82,720 lakh farmers have benefited from ₹587.08 crore credited to their accounts in East and West Godavari Districts.

West Godavari District Collector Karthikeya Misra said that ₹467.02 crore was credited to the bank accounts of 3,29,121 farmers in the district. He said that ₹245.96 crore under Y.S.R. Rythu Bharosa Scheme and ₹0.88 crore under PM Kisan Scheme were credited. He said that financial assistance to the tune of ₹450.23 crore in 2019-20 and ₹467.02 crore in 2020-21 was extended to farmers under the scheme. As many as 4,53,599 farmers will get ₹340.24 crore under the Rythu Bharosa scheme in East Godavari District.

East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that ₹329.41 crore was disbursed to 4,39,220 farmers and ₹10.78 crore to 14,379 ROFR farmers in the agency area. ₹30.44 lakh was credited to 406 farmers belonging to Yanam, a Union Territory enclave of Puducherry, who are cultivating in the district lands. He said each farmer would get ₹7,500 in the first spell and they will get the remaining two spells of amounts in October 2021 and January 2022.

given by the CM has eased our dependence on loans that are taken at high interest rates."

Plant managers helpless to mobilise technicians

From page 1

The plant managers expressed helplessness to mobilise technicians in such a short notice to resume operations.

The Dockyard team was deputed to Nellore to assist the administration in operating the oxygen plants in major hospitals without a break, the Collector informed.

Once the unit is revived, 440 cylinders of 10 liters capacity each can be filled a day and it would help meet the needs of all the small empanelled Covid hospitals in the district.

Number of oxgen tankers for Covid patients increased

From page 1

When the CM ordered arrangement of 15,000 oxygen concentrators, 10,000 D-type cylinders in all Covid hospitals and to provide more facilities to the patients, the officials said that an additional 250 ventilators were being installed, of which 50 had already been supplied to the hospitals. They said that

Plant managers helpless to mobilise technicians

Once the unit is revived, 440 cylinders of 10 liters capacity each can be filled a day and it would help meet the needs of all the small empanelled Covid hospitals in the district.

The Collector also said they are also looking at alternative options to supply 10 tonnes of oxygen to the 3 Nellore-based gas filling agencies which are supplying to individuals and some hospitals. "Hitherto, the agencies were securing oxygen from Chennai but the sup-

CM IS BIASED TOWARDS FARMERS: DY CM

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy believes that the state will prosper only if the farmer is happy, and hence is biased towards them, said Deputy Chief Minister S.B. Amjad Basha.

Accompanied by Government Whip Koramutla Srinivas and district collector Chevuru Harikiran and MLAs, he handed over a mega cheque for around ₹224 crore to be credited to the bank accounts of 2,99,181 farmers towards the first installment of Rythu Bharosa scheme in the Kadapa district.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion, the Deputy CM said it was a matter of great pleasure to provide great aid to the farmers for the third year in a row, despite the dire financial situation of the state due to the Corona epidemic.

Collector Harikiran said that if any eligible farmer does not get the aid, they should contact the ward or village volunteers concerned, agriculture assistant of the secretariat or the mandal agriculture officer. If they still face any problems, they can contact the toll-free number '155251' and represent their problem.

Pendlimarri mandal Havaldar Peta farmer N. Chennareddy said, "Farmers' self-esteem has increased since the formation of the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government."

Plant managers helpless to mobilise technicians

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The Collector also said they are also looking at alternative options to supply 10 tonnes of oxygen to the 3 Nellore-based gas filling agencies which are supplying to individuals and some hospitals. "Hitherto, the agencies were securing oxygen from Chennai but the sup-

plies were suspended from May 2, 2021, after the central government took control of the distribution of oxygen," Chakradhar Babu informed.

He opined that all the ordeals for oxygen would come to an end in the district if they can revive another oxygen plant with 80 tonnes capacity, SBQ Steels, in Chillakur mandal.

It can produce 70 per cent of oxygen in the form of gas and 30 per cent in the form of liquid. The officials have intensified their efforts to bring it into operation at the earliest.

CM's push for vax tech transfer draws praise

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's suggestion to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for compulsory licensing system for vaccines to ramp up their production steeply has been well appreciated by experts including NITI Aayog member V.K. Paul and leaders of various political parties.

Jagan Mohan Reddy's idea of compulsory licensing of Covaxin production was later picked up by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and 12 leaders of opposition. They too demanded that compulsory licensing be introduced and technological transfer effected to other companies for production of Covaxin, which would help meet vaccine demands in a big way.

In order to vaccinate every one above 18 years, the country requires 172 crore doses. As of now, hardly 10 per cent of the population is vaccinated, according to reports.

Accepting the suggestion of Jagan Mohan Reddy, the centre has taken a decision to allow a few more companies to produce the much-needed vaccine.

At present, the production capacity for Covishield is 6 crore doses per month and that of Covaxin is 1 crore doses. At the current pace of

'Centre must find ways to step up vax output'

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has stressed the need for the central government to take measures to ramp up Covid-19 vaccine production to meet the huge demand in the country.

Stating that the country was facing an unprecedented and devastating onslaught by Coronavirus, the Chief Minister asserted that vaccination is the only way out for the country to contain the surge in infections. He demanded that the Centre find ways to increase the vaccine production.

The Chief Minister was speaking on the occasion of releasing the first tranche of YSR Rythu Bharosa. He said that at the rate of two doses per person, there would be a need for 172 crore doses for those above 18 years in the country. However, so far only about 18 crore

doses have been administered, which is less than 10 per cent of the actual requirement, he rued.

He said that in Andhra Pradesh alone, over seven crore doses would be required to cover all those above 18 years, but the Centre has given only 73 lakh doses till date. In regard to vaccine production, he said that currently only two companies are manufacturing vaccines with just seven crore doses per month. While Bharat Biotech is producing one lakh doses, Serum Institute is making six lakh doses per month. He said that given this dire situation of vaccine shortage, the fight against Covid would be long and painful.

The Chief Minister urged the public not to let their guard down and to all precautions by wearing masks, maintaining physical distance, washing hands often, as living with Covid would be part of everyone's lives.

vaccination drive, many experts have opined that it would take 2 to 3 years for the entire population above 18 years to get vaccinated in India.

Further in his letter to the Prime Minister, the

Chief Minister mentioned that Covaxin has been developed by Bharat Biotech in association with ICMR-NIV in PPP mode and as such there should not be any IPR issues.

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Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy greeted Muslims on the eve of Id-ul-Fitr. In a message he wished, "With the blessings of Allah, good luck prevails to the people of the state and to the humanity of the world. Everyone should get out of the Coronavirus epidemic and live with longevity."

The Chief Minister said Ramzan was unique as it combines discipline, philanthropy and charitable thinking and doing. He recalled that during this month of the revelation of the Holy Quran, all Muslims continue their spiritual life by worshipping Allah faithfully with a strict fast initiation for a month. Special prayers

Kapus feel it's time for review of BC list

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 13

Kapus in the state are concerned as the Supreme Court has struck down a GO providing reservations for Marathas, on grounds that the overall reservations have crossed the limit of 50 per cent. The apex court also said that the BC list should be finalised by the Government of India alone.

Kapu leaders say that like them, Jats in Haryana, Patidars in Gujarat, and Gurmars in Rajasthan are seeking reservations in view of their social and economic backwardness. They are gearing up for another agitation to force the central government to enact a law, allowing states to announce or raise quotas for certain castes, not leaving any scope for court intervention. Former MLC Ramu Surya Rao in a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav

Thackeray said the SC judgment would adversely impact the fight of so many castes across the country for equality and social justice.

Kapu leaders believe there is a need to bring all aggrieved castes together on a common platform to mount pressure on governments to concede their just demands for either higher quota or inclusion among the BCs. Rao said the SC should allow reservations for them within the purview of the constitution. A rational view should be taken and constitutionally reservations should be provided to these classes, he observed.

Rao said the centre should conduct a comprehensive caste-wise socio-economic survey to do justice to them. For the last seven decades there has been no review of the BC which remains stagnant despite growing need for BC quota to various castes like Kapus, he rued.

Similarly, in regard to vaccination, 75,49,960 Covid vaccine doses were received so far from the centre, and of them 62,60,400 were Covishield and 12,89,560 were Covaxin doses.

coming to the state after getting filled with oxygen from Durgapur and another 25 tankers are due by the middle of June.

The officials said that German hanger tents were being set up at select hospitals. Each can accommodate 25-50 beds based on the available area. The authorities informed the Chief Minister that there are 47,693 beds at 669 Covid

hospitals, of which 39,749 beds are occupied. 26,030 people are being treated under AarogyaSri Scheme. There are 6,513 ICU beds, 23,357 non-ICU oxygen beds and 17,823 non-ICU oxygen beds with a total of 3,460 ventilators.

As far as availability of essentials are concerned, there are 6,42,911 N-95 masks and 7,18,086 PPE kits and 3,826 surgical

IN BRIEF

WOMAN DELIVERS
BABY AT COVID-19
TESTING CENTREDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 13

A 25-year-old woman delivered a baby while waiting for the Covid-19 test at primary health centre at Simhachalam in Visakhapatnam city on Thursday. Reports said Chintada Lakshmi, a native of old town in Visakhapatnam, has been eking out her living by working as a daily wage earner in the agency area of Simhachalam. She came in an auto rickshaw for getting Covid-19 test at the primary health centre and suddenly developed labor pains.

She later delivered a female baby. In charge of the primary health centre and deputy civil surgeon Dr. Madhavi and health staff took her inside the hospital delivery room and provided the initial treatment. She was later shifted to King George Hospital for better treatment. Both the woman and her baby were found to be healthy.

The news of delivery at the testing centre queue line became viral in the social media. Minister for Health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani) made an inquiry into the incident by calling up district medical and health officer Dr P. Suryanarayana and enquired about the incident. The minister later appreciated the alertness of the primary health centre medical staff for responding to the incident.

● **SHE CAME** in an auto rickshaw for getting Covid-19 test at the primary health centre and suddenly developed labor pains. She later delivered a female baby. She was later shifted to King George Hospital for better treatment. Both the woman and her baby were found to be healthy.

GOVT NURSES BODY
DEMAND SUSPENSION
OF CIRCLE INSPECTORDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

Government Nurses Association leaders have condemned the attack on a nurse and her husband who works in the 108 Emergency service, by a circle inspector and some women police and sought their suspension.

GNA state president G. Santhi Bhavani and secretary S. Kotamma said Rajamahendravaram Three Town circle inspector Durga Prasad illegally detained staff nurse Hemalatha and her husband while they were returning home from work and beat them up.

Hemalatha was working in the medical and health department and her husband in the Emergency 108 services at Rajamahendravaram.

The GNA leaders said CI Durga Prasad forcibly stopped the couple at Quarry market in Rajahmundry on Wednesday, the International Nurses Day, and dumped them into the police vehicle. Inside the van, the CI brutally beat the husband.

Hemalatha informed the cops about their jobs and the exemption they have for travel during the curfew time but the CI went on to detain the couple at the police station. There, the CI and the women police once again beat the couple.

The nurses' leaders lamented that the police attack on the nurse and her husband on International Nurses Day was condemnable in the strongest terms.

They noted that nurses are rendering yeoman services by risking their lives in Coronavirus times. Unmindful of this, the police were inhumanly harassing and beating them up. The GNA leaders urged the police authorities to take the CI and other cops to task by suspending them from service.

Emergency care



A Covid patient brought in an ambulance gets treatment outside a private hospital at Prahaladapuram in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Active Covid-19 cases
cross 2L mark in state

Death toll crosses 9,000 mark; EG sees highest no. of cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

Andhra Pradesh crossed 2 lakh mark in total Coronavirus active infections and 9,000 mark in total Covid-19 deaths on Thursday, with 22,399 new Coronavirus infections and 89 new deaths reported from the state. Coronavirus tests were conducted on 96,446 samples, of which 22,399 were found to be Covid positive. As many as 18,638 patients recovered in the past 24 hours. The total Covid-19 cases in the state reached 13,66,786, comprising

2,01,042 were active cases and 11,56,666 were recoveries. The total Covid-19 deaths were 9,077.

The single-day highest number of 3,372 new cases was registered in East Godavari district, followed by Chittoor with 2,646 new infections, Guntur 2,141, Anantapur 2,080 and Visakhapatnam 2,064 new infections. Nellore district reported 1,589 new Coronavirus infections, West Godavari 1,576, Prakasam 1,489, Kadapa 1,447 and Kurnool 1,365 new Covid-19 infections. Krishna district registered 910

new Coronavirus infections, Vizianagaram 896 and the single-day least number of 824 infections was reported in Srikakulam district.

As many as 11 Covid-19 deaths each were registered in the past 24 hours in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts, followed by nine deaths each in East Godavari and Chittoor districts, eight each in Krishna and Prakasam eight each in Chittoor, seven in Srikakulam, six in Guntur, five in Nellore, four each in Kadapa and West Godavari and three Coronavirus deaths in

Anantapur district.

East Godavari continues to be on the top in the total number of Covid-19 cases in AP State with 1,73,371 cases followed by Chittoor with 1,48,460, Guntur 1,27,993, West Godavari 1,15,168, Visakhapatnam 1,06,110, Anantapur 1,05,673, Nellore 99,280, Kurnool 97,242 and Srikakulam registered a total of 90,220 cases.

The total number of Covid-19 cases in Prakasam district was 87,418, while Kadapa registered 78,233, Krishna 73,479 and Vizianagaram with 61,243 cases.

Covid-19 cases drop by
half in Srikakulam distDC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, MAY 13

Positive cases abruptly dropped by half registering 824 cases during the last 24 hours in Srikakulam district. Health officials said 4,939 samples were collected and of them 824 tested positive. It was hovering between 1500 to 2,000 during the last one week. They said 13,174 patients were in home isolation, 931 in Covid Care Centre and 1861 were undergoing treatment in various

hospitals. Around 1,732 were discharged during the last 24 hours.

A senior official said that hectic efforts to contain the spread of the virus has been yielding desired results.

Initially, shops were closed after 6 pm and later it was brought down to 2 pm and now the government has imposed partial lockdown. The sudden spurt in positive cases and deaths instilled a sense of fear among the people forcing them to follow the Covid protocol.

Meanwhile, the district collector J. Niwas held a teleconference with the officials on Thursday and took stock of the situation. He asked them to increase the tests in places like Amadalavalasa, Palasa and Vajrapukotturu mandals where maximum cases were being reported. He also suggested the officials increase the fever survey all over the district and visit the patients who were getting treated in home isolation.

Separate transport for
Covid-19 suspects soonDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 13

Industries Minister and legislator representing Atmakur segment, Mekapati Goutham Reddy was baffled when Atmakur DSP K. Venkateswar Rao told the minister about people with Covid-19 symptoms traveling in public and private transport vehicles mingling with others in Atmakur division.

The DSP disclosed this during a review on the Covid-19 situation in Atmakur division through virtual mode by the minister on Thursday. Reacting to the informa-

tion, Goutham Reddy directed the Revenue Divisional Officer A. Chaitravashini to arrange a call centre and separate vehicles to take Covid-19 suspected patients to testing centres and confine them to their homes till the results are given.

The minister underlined the need to keep a close watch on private labs which are not posting the Covid-19 test results online reacting to a complaint by Atmakur Municipal Commissioner Ramesh Babu.

Goutham Reddy assured the Commissioner that he would talk to the Collector to

resolve the issue pertaining to the paucity of funds to dispose of the bodies of Covid-19 patients.

He also promised to arrange 150 remdesivir injections and 10 to 15 oxygen concentrators from Med Tech in Visakhapatnam, besides 100 oxygen cylinders on daily basis from Gudur.

He elicited information on the treatment at 100 bedded government hospital in Atmakur from RMO Dr Usha Sundari. Goutham Reddy called for coordinated efforts to contain the Covid-19 infection and offer effective treatment to the patients.

Washermen ostracised
for seeking higher wagesD. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, MAY 13

Washermen from around 40 families in Karimaddela village of Gadivemula mandal were ostracised by villagers as they demanded a hike in wages for washing dirty clothes. About 40 families eke out a living washing clothes in the village, which has a population of 5000. Trouble began when the washerman demanded enhancement of annual maintenance from ₹6,000 to ₹10,000.

As a consequence, villagers ostracised them and for the last one month they are being denied access to NREGS, hotels, and even mineral water plants. Field officer of NREGS, Gokari

said he was informed by the village elders that work should not be allotted to them.

“Based on their diktat, I sent them back and informed the same to my higher authorities,” he said.

Sarpanch Pullaiah Sunkanna said that of the 1,285 households in the village, many are finding it difficult to pay even the existing amount as most of them do not have regular sources of income and they depend on the national rural employment guarantee scheme.

“We have told them that we are paying the highest annual amount to them compared to neighboring villages. Yeeraguntal villagers pay just ₹4,000 per

household while at Gadivemula it is ₹5,000,” the sarpanch said.

He said that they had given three village volunteer posts to rajakas and have always included them in every government scheme granted to the village.

“But they were misled by Left parties, who have been creating discord among the villagers,” he said.

Panyam MLA Katasani Rambhupal Reddy said that the problem has been solved as the villagers have agreed to hike the annual pay to ₹7,000. Both parties agreed to the terms and conditions and they have given an undertaking that they will not seek unfair increases nor would they boycott work, Reddy said.

CJI recalls his
reporter days

From page 1

The CJI referred to his own, first-hand experience when he, for a brief period, worked as a reporter for a Telugu newspaper before embarking on a legal career.

Recalling his brief association with the media before joining the legal field, CJI Ramana said: “The media faces great challenges in reporting. I was a journalist for a brief time. That time we did not have car or bikes. Newspaper managements discouraged accepting any conveyance from the organisers of events. I too encountered difficulties as a journalist.”

The Supreme Court had, by an order of September 26, 2018, permitted the live streaming of court proceedings in cases of constitutional and national importance. However, the live streaming of sensitive cases was excluded.

The virtual event for the launch of the app to help the media cover court proceedings without coming there physically following the second wave of Covid-19 was also attended by Justices D.Y. Chandrachud, A.M. Khanwilkar and Hemant Gupta. Justice Chandrachud heads the court's e-committee credited with putting in place the infrastructure for court hearing via video conferencing since March last year. Justice Chandrachud attended the virtual event via

● **CJI RAMANA** said, “A total of 34 judicial officers and three high court judges have lost their lives battling this pandemic.”

video conferencing even though he tested positive for Covid-19 on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Justice Chandrachud said: “We hope that this facility will keep you all safe. Journalists are exposed so much to the outside world. I hope this is a part of the many steps which will be taken by the Chief Justice of India in the near future.”

He shared the news that all the six people who had developed the mobile app are down with Covid-19 but continued with their work despite being confined to their homes.

Justice Gupta cautioned the media that the “links given to you are (to be) used in a bona fide manner, and unauthorised persons (should) not use it. It will not be fair to the institution”.

On the Covid-19 pandemic affecting the judiciary at all levels across the country, CJI Ramana said: “As per the data available, 2,768 judicial officers and 106 judges of high courts have tested positive. We are yet to receive the data from two major high courts. A total of 34 judicial officers and three high court judges have lost their lives battling this pandemic.”

TTD TO SET UP 22
GERMAN TENTS FOR
COVID PATIENTSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 13

TTD plans to build 22 sheds with German technology in Andhra Pradesh at a cost of ₹3.52 crore for providing beds to Covid-19 victims after a successful experiment at Sri Padmavati Covid hospital in Tirupati a few days back.

Following requests for similar oxygen bed facilities on the Tirupati model, the TTD EO Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy has sanctioned the said amount from the SV Sarva Shreya Nidhi to build such Tents with German technology in different places in AP.

2 buses turned to
mobile hospitalsDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 13

Rajamahendravaram MP M. Bharat is making an initiative and inaugurated “Oxygen on Wheels” for Covid-19 patients in two AC buses. Each bus in the capacity of 20 and 40 patients will be accommodated in the two buses with oxygen facility.

The two buses, namely “Oxygen on Wheels” are being operated by the medical officers of Government Hospital in Rajamahendravaram.

The patients who are in serious condition will be admitted in these bus beds and if beds are vacated in the wards in the hospitals, the patients in these buses will be admitted in the wards according to availability.

The decision of allotting the beds and admitting the patients will be taken by the respective medical officers. Bharat said that these facilities will reduce pressure on the hospitals and it will give temporary relief to the patients.

He said that he has made a call to the bus operators and if they respond properly, such oxygen on wheel beds can be provided more in the district as well in the state. He said that he named the oxygen on wheels scheme as “Jagananna Prana Vayu Vahanam” (Jagan's oxygen vehicle). He said that to meet the oxygen needs, a 10 KL capacity plant at AP

COLLECTOR'S CALL
TO NGOS TO JOIN
COVID RELIEF OPSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 13

The services and support of voluntary organisations is the need of hour in this fight against Coronavirus, said Krishna district collector A.Md. Imtiaz.

4 PERSONS KILLED
IN CAR ACCIDENT
IN EAST GODAVARIDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 13

Four members of two families, including a four month old infant, travelling in a car died on the spot and another five persons were seriously injured in an accident that took place near the Industrial Area under Peddapuram Police Limits in East Godavari district on Thursday.

The injured were admitted in Area Hospital at Peddapuram.

According to the police, two families were travelling in a car from Pedavalasala and Gollapalem to Rajamahendravaram to attend a house-warming function and when the car was approaching an industrial area, it hit a lorry. The front part of the car was smashed.

The police and the locals pulled out the persons from the car with great difficulty.

Vanamadi Eswara Rao, 36, his wife Annapurna, 33, of Gollapalem, Aradari Swamy, 55, and a four-month-old infant died in the accident. The Peddapuram police registered a case.

● **Vigilance officials** led by its Superintendent of Police U. Ravi Prakash conducted raids on some of the hospitals on Thursday in Kakinada.

● **They conducted raids** on a Private Hospital near Nagamallithota and found additional Covid-19 patient beds than allocated beds and also found variations on usage of remdesivir injection stocks and usage and a criminal case was registered on the hospital.

Paper Mills is being revived and it will work in two or three days. It will also reduce the shortage of oxygen to the Covid-19 patients.

Meanwhile vigilance officials led by its Superintendent of Police U. Ravi Prakash conducted raids on some of the hospitals on Thursday in Kakinada.

They conducted raids on a Private Hospital near Nagamallithota and found additional Covid-19 patient beds than allocated beds and also found variations on usage of remdesivir injection stocks and usage and a criminal case was registered on the hospital. The officials also found a private hospital which is treating Covid-19 patients, though the hospital doesn't have permission to treat Covid-19 patients. The officials said that a case will be registered against the hospital also.

ENVIRONMENT | FIRST

Centre forms Environment Impact Assessment Authority for Andhra Pradesh

Panel set up to study green impact of industries

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 13

The union ministry of environment and forests has constituted the Andhra Pradesh State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA) under the chairmanship of retired IAS officer P. Venkatarami Reddy. Dr. Thatiparthi Bairagi Reddy, Professor of Environmental Sciences, Andhra University, is made

a member. Special Chief Secretary (Environment and Forest) will be its member-secretary. The chairman and the members shall hold office for a term of three years with effect from May 12, 2021.

The SEIAA has recommended a 15-member state-level expert appraisal committee (SEAC) under the chairmanship of Prof. G.V.R. Srinivasa Rao from the civil engineering department of Andhra

University. Dr. Dinesh Sankar Reddy, Registrar (VC), Professor of Chemical Engineering, NIT, Tadepalligudem, Prof. G. Gnana Mani, a retired Professor of Zoology, Andhra University, Prof. U. Shameem, Chairman of BoS, Dept. of Zoology, Andhra University, Dr. Kiranmai, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Biotechnology, Vikrama Simhapuri University, Prof. C. Sasidhar, Professor of

Civil Engineering, JNTU, Anantapur, Prof. N. Siva Prasad Reddy, Director (Academics), Brindavan Institute of Technology & Science, Kurnool, Prof. D. Bharathi, Professor, Dept. of Bio Sciences & Sericulture, Sri Padmavathi Mahila Viswa Vidyalayam, Katamneni Venkata Ramana, Head of Mining Dept. Government Polytechnic, Narsipatnam, Dr. M. Sunandana Reddy, Associate Professor, RGM

College of Engineering & Technology (Autonomous), Nandyal, Matli Chandra Sekhar, Professor, Head of Department of Civil Engineering, NIT, Warangal, Dr. G. Madhavi, Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, Sri Venkateswara University, Prof. K. Thyaga Raju, Professor of Biochemistry, SV University, Dr. Gummallu Prasanthi, Professor, Vijaya Institute of

Pharmaceutical Sciences, Vijayawada, are appointed as members. Chief Environmental Engineer, Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board, is made the member-secretary of the committee. This committee will review and accord permissions to any of the establishments, mines, factories, big ventures and will overview all the development activities regarding the environmental issues.

SHORT TAKES

SALARY OF K'TAKA MINISTERS FOR COVID RELIEF FUND

Bengaluru, May 13: The Karnataka government has ordered depositing one-year salary of State Ministers in the Covid Relief Fund.

This was decided by the State Cabinet a few days ago.

The order was issued on May 11 and would come into effect retrospectively from May 1 for a year.

The order was given on the direction of Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa.

The State has been reporting 40,000-50,000 Covid infections daily resulting in about six lakh active cases.

This has led to shortage of oxygen, hospital beds, and essential drugs.

The government has imposed a lockdown-like restriction from May 10 to May 24 to contain the spread of the virus.

NAXAL COUPLE SURRENDERS FOR COVID TREATMENT

DC CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, MAY 13

A Maoist couple, who tested positive for Coronavirus, surrendered in north Bastar district of Kanker in Chhattisgarh, police said on Thursday.

Arjun Tatti and his wife Laxmi Padda, members of Medki Local Operation Squad (LOS) functioning under north Bastar division of Maoists, surrendered before police in Kamdeta BSF camp under Koyelbedi in Kanker district late on Wednesday.

"The Naxal couple deserted their unit owing to illness and approached the police for medical treatment. Both of them tested positive for coronavirus and were admitted to Covid care hospital in Kanker for treatment", Bastar range inspector general of police Sunderraj P told this newspaper.

According to him, 40-50 Naxals in south Bastar have contracted the virus as per the inputs received by the police.

"Due to strict vigilance at interstate and inter district border areas by security forces, Naxals are not getting medicines and other logistic supply", he added.

Police intelligence suggested that several top Maoist leaders of Bastar such as Rajesh, a divisional committee member and Sujata and Savitri, members of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of Maoists have contracted the virus.

"We have received inputs that several senior Maoist leaders have contracted Coronavirus", Mr Sunderraj said.

ODISHA URGES CENTRE TO GIVE 25L VAX DOSES

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO IDC
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 13

Odisha health minister Naba Kishore Das on Thursday urged the Centre to immediately provide 25 lakh doses of Covid vaccines to expedite the ongoing inoculation that has been seriously hit due to inadequate supply of the life-saving injections.

"I urge the Union government to immediately provide at least 25 lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccines so as to regalanise the immunisation process. As many as 22 lakh people are awaiting the second dose of vaccine. In fact, I have already formally placed the demand before Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan during a discussion on the Covid situation on Wednesday," Mr Das said.

Other than the vaccines, Mr Das also demanded oxygen cylinders, Rapid Antigen Test kits, PPE kits and masks.

"We have enough oxygen but not cylinders and hence, we need 30,000 cylinders," he said. Mr Das informed that the Union health minister has assured him to take Odisha's demand seriously.

The Union health minister Dr Harsh Vardhan had on Wednesday held a meeting with health ministers of seven states and one Union Territory and reviewed the progress of the Covid-19 vaccination drive.

On Thursday, Odisha again crossed 10, 000 mark in single-day Covid spike with 10, 649 people testing positive for the contagious disease and 19 deaths. The fresh positive cases took the state's cumulative count to 57, 6297. Similarly, the cumulative death count climbed to 2,251.

Of the new cases, 5,965 infections were detected from quarantines centres while 4,684 were local contacts.



A critical Covid-19 patient being shifted to the Hallet Hospital in Kanpur, on Thursday.

— PTI



People buy sweets and new clothes on the eve of Id-ul-Fitr at Jama Masjid market, in Sadar Bazar during Covid-19 lockdown in Gurugram, on Thursday.

— PTI

NCP ALLEGES FRENCH CITIZENS IN INDIA GIVEN MODERNA VAX

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 13

Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik has sought an explanation from the Centre claiming French citizens and their relatives are being given Moderna vaccine despite only three vaccines permitted in India. Why the Centre cannot procure the vaccine for the people of India if the French Embassy can, he asked.

"Covishield, Covaxin and Sputnik V are the 3 Vaccines that are permitted in India by our government. According to information received by me, the French Embassy in India has procured the vaccine @moderna.tx and is inoculating their citizens and their relatives at Navi Mumbai with the help of @ApolloHosMumbai," Mr Malik tweeted on Thursday.

"Question arises, how can a non-permitted vaccine be allowed to be administered? If they can get it, why can't Indian government get it for our citizens too. The government and the Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan must clarify," he added.

"While only three companies are allowed to vaccinate in India, are the French nationals being given the Moderna vaccine as a special case? Even the Indian relatives of these nationals have also been vaccinated with Moderna," said Mr Malik, who is a minority affairs minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra.

Commenting on his allegations, senior BJP leader Pravin Darekar accused him of creating a sensation. "Nawab Malik has the habit of blaming the Centre. The companies have made a provision for the embassy employees of that respective country. They are taking care of their citizens and employees," he said.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra health minister Rajesh Tope demanded that the Union government float a single global tender of Covid vaccines on behalf of all the states to avoid "unhealthy competition".

NHRC issues notice over bodies in Ganga

52 bodies were found in Ujiyar, Kulhadia, Bharauli ghats

New Delhi, May 13: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, after receiving complaints about several bodies found floating in the Ganga river in the two states.

"It (NHRC) has issued notices to the chief secretaries of both the states and the secretary, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, today calling for action taken report within four weeks," its statement noted.

According to residents in Ballia district of Uttar Pradesh, at least 52 bodies were seen floating at the Ujiyar, Kulhadia and Bharauli ghats in the Narahi area. Similar

● **NHRC SAID** that it seems the public authorities have failed to take concentric efforts in educating the masses and checking the immersion of half-burnt or unburnt bodies into the Ganga.

reports of bodies floating in the Ganga have come from Bihar.

In its statement, the NHRC said that it seems the public authorities have failed to take concentric efforts in educating the masses and checking the immersion of half-burnt or unburnt bodies into the Ganga.

India has been badly hit by the second wave of coronavirus infections and cremation grounds

and burial grounds across the country have been overburdened.

The NHRC's statement said, "The practice of disposal of dead bodies in our sacred river Ganga is clearly in violation of guidelines of the National Mission for Clean Ganga project of the Ministry of Jal Shakti."

It said it received a complaint dated May 11, 2021, based on several media reports, wherein apprehensions were expressed that these bodies floating in the Ganga were of Covid-19 victims.

The complaint noted that the disposal bodies in such a manner may seriously affect all those persons who are dependent on the Ganga for their day-

to-day activities, the NHRC mentioned.

"It (complaint) further stated that even if these dead bodies were not of Covid victims, then such practice/incidents are shameful to the society as a whole as that amounts to violation of human rights of even deceased persons," the NHRC added.

India added 3,62,727 new coronavirus infections in a day taking the Covid-19 tally of cases to 2,37,03,665, while the death toll rose to 2,58,317 with 4,120 daily fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday. The active cases have increased to 37,10,525 comprising 15.65 per cent of the total infections. — PTI

BIHAR EXTENDS LOCKDOWN TILL MAY 25

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, MAY 13

The Bihar government has extended the lockdown till May 25 to stop the surge in Covid - 19 cases in the state.

The decision was taken during a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday.

"The impact of lockdown in the state was reviewed during a meeting with ministers and officials. The positive effect of the lockdown is visible. Therefore, it has been decided to extend the lockdown in Bihar for the next ten days from May 16 to 25", tweeted chief minister Nitish Kumar after the meeting.

The lockdown was imposed in Bihar on May 4 after the Patna High Court stepped in and slammed the state government over its handling of the Covid-19 crisis. Bihar has been witnessing a surge in Covid cases. According to reports, the death toll went up to 3,503 on Wednesday after 74 people succumbed to the viral infection.

No entry in Maharashtra without negative RT-PCR

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 13

The Maharashtra government on Thursday announced the extension of Covid induced restrictions till 7am on June 1. Any person coming from anywhere in the country will have to carry a negative RT-PCR report to enter in Maharashtra by any mode of transport.

Maharashtra on Thursday reported 42,582 new positive cases taking the total number of active cases 5, 33,294. While 850 new deaths were reported on Thursday raising a total fatality in state 78,857. Maharashtra is among the states that account for 82.51 per cent of the total active cases in the country, officials said.

The state government order said that the restrictions will remain in force till June 1. "Any person entering the state of Maharashtra by any mode of transport will have to carry a negative RT-PCR test report, which will have to be issued from upto a maximum of 48 hours before the time of his entering into Maharashtra," the order added.

It also said that all restrictions enforced as per earlier orders for people arriving from places of sensitive origin will be applicable to anyone arriving from any part of the country into the state.

"In the case of cargo carriers, not more than two people (driver and cleaner/helper) may be allowed to travel in the same (those vehicles). If these cargo carriers are originating from outside the state (Maharashtra), these may be allowed to enter into the state with a negative RT-PCR test which will have to be issued from upto 48 hours before the time of entry into Maharashtra and which will be valid for seven days," the government order said.

The order also allowed the personnel engaged in airport and port services to use the local trains, mono rail and metro services. It also gave some relaxations to dairy industries. "Milk collection, transport and processing may be allowed without restrictions though its retail sale be allowed subject to restrictions imposed on shops dealing with essential items or

through home delivery," the order said.

The lockdown-like restrictions have been imposed in the state from April 5. The restrictions were further tightened on April 15 with Section 144 of the CrPc, banning assembly of five or more people, imposed in the entire state. However, even after a month, the Covid cases in some parts of the state are still increasing.

The state, which has consistently reported a high number of Covid infections and remains the worst affected state in the country due to the second wave of the pandemic, added 46,781 new cases on Wednesday and 816 related deaths. On Tuesday, the state reported 40,956 cases while on Monday, 37,236 new cases were logged by the state.

State health minister Rajesh Tope cautioned that some districts in the state have still been reporting high numbers of cases and therefore are a cause of concern for the government. "We need to focus on these districts more. The positivity rate is still not below 10 per cent".

GREAT MOVE

Aims to use state's resources and manpower to manage Coronavirus pandemic

C'garh govt suspends its 'Central vista' project

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY | DC
RAIPUR, MAY 13

Amid mounting pressure by the Congress on the Union government to suspend the Central Vista project, Chhattisgarh government on Thursday announced that it was suspending all major projects, including the construction of a new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly and the official residence of chief minister in Nava Raipur.

The tenders for two projects worth Rs 363 crore for the construction of a new state legislative Assembly building have been cancelled with immediate effect by the Congress state government led by

chief minister Bhupesh Baghel.

To focus the state's resources and manpower in managing the raging Coronavirus pandemic, the state government has also decided to take stringent austerity measures while announcing free education and scholarships for children who lost their parents due to the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"Our citizens - our priority. Foundation stone for the construction of the new Assembly building, Raj Bhavan, chief minister's residence, residence of ministers and senior officials, and a new circuit house was laid before the start of Corona. Today, all these construction works

have been stopped in these times of crisis," Mr Baghel tweeted.

Chhattisgarh has 1,22,798 active Covid-19 cases, while the cumulative number of deaths in the state stands at 11,094, according to the Union health ministry.

"In view of the circumstances arising in the state due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Chhattisgarh government has stopped construction works of all major projects with immediate effect and also decided to take even more stringent measures for austerity," a press release issued by the Chhattisgarh government said.

Accordingly, ongoing works on construction of new Raj Bhavan, state legislative Assembly, official

residences of chief minister, other ministers and senior officers in Nava Raipur have been suspended, the press release said.

The foundation stone-laying ceremony for these projects was performed on November 25, 2019.

"The chief engineer of the Public Works Department has issued orders to the concerned contractors to stop the construction work of the new Raj Bhavan, new CM house, new houses of ministers and officers and new circuit house in Nava Raipur," the press release said.

The state government has instructed all the departments that, like the previous year, austerity should be exercised in the

financial year 2021.

Mr Baghel also announced that his government will provide free education and scholarship to children who lost their parents due to the coronavirus pandemic in Chhattisgarh.

"The Chhattisgarh government will now bear the entire expenditure of the education of children who have lost their parents due to coronavirus during this financial year.

Also a scholarship of ₹500 per month will be given to such children studying from standard first to eighth and ₹1,000 per month for children from standard ninth to 12th," a separate press release issued by the state government said.



Police officers patrol as security beefed up on the eve of id-ul-Fitr, during Covid-induced curfew, in Bhopal on Thursday.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

LANKA: INDIAN FAMILY HELD FOR FLOUTING LAWS

Colombo: Four members of an Indian family, including two children, have been arrested for allegedly entering Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula illegally and violating the local immigration and the quarantine laws, police said on Thursday.

The family, which consists of a 61-year old woman, her 34-year-old daughter and her two children, said they had entered Sri Lanka on May 6 with the help of fishermen.

Ajith Rohana, the deputy inspector general of police, said the members of the family were arrested at Gurunagar area in Jaffna for their illegal stay in the country and violating the immigration and quarantine laws.

They had arrived from India on May 6 on an Indian boat halfway and had travelled the rest of the way aboard a Sri Lankan fishing boat, Rohana said.

DEATH OF STUDENT IN CHINA TRIGGERS PROTEST

Taipei: It was a call no parent wants to receive. On Mother's Day, around 9 pm, a woman in Chengdu in southwestern China was told that her son, who she had dropped off at school just hours ago, had died. Distraught, she went to Chengdu No. 49 Middle School immediately, but could not even enter the school grounds, she wrote in a series of Twitter-like Weibo posts on Monday that were shared hundreds of thousands of times this week.

Her account disputing both the police and local government's account of her 16-year-old son's death has touched a nerve, becoming one of the most discussed topics on Chinese social media this week. One related hashtag #ChengduNo.49Middle racked up more than 1.5 billion views alone on Weibo.

People online called for justice for the mother and questioned the actions of the school, police and local authorities. On Tuesday night, videos of a protest in front of the school circulated. People clutching white flowers shouted "the truth!"

S.TAIWAN LOSES POWER AFTER PLANT FAILURE

Taipei: An equipment failure caused an outage at a power plant in southern Taiwan on Thursday, triggering rolling blackouts across the island affecting millions of people.

The outage in Kaohsiung trapped at least one person in an elevator and disrupted a daily briefing being given by government officials on the island's pandemic situation. Taipower, the government-run electric company, launched the rolling blackouts at 3 pm and said emergency repairs were underway. The outages affected 8.46 million households, Taipower said.

In Yilan county, one person was trapped in an elevator, the government-backed Central News Agency said. In Hsinchu, 150,000 households lost power. In the southern city of Tainan, 14 districts were affected. President Tsai Ing-wen issued a statement saying that "everyone can rest assured" and that the government was handling the situation. She said an investigation would be conducted into the cause of the outage.

UK: ROYAL MAIL TO ISSUE STAMPS FOR PRINCE PHILIP

London: The UK's Royal Mail will issue a set of special stamps in memory of Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh, the husband of Queen Elizabeth II who passed away aged 99 last month.

A sheet of four black and white stamps, which are now available to pre-order, show Britain's longest serving escort to a British monarch in different stages of his life.

The first design features a portrait of the duke as a young man, taken by photographer Baron. The second depicts Prince Philip at the passing out parade of his son, Prince Andrew, at Dartmouth Naval College in Devon. Another stamp shows the duke at the Royal Windsor Horse Show. The final and most recent image is a portrait snapped by photographer Terry O'Neill.

"Throughout adulthood, the Duke of Edinburgh dedicated himself to the service of this country, the Commonwealth and to the many causes he was involved with," said Simon Thompson, chief executive of Royal Mail.

The stamps, officially on sale from June 24.

US vax beat strain found in India

Observation based on latest data about variant and three major vaccines approved in the US

Washington, May 13: Covid-19 vaccines approved by the United States like Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson and Johnson have effectiveness against the B1617 variant of the virus that is predominant in India, which is experiencing one of the worst outbreaks of the pandemic, a top American health official said.

The observation is based on the latest data about the variant and the three major vaccines approved by the United States, said Dr Francis Collins, Director of National Institute of Science. "The data is coming in, and it looks very encouraging that the US-approved vaccines, the Pfizer, the Moderna, the J&J, do have effectiveness against this variant called B1617," Collins told the media.

"It's a little less effective in that case than some of the others, but it looks like it ought to be good enough to make Americans protected. And that's really a good thing to hear," he said in response to a question.

Early this week, the World Health Organisation classified the B1617 SARS-CoV-2 variant, which was first detected in India, as a variant of concern. The WHO said that evidence showed B1617 was more transmissible.

— PTI

INDIAN COVID-19 STRAIN REACHES LAS VEGAS

Las Vegas (US), May 13: The Las Vegas area has been added to places in Nevada where authorities have detected cases of a potentially worrisome strain of the Coronavirus first detected in India.

The Southern Nevada Health District reported on Tuesday that a woman in her 20s who had not travelled recently and was not vaccinated against Covid-19 tested positive for the variant subtype. She didn't require hospitalisation. A district spokeswoman said on Wednesday that there were no additional cases to report.

Eight other cases of the variant were previously identified in northern Nevada, including four confirmed last week in the Reno area.

— AP



Joe Biden

BIDEN TO BEEF UP FEDERAL CYBERSECURITY

Richmond, May 13: President Joe Biden has signed an executive order meant to strengthen US cybersecurity defences in response to a series of headline-grabbing hacking incidents that highlight how vulnerable the country's public and private sectors are to high-tech spies and criminals operating from half a world away.

The order signed on Wednesday will require all federal agencies to use basic cybersecurity measures, like multi-factor authentication, and require new security standards for software makers that contract with the federal government. Officials are hoping to leverage the federal government's massive spending power to improve security across all types of software.

The order comes as the administration has been grappling with its response to a massive breach by Russia of federal agencies and ransomware attacks on private corporations. Hit by a cyberattack, the operator of a major US fuel pipeline was forced to shut down service.

— AP



Worshippers stand on circles marked on the ground to help people maintain social distancing during religious ceremonies at the Catholic shrine in Fatima, Portugal on Thursday. Due to Covid-19, the shrine has limited to 7,500 pilgrims that can be present during the celebrations of May 12 and 13.

— AP

US Cong. urges to boost aid to India

Washington, May 13: Fifty-seven US Congressmen have written to President Joe Biden, urging him to bolster America's Covid-19 assistance to India.

The sharp increase in cases has overwhelmed India's healthcare system. We must do our part to quell the virus everywhere it persists, the law-

makers said in a letter to Biden on Wednesday.

We are extremely concerned with regards to India's deadly Covid-19 second wave. India is now the epicenter of the Covid-19. Today, marked India's deadliest day, with 4,205 deaths reported, carrying the total number of confirmed deaths to more than 250,000, said the letter

initiated by Congressman Brad Sherman, the Democratic Chair of the Congressional India Caucus.

In the letter, the Congressmen relayed to the administration that India remains in need of additional medical equipment, supplies and other vital resources to emerge from this crisis.

They requested the

administration to provide oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators, oxygen generator plants, cryogenic oxygen tanker/container, Remdesivir, Tocilizumab and ventilators/BIPAP to India.

It is also in the US interest that everyone in India be vaccinated, the Congressmen wrote.

— PTI

Oz signs deal for 25mn Moderna vax

Canberra, May 13: Australia has reached a supply agreement for 25 million doses of Moderna Covid-19 vaccines, the US-based biotechnology company and the prime minister said on Thursday.

The deal included 10 million doses of the vaccine against the ancestral strain to be delivered in

2021 and 15 million doses of an updated variant booster to be delivered in 2022, Moderna said in a statement.

The vaccines have yet to be approved by the Australian regulator, the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Pfizer and AstraZeneca are the only other Covid vaccines approved for use

in Australia. All three vaccines require two doses.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said that he expected the first Moderna vaccines to arrive in Australia in the last three months of 2021. The 15 million booster doses would deal with possible future variants of the virus, he said.

We're now well into the

phase of dealing with what's coming next because the pandemic's not going anywhere, Morrison told *Perth Radio 6PR*.

Moderna vaccines would help Australia achieve its aim of inoculating all willing Australian adults within a population of 26 million by the end of 2021.

— AP

Italy fines Google 100 million euros

Rome, May 13: Italy's anti-trust authority said Thursday it had fined Google more than 100 million euros (\$120mn) for shutting out a rival's smartphone app offering recharging of electric vehicles.

The authority said Google, whose Android operating system and Google Play app store dominate the Italian market, had abused its market position by blocking an Enel X app for users of electric vehicles.

The regulator added it would require Google to make Enel X's app avail-

able on Android Auto, which mirrors features of an Android device, such as a smartphone, on a car dashboard screen.

The fine of 102,084,433.91 euros is for a violation of article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which regulates monopolies and issues involving restriction of competition.

Italy found Google did not allow Enel X Italia to develop an Android Auto-compatible version of its JuicePass app. JuicePass offers services relating to recharging electric vehicles.

— AFP

Nepal: Oli set to reclaim PM's post

Kathmandu, May 13: K.P. Sharma Oli was set to be reappointed as Nepal Prime Minister as the Opposition alliance of Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) on Thursday failed to muster majority support to form the next government.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari had asked the Opposition parties to come up with the support of majority lawmakers to form a new government by 9 PM on Thursday after Oli lost a crucial trust vote in the House of Representatives on Monday.

However, as the deadline which ended at 9.00 pm on



K.P. Sharma Oli

Thursday, the NC-Maoist Centre alliance has its hopes crashing down as disgruntled Nepal-Khanal faction of the ruling CPN-UML did not forward their resignation, which they had been claiming to do for long as a bargaining chip with embattled former prime minister Oli.

As the time accorded by the President gradually runs out and the deadline approaches, it can well be assumed that Oli is all set to make a comeback, emerging victorious in this Game of Thrones, as the country grapples with unprecedented rise in Covid-19 cases and corresponding fatalities as the second wave of the pandemic rages on, *The Himalayan Times* newspaper commented.

Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Maoist Centre chairman Pushpakamal Dahal "Prachanda" held a meeting on Thursday at the former's residence at Budhanilkantha in the

outskirts of Kathmandu to discuss the formation of the new government.

Similarly, Prime Minister and chairman of ruling CPN-UML Oli and dissident leader of the party Madhav Kumar Nepal held a meeting in an attempt to make the last effort to patch up their differences.

After Prime Minister Oli withdrew action taken against four dissident leaders for working against the party, 28 lawmakers close to the dissident leader withdrew their decision to resign en masse from the House of Representatives, that would pave way for Deuba to stake a claim for the prime minister's post.

— PTI

COSMOS | DRAMA

Pre-flight training to be documented by Channel One of Russia

Russia to send crew to ISS for first space movie

Moscow, May 13: Russia's space agency said on Thursday it was sending an actress and a director to the International Space Station in October to make the first feature film in space.

"Filming will take place at the International Space Station. The start of the expedition is scheduled for October 5, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome on the Soyuz MS-19 manned transport spacecraft," Roscosmos said in a statement.

Actress Yulia Peresild, 36, and director Klim Shipenko, 37, will undergo special training, including tests on a centrifuge and flights in zero gravity, starting no later than 1 June.

Their pre-flight training will be documented by one of Russia's main TV channels, Channel One, which will also be involved in producing the film.

The film's working title is "Challenge" and will be in the genre of a "space drama", Roscosmos said, without providing details about the plot of the film or Peresild's role.

Roscosmos said in September the movie will aim to "popularise Russia's space activities, as well as glorify cosmonaut profession".

The film will be co-produced by Dmitry Rogozin, the head of Russia's space agency, with the ambition of making Russia the first country to shoot a film in space.

— AFP

Moscow, May 13: Japanese billionaire entrepreneur Yusaku Maezawa and his assistant Yozo Hirano will be the next tourists to travel to the International Space Station (ISS), Russia's space agency Roscosmos said Thursday.

Maezawa and Hirano will travel aboard a Russian "Soyuz MS-20 spacecraft that is scheduled for launch on December 8, 2021 from the Baikonur cosmodrome" in Kazakhstan, the agency said in a statement.

Maezawa, 45, who made his fortune in online retail, also plans to partic-



Yusaku Maezawa

ipate in a 2023 mission around the moon aboard a Starship spacecraft of SpaceX, the Roscosmos rival of US billionaire

Elon Musk.

Maezawa and film producer Hirano, who will be documenting the mission, will begin pre-flight training in June at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre in Star City, a closed town outside of Moscow, Roscosmos added.

It said that the flight will last 12 days and the crew will be led by Cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin.

"I'm so curious 'what's life like in space?' So, I am planning to find out on my own and share with the world on my YouTube channel," Maezawa said,

as quoted by Roscosmos.

It will be the first time that two of the three spots on a Soyuz space rocket will be occupied by tourists.

The last time Roscosmos took a tourist to the ISS was in 2009, with the flight of Canadian Guy Laliberte, co-founder of Cirque du Soleil.

The resumption of these tourist flights comes as Roscosmos lost its monopoly for ferrying crews to the ISS after a reusable SpaceX rocket last year successfully delivered NASA astronauts to space.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

14 MAY 2021

De-escalate conflict in Gaza, US must step in

There is a burgeoning conflict between Israel and the Hamas-administered Gaza Strip that must stop immediately if the entire Middle East region is not to be embroiled in another full-scale war. The Israeli police intervention restricting the right to freedom of worship during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan outside the historic Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem was the trigger for the events which have led Israel to the brink of an invasion of Gaza, with its combat troops massing on the border and preparing for a possible incursion like in 2008-09 and later in 2014. There are two “wars” on at the moment — the unprovoked firing of rockets by Hamas into Israeli population centres and the retaliatory aerial attacks on the Gaza Strip on the one hand and, on the other, the sectarian violence in Israel between Jews and Israeli Arabs.

Amid an already grim scenario, it does not help that US President Joe Biden declares Israel has a right to defend itself, though of course every nation does have the right to defend itself against external aggression, as illustrated in this instance of hundreds of Hamas rockets testing Israel’s fabled Iron Dome defence system with some streaking through to kill civilians, including an Indian housemaid. The Israelis are also facing a new type of challenge in people of the TikTok generation owing no loyalty except to the social media and spreading stray images of individual Arabs attacking Jews, which situation has now worsened into attacks on synagogues and citizens fighting on the streets. World powers are calling for a cessation of hostilities, while some like Russia and Turkey are egging Hamas on though they may know who will be the likely victor in aggrandising traditional Arab territory. Of

course, there can be no end to arguments about whose land it was and who was evicted 2,000 years ago. Such issues, in which 1948 and 1967 were significant dates, are being revisited now with arguments over seven Palestinian families facing eviction from the Sheikh Jarra neighbourhood of East Jerusalem and a court holding back a ruling only due to the outbreak of violence, starting with stone throwers aiming at policing of their congregating near the confluence of some of the holiest shrines of three religions and excessive police retaliation.

The one person who might not find the situation as incommoding of his power and position is Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who could be replaced if his rival Yair Lapid’s coalition moves bear fruit. These moves have become complicated amid the bloodshed in the raging conflict, with at least 67 Palestinians and seven Israelis dead. If Mr Netanyahu does cling on for now as he presides over operations in tandem with his nemesis Benny Gantz, the United States would have to play a leading role in bringing about a ceasefire. It is not clear where President Biden’s optimism springs from as he said “we will see this coming to a conclusion sooner than later”, but can there be a more effective peacemaker in this conflict than the US President, if he can exert America’s traditional influence on the Jewish state.

Kerala Left icon’s legacy

The centenarian Communist leader K.R. Gowri Amma who passed away earlier this week was a product of, and represented, the essence of the renaissance values Kerala had nurtured in the early 20th century. Her call was to use those progressive and revolutionary values to the benefit of the working class and the downtrodden, and she did it quite successfully. Kerala’s land reforms are one of the legacies she has left behind.

That Gowri Amma was the first woman law graduate in her community was made possible because of the ideals of social reformer Sree Narayana Guru who emphasised the role of education in the emancipation of the subaltern classes. A successful lawyer, she later embraced the Communist ideology and there was no looking back. The fiery leader was subjected to police brutality during 1948-52 when the Communist Party was banned. She was elected to the Thiruv-Kochi Assembly in 1954 and then to the first Kerala Assembly in 1957.

It was Gowri Amma as revenue minister in the first EMS ministry who moved the path-breaking Agrarian Relations Bill, 1957, which began the process of land reforms in the state. The ministry did not survive the combined assault of the reactionary forces but the ideals behind the bill did. True, it took another 13 years for Kerala to initiate land reforms but the egalitarian push that made the bill possible was too strong to be put under the carpet.

Gowri Amma was part of four more ministries in Kerala, thus actively contributing to the evolution of the state to its present form. She held on to her beliefs, political as well as personal, leading to her ouster from her party, the CPI(M), in 1994. She, along with her political outfit, later sided with the Congress-led United Democratic Front. Her spirits had returned to the Communists towards the fag end of her life, and her body has now joined those of the martyrs of Punnappra-Vayalar uprising and her husband and Communist Party leader T.V. Thomas at Valiya Chudukad, Alappuzha. Rest in the right company, comrade!

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KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax: 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajamahendravaram: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajamahendravaram, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalapally Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennamudugunta 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

Coinbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coinbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255
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Subhani



Why did Centre fail to act despite a surge warning?



Karan Thapar

I want to tell you about a news report that hasn’t got the attention it deserves. With very few exceptions it’s been ignored by our newspapers and television channels. Yet it raises deeply disturbing questions about the government’s handling of the entire coronavirus crisis. Indeed, you could even say it provides “proof” of the government’s irresponsibility. That’s why it’s a story we need to know about so each of us can decide what we make of it. In that spirit I shall proceed.

On May 1, Reuters released a story headlined “Scientists say India government ignored warnings amid coronavirus surge”. It claimed five scientists from the government-appointed consortium of national laboratories tasked with genome sequencing, INSACOG, had “warned Indian officials in early March of a new and more contagious variant of the coronavirus taking hold in the country”. The story added: “Four of the scientists said the federal government did not seek to impose major restrictions to stop the spread of the virus”. So, in a nutshell, the government had been effectively forewarned to expect a possible exponential rise in cases but did virtually nothing.

The story carries a quotation from Shahid Jameel, the head of INSACOG, that suggests corroboration. “As scientists we provide the evidence, policymaking is the job of the government”. That seems to say INSACOG had done its duty, but the government did not.

On May 5, I interviewed a member of INSACOG. Three days earlier he had retired as director of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology. His name is Rakesh Mishra.

He confirmed the Reuters story. “This concern was raised”, he said. “It was a kind of warning that we are heading towards danger”. In fact, Dr Mishra went further. “It was a high concern and there’s no doubt about it ... we were very, very concerned ... dreading something bad would happen”. Dr Mishra said INSACOG’s concerns were conveyed directly to Sujet Kumar Singh, the director of the National Centre for Disease Control, to whom INSACOG reports. He added: “I think it went to the health secretary”. More important, he said it’s impossible to believe the Prime Minister would not have been told.

This means Dr Mishra did a lot more than confirm the Reuters story. He suggested the responsibility for not responding to INSACOG’s warning lay with the Prime Minister. Not surprisingly, a desperate government struggled to defend itself. Renu Swarup, biotech secretary, told a major financial daily that she wasn’t aware of any warning but then, bizarrely, added: “I also don’t understand the word warning at all”. If this was intended to scotch the Reuters story and rubbish Dr Mishra’s confirmation, it failed miserably.

Several INSACOG members confirmed that Dr Mishra spoke the truth. Of course, they didn’t do so in public. When I told them of Renu Swarup’s response, they laughed. “What else could she have done?”, one asked. Meanwhile, Dr Mishra repeated his confirmation to a major newspaper.

This brings me to the government’s response. Remember, the warning from INSACOG came in early March. But on March 7 health minister Harsh Vardhan told the Delhi Medical Association: “We are in the endgame of the Covid-19

pandemic in India”. That was the first sign that the government was paying no heed to INSACOG.

Thereafter, it got worse. Right through March massive political rallies, with tens or hundreds of thousands, took place in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam. In West Bengal they continued well into the second half of April. There were also *shahi snans*, with two or three million taking part, both in March and April. Ask yourself a simple question: after receiving INSACOG’s warning, was it all right to continue with these gatherings?

That’s not all. After INSACOG’s warning, Assam’s health minister (who is now the chief minister) said publicly that there was no need to wear a mask. Uttarakhand’s chief minister said faith in God and the power of Mother Ganga would protect people at the *shahi snans*. In the light of what we now know, was this the right response from health ministers and CMs?

In fact, deliberate disregard, not just of INSACOG but science itself, goes all the way to the top. When questioned, the home minister said political rallies can’t be held responsible for spreading Covid as Covid cases were rising in Maharashtra, where there were no rallies, not in Bengal, where he was present. If only he could see the situation today. Maharashtra is plateauing or declining, West Bengal seems to be shooting for the stars.

Perhaps the most incriminating proof of how our government disregarded science and ignored INSACOG came from the Prime Minister himself. On April 17, when cases were growing by over 260,000 a day, he

applauded the massive turnout at his Asansol rally. Yet the tens of thousands in front of him were doing things he should never have permitted: they weren’t wearing masks and they weren’t maintaining “*do gaj ki doori*”.

However, when INSACOG advised the government cases could rise dramatically it was also, at one remove, telling the authorities serious illness, hospitalisation and deaths would go up sharply. This should have prompted the government to immediately increase hospital beds, ICU facilities, ventilators and, most important, oxygen. It didn’t. Instead, the facilities set up to tackle the first wave were dismantled.

Now, let me ask a critical question. Doesn’t this story suggest — actually prove — the government was forewarned of the looming crisis but chose to ignore scientific advice? Worse, the government did all the wrong things. Doesn’t that amount to irresponsibility?

So that our political divisions don’t prejudice us, I put this question to one of the world’s most highly regarded experts on global health, Prof. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University’s School of Public Health. He said he has no doubt “the government failed to respond in a serious way even though the data was clear”. He also said the Kumbh Mela could end up being “the biggest superspreader in this pandemic’s history”. But he went one critical step further. He said this failure must be explained by “the people in power”. India, he added, is owed “an explanation” by its government.

Now can you see why this story is so important and you should know about it? If the answer is yes, ask why the vast majority of our media kept quiet and failed to tell you? Just as the government owes us an explanation for its irresponsibility, doesn’t the media owe you an explanation for keeping you in the dark?

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

BREAK THE CHAIN

Day by day the daily cases of Covid positive patients are increasing in Andhra Pradesh. The main photo in DC on is the root cause for the spread of pandemic.

There is no use of partial lockdown as it results in aggravating the bad situation. The relaxation time is becoming a hotspot and people are rushing onto the roads and markets without any social distance. If the same situation continues for more days it will be very difficult to break the chain. Why can’t the AP government think about total lockdown for some days to break the chain? In the first phase we could control the situation with complete lockdown. To save the people the government should take immediate step for complete lockdown.

J. Srinivasa Rao
Srikakulam

OPPN REQUEST

The 12 Opposition parties rightly wrote a letter to PM seeking free vaccination and rightly claimed that the pandemic has turned into an apocalyptic human tragedy. PM may consider their suggestions for the sake of controlling the worst pandemic which has spoiled the reputation of India world over. It is time the PM felt responsible to save people. Experts are also waiting for the quick action from the PM to control the situation.

Panchakarla Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu,
Krishna district

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Gujarat under President’s rule

NEW DELHI, May 13. The President Mr. V.V. Giri today dissolved the Gujarat Legislative Assembly and assumed to himself all the functions of the State Government following the Governor Mr. Shriman Narayan’s report that the constitutional machinery in the State had broken down.

This is the first time that the 11-year-old state has been placed under direct Central rule.

Mr. Giri signed the proclamation providing for the immediate takeover of the state administration within minutes of the Union cabinet’s decision to endorse the recommendation of the Governor.

Mahir Ali



Resistance to the latest bout of attempted ethnic cleansing in the Old City has fed into spiralling violence in Jerusalem in the days leading up to Eid. Sheikh Jarrah — the Old City neighbourhood where the legally sanctioned evictions of long-standing Palestinian residents at the behest of Jewish settler organisations predictably sparked a response — serves as a reminder that the Nakba is much more than a historical event.

It is an ongoing catastrophe, perhaps best exemplified by the creeping annexation of the West Bank.

Amid the confrontation centred around Al Aqsa mosque — with stones and fireworks on one side, and stun grenades, tear gas and rubber bullets on the other, causing hundreds of injuries — Hamas opted for its usual tactic of lobbing a bunch of missiles towards Jerusalem. They caused little damage and no casualties, whereas the Israeli response claimed the lives of at least 24 people, many of them children, in the Gaza Strip, according to reports.

That’s par for the course in that part of the world. Likewise the swift Western condemnation of Hamas’s futile attacks. More broadly there have been the usual calls for a “de-escalation on both sides” from the US and EU. Moral equivalence between the brutality of the oppressor and the resistance of the oppressed remains a problematic hurdle for Western “diplomacy”.

This is reflected in efforts across Europe and the US, legally or legislatively sanctioned in some cases, to effectively outlaw most criticism of Israel, and specifically the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. It’s worth recalling that there was also opposition to pressure for sanctions against the South African apartheid state. It took a few decades for sufficient momentum to build up to make a difference.

It may take even longer in the case of Israel. After all, the Afrikaners who dominated South Africa lacked the leverage of a historical holocaust. Mind you, this is not to suggest that Europeans, or anyone else, ought to

overlook one of the 20th century’s most atrocious crimes against humanity. On the contrary, the horrific Nazi extermination campaign against European Jews should forever serve as a particularly sordid reminder of the depths of hatred to which human beings can descend.

One can only wonder whether historical memories play any role when, for instance, German legislators effectively criminalise solidarity with Palestine amid a rising tide of neo-Nazism in their nation, when French politicians and retired generals promote Islamophobia, or when Israeli fascists mobilise to chant “death to Arabs” in Palestinian neighbourhoods.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding bipartisan opposition to a congressional effort to legislate some leverage over how generous US subsidies to Israel, mostly in the form of military aid, are used, there are persistent reports from the US suggesting that the mood over unquestioning backing for Israel is shifting, not least among younger American Jews.

It may be so, although there’s scope

for scepticism. It was nonetheless intriguing to encounter an opinion column in *The New York Times* recently in which former CIA chief John Brennan advised Joe Biden to watch Palestinian film-maker Farah Nabulsi’s Academy Award-nominated short film *The Present*, which depicts the ordeals Palestinians routinely face in crossing checkpoints not between the occupied territories and Israel, but within the West Bank.

Who knows whether Mr Biden will bother, but either way chances of a substantial policy shift in the US — perhaps the only country capable of single-handedly compelling Israel to reconsider the status quo — remain infinitesimal. It won’t matter that Human Rights Watch has at last acknowledged that Israel is guilty of the crimes of apartheid and persecution.

It will matter even less that Israel remains in a political mess, with its fourth election in two years predictably yielding no clear mandate, and its caretaker Prime Minister facing corruption charges and the prospect of imprisonment.

Benjamin Netanyahu was once more afforded the opportunity of forming a government after his Likud party won 30 Knesset seats in March, falling short of a majority by 31 seats. He failed, and last week Yair Lapid of Yesh Atid, which won 17 seats, was invited to have a go. That effectively means either a (probably temporary) government led by Naftali Bennett (who is even nastier than Netanyahu in some respects), or a fifth election.

Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, has lamely put off indefinitely elections scheduled for this month. One could argue that under the circumstances, Palestinian elections, like the aspirations of young Palestinians who have never had a chance to vote, hardly matter. But how exactly do young Israelis see their future? Are they comfortable with the idea of living in, and fighting for, a proto-fascist state? Would they be willing to confide as much the next time they commune with their grandparents?

By arrangement with Dawn

quick
BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48690.80	-0.96
Nifty 50	14696.50	-1.04
S&P 500*	4,112.51	1.22
Dollar (₹)	73.42	-0.09
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.78	-0.12
Euro (₹)	89.10	0.13
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,468▼14	0.03
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.28	-2.94
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.010	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.674	-0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Builders hope
for recovery in
2nd half of 2021

The demand for luxury homes has slowed down during the last one-and-a-half months due to the second wave of Covid-19 but real estate developers and consultants are hopeful that sales will pick up once the situation normalises as it happened last year. Despite Covid wave, prices of luxury residential properties are likely to remain stable and may even rise slightly due to limited supply, they said.

Airtel fixed line,
enterprise users to
get quick service



Airtel fixed line and enterprise subscribers will soon be migrated to Amdocs' system for more rapid delivery of new digital customer experiences, according to a statement. The telecom company said seamless migration of Airtel wireless postpaid customers to Amdocs modern digital-business system, which enables the telco to quickly create and launch new digital services for customers.

Embassy invests
in Pi Labs fund
for proptech cos

Realty firm Embassy Group on Thursday said it has invested in venture capital firm Pi Labs' new fund that puts money in proptech startups. Founded in 2014, Pi Labs was the first venture capital firm in Europe to exclusively invest in proptech companies. Embassy has joined Pi Labs as a limited partner in its current Fund 3, the Bengaluru-based firm said. The company did not disclose the amount it has invested in the fund.

TVS picks Robert
as CEO of Norton
Motorcycle

TVS Motor Company on Thursday said it has appointed Robert Hentschel as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of iconic British brand Norton Motorcycle, which it acquired last year. Hentschel replaces John Russell who steps down from his role as an interim CEO. Besides, Vittorio Urciuoli has been named as the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) of the Solihull-based motorcycle brand.



Interest shows a better demand scenario for gas
14 bidders slug it out
for KG-D6 gas supply

New Delhi, May 13: As many as 14 users across sectors slugged it on a third-party electronic platform for seven-and-half hours to secure natural gas supplies from the eastern offshore KG-D6 block before the oil-to-chemical (O2C) unit of Reliance Industries Ltd bagged most of the supplies, sources said.

Reliance Industries Ltd and its partner BP Plc of the United Kingdom, who are bringing a second set of gas discoveries in their Bay of Bengal KG-D6 block, had offered 5.5 million standard cubic metres per day (mmscmd) of additional gas in the auction for a flexible tenure of between three and five years.

Gas users companies like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Reliance O2C, GAIL Gas, Adani Total Gas Ltd, Torrent Gas, Torrent Power and gas trading companies like GAIL, Shell and IGS were locked in the intense bidding war on the e-auction that happened on May 5, sources in the Reliance-BP consortium said.

At the end of the intense bidding war, Reliance O2C walked away with three mmscmd of supplies, offering better prices than competitors, they said.

India Gas Solutions (IGS) - a gas sourcing and marketing joint venture of Reliance and BP - bagged another 1 mmscmd, while IOC got a similar volume.

The remaining volume was picked by Adani Gas



ONGC WAIVES MARKETING MARGIN
BUT REFUSES TO LOWER GAS PRICE

New Delhi, May 13: ONGC has agreed to do away with charging users a marketing margin on the gas it plans to produce from its KG basin field but refused to lower the minimum rate, according to tender documents.

ONGC, India's top oil and gas producer, last month sought bids for the sale of initial 2 million standard cubic meters per day of gas from its KG-DWN-98/2 block (KG-D5).

The company asked bidders to quote a rate linked to prevailing Brent crude oil prices. It fixed the floor or minimum rate at 10.5 per cent of the three-month aver-

age Brent crude oil price.

On top of it, the firm sought \$0.20 per million British thermal unit.

Potential bidders however opposed the levy of the marketing margin as well as the "high" floor price.

Responding to queries raised by bidders, ONGC said the floor price cannot be changed but the marketing margin is being dropped.

"Change in Reserve Gas Price (floor rate) is not agreed. However, considering requests from various bidders, the levy of marketing margin of \$0.20 per mmbtu over and above contract price is removed," the company said. — PTI

(0.15 mmscmd), IRM Energy (0.10 mmscmd), GAIL (30,000 cubic meters per day) and Torrent Gas (20,000 cubic metres per day). This is the third auc-

tion that Reliance-BP conducted on a third party independent platform approved by the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). The online

web-based electronic bidding platform of CRISIL Risk and Infrastructure Solutions Ltd (CRIS) was also used for e-auction in February this year as well as in 2019.

In the three auctions, Reliance-BP has sold around 18 mmscmd of domestic gas from new fields in the KG-D6 block, which would help substantially reduce reliance on imported LNG, the sources said.

In the May 5 auction, Reliance-BP had asked bidders to quote a price linked to Platts JKM (Japan Korea marker), the liquefied natural gas (LNG) benchmark price assessment for spot physical cargoes.

The intense competition indicates a preference for domestic gas vis a vis LNG for Indian consumers.

At current prices, the discovered price translates into a price of about \$9 per mmbtu, but the buyers will be required to pay only the cap or ceiling price that the government has set for such fields. The government sets a cap or ceiling rate at which natural gas from difficult fields like deepsea can be sold.

This cap for the period April 1, 2021, to September 30 2021 is \$3.62 per mmbtu.

With the return of demand, international rates have rebounded, which will reflect in the prices in the second revision due on October 1. — PTI

Covid fails to dampen
PE, VC interest in India

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 13

The second wave of the pandemic has not been able to affect the enthusiasm of private equity and venture capital funds as investments continued to grow for four straight months of 2021.

PE/VC investments in April 2021 stood at \$7.5 billion, which were 6.5 times the value recorded in the lock-down hit April 2020 at \$1.1 billion. The April 2021 investments were also 37 per cent higher compared to \$5.5 billion in the previous month of March.

In the past four months of 2021, there has been a sequential increase in investments from \$1.6 billion in January to \$7.5 billion in April.

Technology was the top sector to grab \$3.1 billion, followed by e-commerce with \$1.5 billion. E-commerce also saw the highest monthly investment value in the past 31 months. The financial services sector received \$614 million and media and entertainment \$515 million.

"The revival in PE/VC investments has been driven by an increase in large deals valued over \$100 million. Of the 41 large deals recorded in the first four months of 2021, 32 were in the past two months. While Covid resilient sectors like pharma, healthcare, edutech, online media, SaaS, Technology and IT/ITeS continue to see good traction in both value and volume of PE/VC deals, there has been a significant uptick in the value and volume of investments in the e-commerce sector,"

FPI INVESTMENT IN EQUITY RISES
7% TO \$552B IN MARCH QUARTER

New Delhi, May 13: The value of foreign portfolio investor (FPI) holdings in domestic equities reached \$552 billion in three months to March 2021, a surge of 7 per cent from the preceding quarter, according to a Morningstar report.

This was largely on the back of robust net inflows from FPIs, coupled with a strong performance of the Indian equity markets. "As of the quarter ended March 2021, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities stood at \$552 billion, which was considerably higher than the \$518 billion recorded in the previous quarter," the report noted.

As of March 2020 quarter, the value of FPI investments in Indian equities was \$281 billion. However, the contribution of overseas investors to domestic equity market capitalisation

dropped marginally during the period under review to 19.9 per cent from 20.1 per cent in the December quarter.

Offshore mutual funds form an important component of total foreign portfolio investment, apart from other large FPIs, such as offshore insurance companies, hedge funds, and sovereign wealth funds.

During January-March 2021, FPIs invested a robust \$7.64 billion in Indian equities. In relative terms, it was much lower than the net inflows of \$19.21 billion recorded in the previous quarter, but in absolute terms, it is a significant amount, nonetheless, the report pointed out.

According to the report, positive domestic and global factors ensured that the interest of foreign investors in the Indian equity markets remains intact. — PTI

Exits also were quite active in April. April 2021 recorded 13 exits worth \$2.7 billion, almost 23 times the value of exits in April 2020 at \$117 million and 25 per cent higher than the value recorded in March 2021 at \$2.1 billion.

Secondary exits in April 2021 were highest at \$2.1 billion across three deals. Exits worth \$7 billion in the first four months were 17 per cent higher than the total value recorded last year.

Exits also were quite active in April. April 2021 recorded 13 exits worth \$2.7 billion, almost 23 times the value of exits in April 2020 at \$117 million and 25 per cent higher than the value recorded in March 2021 at \$2.1 billion. Secondary exits in April 2021 were highest at \$2.1 billion across three deals. Exits worth \$7 billion in the first four months were 17 per cent higher than the total value recorded last year.

Sensex may react to
US volatility today

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 13

The equity market may continue to be highly volatile on Friday as it opens post-holiday on Thursday, tracking volatile global markets, domestic macroeconomic data and grim Covid situation.

Asian and European markets tumbled on Thursday on rising inflation and soaring global commodity prices.

Japan's Nikkei index was down 2.49 per cent, China's Shanghai Composite was down 0.96 per cent and Hong Kong's Hang Seng 1.81 per cent following the biggest fall in the US stock market since February.

The US market fell sharply on Wednesday after inflation data released showed the biggest jump in inflation since September 2008 as consumer prices jumped 4.2 per cent in April, up from 2.6 per cent in March. However, better US job data released on Thursday led to a recovery in the US market in early trade.

Fearing a rise in interest rates, technology index

Nasdaq fell 2.67 per cent, SP 500 fell 2.1 per cent and Dow Jones fell 1.99 per cent on Wednesday.

Along with the US market developments, escalation of war between Israel and Palestine and grim Covid situation back home are likely to impact stock price movement in the domestic market. Around 83 people were killed and 480 wounded in the fierce fight between Israel and Palestine forces.

CPI inflation moderated to 4.3 per cent y-o-y in April versus 5.5 per cent, largely as a consequence of favourable base effects and thus could rise in coming months.

"Upcoming inflation prints may shoot up to above 5.2 per cent led by higher fuel cost and select perishable and non-perishable food inflation and sticky core inflation," said analysts from Emkay Global Financial Services.

Industrial production growth picked up sharply to 22.4 per cent year on year in March from minus 3.4 per cent in February 2021 but could again get impacted negatively due to the lockdown effect.

DUCATI DRIVES IN
NEW MODELS OF
STREETFIGHTER

New Delhi, May 13: Italian superbike maker Ducati on Thursday launched new versions of Streetfighter V4 and V4 S in India priced at ₹19.99 lakh and ₹22.99 lakh, respectively (ex-showroom Delhi).

The two models now come with a BSVI compliant engine which churns out 208 HP of power.

"The Streetfighter V4 embodies the spirit of a mean beastly super naked, that is loaded with performance to back it up," Ducati India managing director Bipul Chandra said. The motorcycle was much awaited by enthusiasts and Ducati fans alike, he added.

"We are excited that it is finally available in India for everyone to experience," he noted.

It said that bookings were open across all Ducati dealerships in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, and Chennai. — PTI

Eli Lilly allows 3 Indian
cos to make Covid drug

DRL, MSN Labs, Torrent to make Baricitinib

New Delhi, May 13: Drug firm Eli Lilly and Company on Thursday said it has inked voluntary licensing agreements with three Indian drug firms — Torrent Pharmaceuticals, Dr Reddy's and MSN Laboratories — to expedite the availability of Baricitinib for treatment of Covid patients in India.

The company has issued additional royalty-free, non-exclusive voluntary licences to Dr Reddy's, MSN Laboratories and Torrent Pharmaceuticals, who will be collaborating

with Lilly to accelerate and expand the availability of Baricitinib in India, Eli Lilly and Company said in a statement.

"These three additional voluntary licensing agreements will ensure high-quality manufacturing and accessibility of Baricitinib during this pandemic improving the local treatment options available to positively impact the lives of people who are currently battling Covid in India," it added.

The company on Monday had announced

signing voluntary licensing agreements with Sun Pharma, Cipla and Lupin.

Eli Lilly has received permission for restricted emergency use by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, for Baricitinib to be used in combination with Remdesivir for the treatment of suspected or laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 in hospitalised adults requiring supplemental oxygen, invasive mechanical ventilation, or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, the statement said. — PTI

LUPIN JUMPS INTO BLACK WITH ₹1,216 CR PROFIT IN FY21

New Delhi, May 13: Drug maker Lupin on Thursday reported an 18 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit at ₹460 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2021, driven by robust sales across domestic and international markets.

The Mumbai-based company had reported a net profit of ₹390 crore in the January-March quarter of 2019-20.

The company's total income from operations, however, declined to ₹3,783 crore during the fourth quarter, as compared to ₹3,846 crore in the corresponding period of FY20, Lupin Ltd said.

For the entire 2020-21 fiscal, the drugmaker posted a consolidated net profit of

January-March quarter of 2019-20.

The company's total income from operations, however, declined to ₹3,783 crore during the fourth quarter, as compared to ₹3,846 crore in the corresponding period of FY20, Lupin Ltd said.

For the entire 2020-21 fiscal, the drugmaker posted a consolidated net profit of

₹1,216 crore. The company had reported a net loss of ₹269 crore in the 2019-20 financial year. Total income from operations for the last fiscal stood at ₹15,163 crore, as compared to ₹15,375 crore in 2019-20.

The company said its board has recommended a dividend of ₹6.5 per equity share of the face value of ₹2 each. — PTI

WORKER | BENEFIT

Member nations to begin dialogue on issue
Brics moots wider social security net

New Delhi, May 13: The representatives of BricsS nations have expressed willingness to have a multilateral social security framework in order to safeguard workers' rights.

The Social Security Agreement will help the international workers to port their benefit to their home countries and are exempted from contributing towards social security schemes both in home and host countries.

The views were expressed by member nations' representatives at the first Brics Employment Working Group (EWG) meeting held on May 11 and 12, 2021 at New Delhi in a virtual format, a statement said.

Indian labour secretary Apurva Chandra, chaired the meeting as the country has assumed the Brics

Presidency this year. The prime agenda for the discussions were Promoting Social Security Agreements amongst Brics nations, formalisation of labour markets, participation of women in the labour force and Gig and Platform workers' role in the labour market.

Apart from representatives of member nations, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the representatives of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Social Security Agency (ISSA) also made valuable interventions and suggestions on the agenda issues.

"On the issue of Social Security Agreement

(SSA), the member nations resolved to enter into dialogue and discussion with each other and take it forward towards the signing of the agreements, while the ISSA and ILO on their part, expressed willingness to provide technical support in facilitating the conclusion of such agreements," it said.

The member nations also converged on devising a multilateral framework for the same (social security agreement) at a later stage, it said.

The member nations also discussed various initiatives taken by them towards the formalization of jobs and how Covid-19 has enhanced informalisation risk. — PTI

fastest to help the country navigate the second wave and be better prepared to deal with future waves". Nasscom said while the vaccination regime has been liberalised, the availability of vaccines — particularly for the private sector — continues to be "very challenging".

"While we are attempting to source available vaccines in India, we request the government to provide emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, and others that have gone through stringent approval process globally, to ensure there is no vaccine divide in the country," the industry body said in a statement. — PTI

Nasscom seeks waiver
from FCRA regulations

New Delhi, May 13: IT industry body Nasscom on Thursday said that it has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a temporary relaxation in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) norms and further liberalisation of vaccine import to navigate through the deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Terming data as strategic ammunition available for managing the pandemic, the IT industry body said insights and analytics from Covid tracking and vaccination data could play a key role in decision making and early warning signals.

All these steps, Nasscom said, will enable the industry to "do more and act

fastest to help the country navigate the second wave and be better prepared to deal with future waves".

Nasscom said while the vaccination regime has been liberalised, the availability of vaccines — particularly for the private sector — continues to be "very challenging".

"While we are attempting to source available vaccines in India, we request the government to provide emergency use authorisation for all WHO-approved vaccines Pfizer, Moderna, J&J, and others that have gone through stringent approval process globally, to ensure there is no vaccine divide in the country," the industry body said in a statement. — PTI

LABOUR FORCE
SHRANK IN
INDIA, SAYS CMIE



SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 13

The number of employed people fell by 7.35 million in April over March as the labour force shrank and the unemployment rate went up due to the second wave of the pandemic, finds CMIE.

The number of employed people in India fell from 398 million in March to 390.79 million in April — a decline of 7.35 million within a month.

Shrinkage of the labour force and rise in unemployment among those looking for jobs contributed to the decline. The labour force shrank by 1.1 million in April 2021 to 424.6 million compared to 425.8 million in March.

Labour Participation Rate fell for a third consecutive month in April and was the lowest since the nation-wide lockdown month of May 2020. The lockdowns imposed in some of the states to curb the second wave could have denied people from seeking employment and caused a fall in labour participation, finds Mahesh Vyas, CEO, CMIE.

However, despite this smaller labour force looking for employment, a greater proportion failed to find jobs. As a result, the unemployment rate shot up from 6.5 per cent in March to 8 per cent in April. Count of the unemployed who was willing to work and was actively looking for work but unable to find any expanded by 6.2 million from 27.7 million in March to 33.9 million in April.

Most of the job losses are from the agricultural sector, which is not impacted by the lockdowns. Of the 7.35 million people who lost employment in April, six million losses were from the agricultural sector.

SHORT TAKES

Lukaku fined for birthday party

Milan: Romelu Lukaku has been fined along with three Inter Milan teammates after a party in the early hours of Thursday morning to celebrate the Belgium forward's birthday which broke Covid-19 restrictions. Lukaku, Achraf Hakimi, Ivan Perisic and Ashley Young were among a group of 24 people celebrating his 28th birthday in a Milan hotel after the Inter's 3-1 league win over Roma, *Gazzetta Dello Sport* reported.

Police were called with all present receiving fines for breaking coronavirus rules, *Gazzetta* said. According to Lukaku's entourage, the former Manchester United forward went out with friends, but had not organised the party. Lukaku scored the final goal against Roma to bring his tally to 22 in the league this season, six behind Cristiano Ronaldo.

— AFP

Serena beaten in 1,000th match

Rome: Serena Williams' 1,000th tour-level singles match ended in defeat as she marked her return to action with a 7-6 (6), 7-5 loss to Nadia Podoroska in the second round of the Italian Open. The eighth-seeded Williams, who hadn't played since the Australian Open, rallied from a break down twice in the opening set on Wednesday and saved the first three set points she faced in the tiebreaker before Podoroska converted her fourth. "It's tough to have a first match on clay. It was definitely kind of good to go the distance and to try to be out there, but clearly I can do legions better," said Williams.

Defending champion Simona Halep was forced to retire with a left calf injury in the second set of her match against fellow former No. 1 Angelique Kerber. Halep was leading 6-1, 3-3 before her injury. — AP

Djokovic sweeps into Italian last 8

Rome: World number one Novak Djokovic swept into the Italian Open quarter-finals on Thursday with a straight sets wins over Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in front of spectators who were allowed to watch in the Foro Italico for the first time.

The five-time Rome champion won through 6-2, 6-1 in 1hr 10min against the 48th-ranked Spaniard with the venue filled to 25 per cent of capacity. "It was not good, it was great. I missed the crowd," said the 33-year-old Serb. "It was nice to see them back." After losing his opening service game, Djokovic powered back with five breaks of serve, outclassing his rival, despite a late fightback, to seal the win on his sixth match point. — AFP

Oz players may return home soon

Male, Maldives: A group of Australian cricketers, coaches and players-turned-commentators, currently stranded in Maldives, may return home in a chartered flight on Sunday, though they are still waiting confirmation from their government, according to a report. A group of 38 Australians, including 14 players, left for Maldives on May 6 after the suspension of IPL 2021 as their government had banned flights from India till May 15 due to surge in Covid-19 cases there. "Under plans currently being thrashed out..., the group of 38 would be able to take a charter flight out of the Maldives via Malaysia to Sydney on May 16, where they would then serve their mandatory 14-day quarantine period," a report in *ESPNcricinfo* said. — PTI

Hockey legends kin to get ₹5 lac

New Delhi: Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday announced financial support of ₹5 lakh each for the bereaved families of former hockey players M.K. Kaushik and Ravinder Pal Singh, who recently lost their lives to Covid-19. Both Kaushik and Singh were a part of India's 1980 Olympic gold-winning team. "We've lost two hockey greats to Covid. MK Kaushik ji & Ravinder Pal Singh ji's contribution to Indian sport will always be remembered," Rijiju wrote on his twitter handle. "As a gesture of support, the Sports Ministry is handing over ₹5 lakh each to the bereaved families. We stand with them in this hour of grief." India lost the revered stars on last Saturday. — PTI

Atletico on in Spain

Atletico on the cusp of La Liga glory after Sociedad win

Madrid, May 13: Atletico Madrid held their nerve to beat Real Sociedad 2-1 on Wednesday and move within touching distance of winning La Liga.

Yannick Carrasco and Angel Correa made a dominant first half count for Atletico, who retreated in the second and were left hanging on after Igor Zubeldia blasted in for La Real with seven minutes left.

When the final whistle blew, Diego Simeone jogged up the tunnel at the Wanda Metropolitano, punching the air as he went, fully aware how important this result could prove.

"We were excellent in the first half but the suffering was unnecessary when we had so many chances," Simeone said.

Outside, Atleti fans had gathered to cheer and sing throughout a nervy contest and when victory was confirmed, fireworks filled the sky.

"We thank all those who are outside tonight and all those who can't come because of everything that is happening," said Atletico captain Koke. "We could hear them outside when we needed them in the last 10 minutes."

Victory puts Atletico four points clear of Barcelona in the table and five ahead of Real Madrid, with Zinedine Zidane's side playing their game in hand away at Granada on Thursday.

It also raises the possibility of Atletico winning the title in the penultimate round on Sunday when they play at home to Osasuna.

Another victory this weekend would knock Barca out of the race regardless of what the Catalans do against Celta Vigo while Real Madrid would also concede if they had not taken six points from Granada and Sunday's trip to Athletic Bilbao.

Sevilla, in fourth, had earlier edged past Valencia 1-0 but they can no longer overtake Atleti, given their six-point deficit and a losing head-to-head record with the leaders. Youssef En-Nesyri scored his 26th goal of the season at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan.

The four-horse race is reduced to three and after weeks of various twists and turns, Atletico suddenly appear to have a route to the trophy.

In terms of the table at least, this game against fifth-placed Real Sociedad was their toughest remaining fixture, although Real Valladolid could well be fighting for survival on the final day.

— AFP



Atletico Madrid's Angel Correa (left) vies for the ball with Martin Zubimendi of Real Sociedad in their Spanish League match in Madrid on Wednesday. — AFP

Rowe exploits Jorginho blunder as Arsenal win

London, May 13: Thomas Tuchel admitted Chelsea's 1-0 defeat against Arsenal was a "wake-up call" after Emile Smith Rowe punished Jorginho's blunder to dent the Blues' bid to finish in the Premier League's top four.

Midfielder Jorginho was guilty of a woefully misplaced back-pass that ended with Gunners youngster Smith Rowe slotting home early in the first half at Stamford Bridge.

Tuchel's side were bereft of quality in the final third as they succumbed to only a third defeat in their 26 matches in all competitions. Chelsea remain in fourth place, but their bid to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish is now on a knife edge.

They sit six points clear of fifth placed West Ham, who have a game in hand, and seven ahead of sixth placed Liverpool, who could be the biggest threat with two games in hand.

"I don't know how

MILAN RUN RIOT TO KEEP THEIR CL CHANCES ALIVE

Milan, May 13: Ante Rebic scored a hat-trick and Theo Hernandez a double as AC Milan thrashed Torino 7-0 on Wednesday to keep their push for a return to the Champions League for the first time since 2014 on track.

The battle for elite European football remains tight with just three points separating second-placed Atalanta and Juventus in fifth.

Atalanta moved back second ahead of Napoli with a 2-0 win over relegation candidates Benevento.

The Bergamo side are equal on points with Milan, with Napoli a further two points adrift in fourth.

"Until you cross the finish line, you can't give up on anything," said Milan coach Stefano Pioli whose final two games are home against Cagliari and away to Atalanta.

— AFP

Arsenal would have scored if we didn't give it to them. We scored more or less an own goal, a total gift," Tuchel said.

PSG MAKE IT TO FRENCH CUP FINAL

Paris Saint-Germain squeaked past Montpellier 6-5 on penalties in Wednesday's

French Cup semi-final to keep alive their hopes of ending the season with silverware.

Spot kicks were required after the two sides were all square at 2-2 after normal time in Montpellier.

"It was a real cup tie, they're never easy," said PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino.

— AFP

CL FINAL MOVED FROM TURKEY TO PORTUGAL

Paris, May 13: UEFA announced on Thursday that the Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea had been moved from Istanbul to Porto, Portugal.

The match on May 29 has been switched to the Estadio do Dragao to allow English spectators to attend as travel between the UK and Turkey is suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier, European football's governing body announced up to 6,000 supporters from each club will be able to attend.

"We accept that the decision of the British Government to place Turkey on the red list for travel was taken in good faith and in the best interests of protecting its citizens from the spread of the virus but it also presented us with a major challenge in staging a final featuring two English teams," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said.

UK citizens returning from red list countries are required to quarantine for 10 days.

— AFP

India remain No.1 in Test rankings

Dubai, May 13: India remained the number one Test side after the annual update of the ICC team rankings, released on Thursday.

India head the table after gaining one rating point for an aggregate of 121, having accumulated 2,914 points from 24 matches.

Virat Kohli's men are closely followed by their World Test Championship final opponents, New Zealand, with a rating of 120. The Kiwis have garnered 2166 points from 18 Tests and gained two rating points.

India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.

According to an ICC statement, the latest annual update eliminates results of 2017-18.

The latest update rates all matches played since May 2020 at 100 per cent and those of the previous two years at 50 per cent.

England (109 rating) have climbed a place to third at the expense of Australia (108 rating), down to fourth now.

England's jump came

● **India's 2-1 win over Australia and 3-1 win over England over the past year and New Zealand's 2-0 series wins over the West Indies and Pakistan have helped them keep ahead of the pack.**

after their 0-4 defeat to Australia in 2017-18 was dropped from the rankings.

Pakistan (94) have gained three points but remained at fifth spot, while West Indies (84), who beat Bangladesh 2-0 and drew 0-0 with Sri Lanka in series played this year, have jumped two places to sixth, their best position since 2013.

South Africa (80) and Sri Lanka (78) have dropped a rung each to seventh and eighth positions respectively, followed by Bangladesh (46), who have lost five points and Zimbabwe (35), who gained eight points.

India and New Zealand will square off in the inaugural World Test Championship final at Southampton's Ageas Bowl from June 18 to 22.

— PTI

PAINE HINTS AT GIVING UP CAPTAINCY AFTER ASHES

Melbourne, May 13: Australian Test captain Tim Paine has hinted at stepping down from the position if his team manages to defeat England in the Ashes series this year and backed former skipper Steve Smith to succeed him.

The 36-year-old Paine has been under intense scrutiny after Australia were beaten 1-2 by an injury-ravaged India in a home Test series earlier this season. Paine said that debacle was partly because his team got distracted by India's "nig-gling".

Smith was Australia's captain before being forced to step down in 2018 owing to his role in the ball-tampering scan-

dal. "He's probably a bit like me when I was at the start of my captaincy journey in Tasmania — he was thrown into a very big role at a very, very young age and he probably wasn't quite ready for it," Paine was quoted as saying by *news.com.au*.

"But by the time I came in he was growing into that role and getting better and better. Then obviously (in) South Africa events happened and he's not doing it anymore. But yeah I would support him getting that job again," he added.

Paine also hinted that he might step down from captaincy if Australia can beat England in the Ashes later this year.

— PTI

WOMEN'S | CRICKET

Powar replaces Raman as coach

New Delhi, May 13: Former spinner Ramesh Powar on Thursday replaced W.V. Raman as the Indian women's cricket team's head coach, regaining the position more than two years after he was sacked following a bitter fallout with ODI captain Mithali Raj.

The 42-year-old was recommended by the Madan Lal-led Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) after interviewing eight candidates, including Raman.

"The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announces the appointment of Mr Ramesh Powar as the Head Coach of Team India (Senior Women)," a BCCI statement read.

The others in fray were former India wicketkeeper Ajay Ratna and four female candidates.

It remains to be seen how Powar works alongside Mithali, who had accused him of bias after the Harmanpreet Kaur-led T20 team dropped the veteran batter for the all-important World Cup semifinal against England.

Mithali, in a letter to the BCCI after the event, had alleged that Powar "was out to destroy and humiliate" her. Powar had hit back asserting that Mithali "threw a lot of tantrums and created chaos in the team".

After being removed from his position in the women's team, Powar proved himself as a coach and earlier this year, led Mumbai to the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

— PTI

SHAFALI, RADHA READY TO MAKE WBBL DEBUTS

New Delhi, May 13: Indian batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to make her Women's Big Bash League debut with two-time champions Sydney Sixers later this year.

The 17-year-old is expected to be joined by left-arm spinner Radha Yadav, who is currently in talks with the Sydney Sixers franchise.

"Shafali's deal is done, it will be announced when the Women's Big Bash schedule is released. Radha is also in talks with the Sydney Sixers," a BCCI source said.

The teenager's father was also required to sign a consent form as Shafali is still a minor.

Shafali joins the trio of T20 skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (Sydney Thunder), opener Smriti Mandhana (Brisbane Heat) and all-rounder Veda Krishnamurthy (Hobart Hurricanes), which has featured in the WBBL.

The world number one batter in ICC women's T20I rankings will also be turning up for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred — the 100-ball domestic competition of the England and Wales Cricket Board later this year.

— PTI

TOKYO-BOUND RACE WALKER IRFAN +VE

New Delhi, May 13: Olympic-bound race walker K. T. Irfan is among five elite track-and-field athletes who have tested positive for Covid-19 at the Sports Authority of India's Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru.

The tests were conducted last Friday and those who returned positive have been kept under quarantine.

"At least five elite athletes have tested positive for Covid-19 when tests were conducted on Friday. They have been kept isolated from others," a source at the SAI Centre said.

The source said another race walker could also have tested positive but this could



K. T. Irfan

not be confirmed.

"4 male players and 1 female player and 4 support staff tested positive for Covid-19," a SAI source stated.

Irfan had qualified for the Tokyo Olympics way back in 2019 after finishing fourth in the 20 km event of the Asian Race Walking Championships in Nomi, Japan.

— PTI

Instead, an activist appeared on the screen holding up a black and white banner opposing the Tokyo Olympics.

"No Olympics anywhere, No Olympics anywhere," he said, before using a profanity and adding "No Olympics in LA., No Olympics in

Tokyo," before the line was cut. The 2028 Olympics will be held in Los Angeles.

Adams made light of the interruption noting if Bach had been present it "probably would have made that stunt a little bit more interesting."

— AP

Negative public opinion is no threat to Olympics

Geneva, May 13: The IOC has downplayed concerns over Japanese public opinion calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be cancelled, before its virtual news conference was interrupted by an activist protesting the Games.

The news conference on Wednesday followed a monthly meeting of the International Olympic Committee's executive board held amid a state of emergency in Tokyo to curb surging Covid-19 cases. Polling in Japan also persistently suggests people want the July 23-August 8 Olympics to be called off, having already been postponed by one year.

"We listen but won't be guided by public opinion," IOC spokesman Mark Adams said, adding "everything is telling us ... that the Games can go ahead and will go ahead."

Adams stood in for his boss, IOC president Thomas Bach, whose planned visit to Japan next week was called off Monday after states of emergency in Tokyo and other regions were extended through May.

The final question of the news conference, held by video call, was offered to a reporter from Yahoo Sports.

Srikanth holds on to slim Oly hopes

New Delhi, May 13: Left stranded after the final three Olympic qualifiers were cancelled, Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth still harbours "some hope" of making it to the Tokyo Games, his faint optimism resting on the world body's assurance of a statement on the qualification process.

Former world No. 1 Srikanth and Saina Nehwal were all but out of contention after the Badminton World Federation on Wednesday cancelled the last qualifying event in Singapore due to the Coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

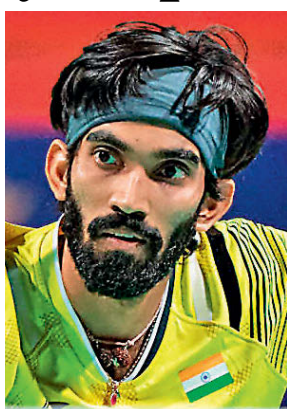
The cancellation of the Singapore event (June 1-6) was after Malaysia Open and India Open had to be shelved due to the health crisis.

The BWF, however, said it "will issue a further statement on Tokyo Olympics qualifying at a later date."

"I could have qualified if I had participated in the qualifiers but there is nothing much I can do about it now. Just waiting to see what BWF says about this whole qualification things, so yeah holding on to some hope," Srikanth said.

There is no tournament scheduled till August and Telangana too has gone into a lockdown. Srikanth said he would now take a break from training.

Asked if BWF could have



Kidambi Srikanth

done anything differently, Srikanth said: "Now we can say a lot of things because the tournament is not happening but we really don't know what is happening between the organisers and BWF."

"So, I don't know what else can be done, may be BWF can communicate things better to players."

With no events lined-up, Olympic-bound shuttlers such as P. V. Sindhu, B. Sai Praneeth and men's doubles pair of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, too have decided to take some time off.

"Definitely disappointed that all the three events got cancelled. I have been training for 7 weeks but now just training without purpose makes no sense," world No. 15 Praneeth said.

— PTI

