

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | THURSDAY | 6 MAY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 39.0°C
Min: 18°C
RH: 41%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 39/18 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Dasami till 2.13 pm
Star: Satabhisha till 10.33 am
Varjyam: 5.28 pm to 7.11 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.05 am to 10.56 am; 3.11 pm to 4.01 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Ramzan 23, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 06.08 AM
SUNSET TODAY 06.33 PM
MOONSET 1.37 AM
MOONRISE 2.31 PM

RAMZAN TIMINGS
IFTAR: 6.49 (Today)
SEHRI: 4.34 (Tomorrow)

COUNTER POINT



Hike the prices by a paise where we won, and by a rupee where we lost!

SHORT TAKES

Stalin to take oath as CM tomorrow

Chennai: TN Governor Banwarilal Purohit appointed M.K. Stalin as Chief Minister on Wednesday and invited him to form the next government. Stalin would be sworn in as CM along with his ministerial colleagues on Friday 9 am at the Raj Bhavan in a simple function, which will be attended by 200 persons.

■ Full report on Page 4

Deadline for KYC update extended

Chennai: Considering the Covid situation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday provided some relief to the customers by asking banks and other financial institutions not to impose punitive action against those who fail to update KYC. This relief is being provided till December end.

■ Full report on Page 7

IDBI Bank to be privatised

New Delhi: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday gave its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank. The extent of shareholding to be divested by the Centre and LIC would be decided later in consultation with RBI.

■ Full report on Page 7

BJP claims win in UP local polls

Lucknow: The ruling BJP on Wednesday rejected opposition claims that it had received a setback in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls and called it the "overall winner". Samajwadi Party, however, claimed that it has bagged over 800 out of about 3,000 in zila panchayat seats, breaching also the BJP bastions of Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Ayodhya.



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WORLD | 5

WTO mulling IP waiver for vaccines

Jagan to launch housing plan

Asks officials to begin construction before June 1 launch

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

The Andhra Pradesh government's prestigious mega housing programme 'Navaratnalu-Pedalanderiki Illu' (Houses for the poor) is all set to be launched in the state on June 1.

During a review meeting at his camp office on Wednesday, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy instructed officials to make all arrangements for starting construction works by May 25 and ensure their timely completion by providing water, electricity and

● CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy instructed officials to make all arrangements for starting construction by May 25 and ensure timely completion by providing water, electricity and other amenities.

● He made it clear that the works should not be stopped because of curfew, and that the works be carried out from 6 am to 12 noon.

other amenities.

The Chief Minister made it clear to the officials that the works should not be stopped because of curfew, and that the works be carried out from 6 am to 12 noon.

He said water and electricity should be provided in the colonies immediately as they are very crucial

to ground the works. He directed that a model house be construed in every layout and a detailed report on it submitted later. He further said that details on expenditure, savings, modifications and other issues can be reviewed based on the reports. He felt that since the demand for steel would

come down due to the Covid crisis, it might lead to a reduction in prices. He noted that the state would need 7.5 lakh tonnes of steel for the housing scheme. He asked the officials to hold talks with steel companies and ensure timely supplies to those beneficiaries who would like to construct houses on their own. He called for the provision of all infrastructure facilities in layouts viz., CC roads, underground CC drains, water pipe-lines, electrification and internet.

■ Page 2: Mega projects to fuel growth in pandemic: CM



SPORTS | 8

MacGill kidnapped and released

TABLOID

How old is too old to be a mother?



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Centre warns of 3rd Covid wave

Top adviser points out at a higher active cases in Andhra Pradesh and other states

New Delhi, May 5: The government on Wednesday said that a third wave of Coronavirus pandemic was "inevitable", although a time-frame for it could not be predicted.

In a press briefing by the ministry of health affairs on Wednesday, officials said the long Covid wave of such "ferocity" that the country was experiencing currently "was not predicted".

Twelve states, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, have more than one lakh active Covid cases, the government said.

Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Bihar are among the states that show an increasing trend in daily cases, it said.

The government also said that 24 states and UTs show more than 15 per

● Phase three is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur. We should be prepared for new waves

— K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal scientific advisor to the Centre

cent Covid positivity rate. From May 1, 6.71 lakh people in the age group of 18-44 years in nine states have been administered the vaccines, it added.

"Phase three is inevitable given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur. We should be prepared for new waves," said K. Vijay Raghavan, the principal

scientific advisor to the Centre.

Member, NITI Ayog, Dr VK Paul requested "physicians' fraternity" to come forward and provide teleconsultations to people and families at home who are infected with coronavirus.

"The response to the changing virus remains the same. We need to follow the Covid-appropriate behaviour such as mask, distancing, hygiene, no unnecessary meetings and staying at home," Dr Paul said.

Union health ministry joint secretary Lav Agarwal said that 11 districts in Maharashtra are showing continuous decline in Coronavirus cases since the last 14 days, while some districts like Satara and Solapur show a continued increase in such cases over the last two weeks. — PTI

Masks off



West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamul Congress supreme Mamata Banerjee greets West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar after taking oath as the West Bengal CM for the third time consecutively at Governor House in Kolkata on Wednesday. — PTI

States have lost power to identify BCs, says SC

Rules Maratha quota invalid, backs 50% cap

New Delhi, May 5: The Supreme Court by a majority of 3:2, on Wednesday held the 102nd Constitutional amendment, which also led to setting up of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC), took away states' power to identify socially and educationally backward classes under their territory for grant of quota in jobs and admissions.

The 102nd Constitution amendment Act of 2018 inserted Articles 338B, which deals with the structure, duties and powers of the NCBC, and 342A which deals with power of the President to notify a particular caste as SEBC and power of Parliament to change the list.

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by

● The states can, through their existing mechanisms can only make suggestions to the President or the Commission, for inclusion, exclusion or modification of castes or communities in the SEBC list, SC said.

Justice Ashok Bhushan, in their four separate verdicts, however, was unanimous on other key issues such as the Maratha quota law was invalid and the 1992 Mandal judgement, capping total reservation to 50 per cent, did not need a relook.

Justice S. Ravindra Bhat wrote 132-page long ver-

dict and Justices L. Nageswara Rao and Hemant Gupta, in their separate judgements, concurred with Justice Bhat and his reasoning in holding that states have lost their power to identify SEBC under their territory after 102nd amendment.

Writing the majority judgement on this aspect, Justice Bhat, said, By introduction of Articles 366 (26C) and 342A through the 102nd Constitution, the President alone, to the exclusion of all other authorities, is empowered to identify SEBCs and include them in a list to be published under Article 342A (1), which shall be deemed to include SEBCs in relation to each state and union territory for the purposes of the Constitution.

Extended curfew brings life to halt

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

All activities, barring emergencies and essential services, came to a halt in Andhra Pradesh after a 18-hour long curfew imposed — from 12 noon to 6 am per day — from Wednesday.

APSRTC suspended all its bus services while shops, malls, business establishments and transportation activities ceased during the curfew period. The police did not allow vehicles into AP along the borders and were allowing only emergency/ essential services and travel for medical treatment and such purposes.

People were seen thronging the markets to purchase essentials in the morning hours. The curfew is adversely impacting the working classes, including petty traders, daily wage workers, fruit

vendors as also pushcart sellers apart from hotels, who are all forced to close their activities by noon.

Shops in the busy market places were closed by noon and the busy roads wore a deserted look. A majority of the people were confined to their homes due to the strict curfew norms.

The continuous plying of auto rickshaws has stopped for the duration of the curfew and only a few auto rickshaws and taxis were permitted by cops during this period.

Restrictions were imposed on vehicles moving between AP and Telangana during the curfew. The main inter-state check posts connecting Telangana were closed at Ramapuram, Pondugula and Nagarjuna Sagar and exemption was given only to emergency services.

■ Page 3: Section 144 enforced at border posts

Orchard farming blooms in Kadapa under MGNREGS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 5

Small farmers are now able to grow horticulture orchards, thanks to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The District Water Management Authority

has decided to cultivate 10,000 acres of orchards this year, which is unprecedented in the district.

Currently, selection of beneficiaries for the year 2021-22 is in full swing. Eligible farmers have to apply by May 31.

Until now, crops like guava, sapota, mango,

teak, coconut, custard apple, apricot and tamarind were made available under job guarantee scheme. This year dragon fruit, Taiwan guava, coconut, hybrid orchards, rose and jasmines were added.

■ Page 2: Only small farmers can benefit from scheme

DUAL | USE

Black marketers use groups to sell oxygen and key Covid drugs

Fraudsters sneak into WhatsApp groups

SANJAY SAMUEL PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, MAY 5

When the sudden spike in Coronavirus cases came about and the related problems multiplied, the WhatsApp groups too mushroomed, mostly with an intent to help those in dire need of support.

These groups helped the needy get information on treatment, availability of plasma, oxygen cylinders, oxygen concentrators and the emergency medicines used for Covid19 treat-

ment. These are also helping patients get beds in hospitals, food for those in isolation or quarantine, and reach up to newly established centres for patients with minimum symptoms.

All these groups have been adding members regularly as many are coming forward to extend a helping hand to the suffering patients and their families. They have information on their finger-tips.

Predictably, some fraudsters and the black marketers too have become a

● While WhatsApp groups have helped patients with critical information, some fraudsters too joined the group to reach out to those in need to bail them out for a hefty price

part of these groups. When someone post a message about an urgent requirement in the group, crooks would immediately catch on it and start sending private messages in spite of

the group having common slots for communication. There starts the bargain for emergency products, be it for remdesivir injections, oxygen cylinders or any other item of an emergency nature.

Needless to say, these crooks make a kill out of any deal they are able to strike with the needy in desperation.

Safer Hussain, an IT employee, was in need of remdesivir injections on Tuesday night. There was a serious shortage of this medicine. When a request

was posted on the groups, a lot of black marketers rushed in with offer of help. "This will create a tense situation. If we don't buy from one, there are others in wait. In an emergency situation, we end up spending a lot of time, haggling over rates etc," he said.

A international school teacher, on condition of anonymity, narrated her experience in a Telegram, which they had started to help out people.

■ Page 3: Police arrested doctor for black marketing

Lokayukta finds CCST report faulty

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD MAY 5

The AP Lokayukta has noticed serious lapses in a report submitted by chief commissioner of state tax (CCST) Peeyush Kumar in a case filed against Telugu Desam MLC P. Ashok Babu.

The Lokayukta directed special chief secretary Rajat Bhargava to conduct a fresh inquiry and submit a report by June 14.

Deccan Chronicle carried a report on April 19 titled 'AP tax staff helping TD

DC IMPACT

MLC', exposing the botched up inquiry by senior officials, which was endorsed by CCST.

According to the order, a copy of which is available with DC, "key aspects related to the complaint haven't been taken into consideration by the officer and certain allegations have been ignored and not inquired into."

■ Page 2: Inaction requires further inquiry: Lokayukta

IN BRIEF

AP URGES CENTRE TO EXTEND CS SERVICE

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

The Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government has requested the centre to extend the service of Chief Secretary Adityanath Das by six months.

The Chief Secretary is due for retirement in June, but the Chief Minister is keen to continue him further in view of good working relationship between the two and the former's proactive approach to implementing government policies and programmes.

The CM is said to have referred to the pandemic and stressed the need to continue the services of Das for some more time. The Centre had earlier extended the services of Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan and also the then Chief Secretary of AP, Neelam Sawhney.

DHULIPALLA GETS RESPITE FROM AP HIGH COURT

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

Telugu Desam senior leader Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar got relief from the AP High Court on Wednesday. The HC directed the state government to shift him to any private hospital, conduct tests if required, and provide necessary treatment.

Narendra had filed a quash petition in the High Court, in which his advocate informed the court that his client was suffering from some health issues. At present, Narendra is under judicial remand at Rajamahendravaram jail, following an inquiry into irregularities and corruption at Sangam Dairy. He was accused of illegally transferring 10 acres of Dairy land to his own trust established in the memory of his late father Dhulipalla Viralish Chowdary.

Earlier, the ACB officials questioned Narendra for six hours about the illegalities in Sangam Dairy case on Wednesday and it would again grill him on Thursday.

Another accused, Gopala Krishna, the managing director of Sangam Dairy, is also currently in judicial remand. He was shifted to a private hospital as he tested Covid positive.

Meanwhile, the High Court on Wednesday appointed senior advocates Y.V. Ravi Prasad and Ashwin Kumar as amicus curiae to assist the court in dealing with Covid-related PILs.

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FAPCCI WELCOMES AP ELECTRONIC POLICY 2021-24

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) has welcomed approval of AP Electronic Policy 2021-24 by the state cabinet.

In a statement here on Wednesday, FAPCCI president C. V. Atchut Rao hailed the policy saying it aimed at creating world-class electronics manufacturing infrastructure in the state by improving the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) status through various reforms. He pointed out that the policy offers a host of incentives for reducing costs involved in doing business in the state.

FAPCCI president said the electronics manufacturing industry had been eagerly awaiting initiatives to boost its production and integrate itself with the global value chain, thereby developing the state as an electronics manufacturing hub. In this regard, he referred to key salient feature of the policy including a green field electronic manufacturing cluster by introducing the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme, which is the first ever in country.

Atchut Rao welcomed the decision of the government to develop the green field cluster in Kadapa district, as it provides ample opportunity for economic and industrial development of the backward district. He expressed confidence that the policy will generate employment, particularly for women, providing them financial independence.



People throng the Rythu Bazaar to purchase vegetables, ignoring the Covid-19 protocol, before the start of curfew at Seethammadhara in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Another bitter season for mango growers

Farmers saddled with stocks due to transport curbs

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 5

Usually, when supplies are hard to come by, demand shoots up and prices would go up. But, the raging pandemic has dealt a double whammy to mango growers. Due to adverse seasonal conditions, crop yields have plunged to about 25 per cent, and so did the demand too, as movement curbs meant no transport of the fruit in time to major markets such as Mumbai, Pune and Nashik.

Mango growers are a much-depressed lot now. They pinned their hopes on local demand but they, too, are dashed as stocks are arriving aplenty from

- Crop yields fall steeply this season in Kadapa district.
- Arrivals from other places too depress prices for fruit.
- Benisha variety is fetching around ₹40,000 per tonne as against ₹70,000 per tonne last year. Tothapuri is hardly going for ₹19,000. It was around ₹24,000 per tonne last season

Vijayawada, Visannapeta, D a m a l a c h e r u v u , Kottakotta, Srinivasapur (Karnataka) and other parts.

With no one asking for their produce, the farmers are faced with a steep fall in prices.

In Kadapa district, Railway Koduru constituency is famous for its mangoes in South India. Farmers cultivate around 100 varieties. The Benisha

type is the main one. Then there are Rumani, Tothapuri, Neelam, Khader, Mallika, Pulihora, Manoranjan, Noonepasand, Neelishan etc. Tothapuri type mangoes are mostly supplied to juice factories in Chittoor district.

Every year, mangoes are exported from Railway Koduru to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Odisha during the season.

Markets in the respective states are currently not functioning due to the Covid-19 second wave.

Last year, the Benisha variety fetched between ₹60,000 and ₹70,000 per tonne. Rumani variety was priced at ₹18,000-₹20,000 and Tothapuri variety sold for ₹22,000 to ₹24,000 per tonne. This year, the Benishan price has fallen to around ₹40,000 per tonne. Tothapuri is fetching only up to ₹19,000 per tonne. Pulihora mango variety is priced at ₹26,000 to ₹28,000.

Mango growers as well as traders are worried that if Coronavirus spreads further, it will cause severe losses this year as well.

TD chief demands free vaccination for all in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday stressed on central and state governments jointly pooling their resources in efficiently battling the deadly second wave of Coronavirus.

Addressing a press conference here after a meeting of TD politburo members, Naidu wanted total lockdown declared for a limited period in all states and the country to break the current rapid spread of the most-dreaded mutants like N-440K. He wanted that all citizens of AP above 18 years of age be given vaccination free of cost on immediate priority. He, however, pointed out that as per reports; even those below 18 years could be badly affected in a future third wave of Covid-19.

The TD president pointed out that Jagan Mohan Reddy government has ordered just 13 lakh doses, while all other states have placed much bigger orders to secure the safety of their people. He pointed out that Tamil Nadu has requisitioned 1.5 crore doses while Karnataka and Kerala are procuring 1 crore doses.

Rosaiah said TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu had destroyed cooperative dairies just to safeguard the interests of his family-owned Heritage Group by shutting down Chittoor Dairy.

Further, he said that TD leaders have lost the right to speak on farmers and their welfare, as they had utterly failed to implement the loan-waiver scheme. He stated that as per the promise he had made during his walkathon, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had signed a MoU with Amul, which is paying more than the other existing dairies. Profits will be shared with farmers, he said.

● Rosaiah said TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu had destroyed cooperative dairies just to safeguard the interests of his family-owned Heritage Group by shutting down Chittoor Dairy.

LOKESH OBJECTS TO SALE OF LIQUOR, SEEKS POSTPONEMENT OF ALL EXAMS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

The Telugu Desam has opposed the sales of liquor from early hours along with milk and urged the government to accord priority to ensuring oxygen and beds in this Corona crisis.

TD general secretary Nara Lokesh said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy should explain to the people what happened to his promise of implementing total prohibition in the state.

Lokesh flayed the YSRC government for opening shops to sell liquor along with milk in the early morning hours. "At a time when the people are suffering due to non-availability of the Coronavirus medicines, the Jagan Reddy government is busy selling its favourite liquor brands from 6am," he said.

The TD MLC asked, "What message is the ruling party giving to the general public by selling liquor from the early

morning hour? Is it not high time the government shifted its focus on meeting the shortages vis-à-vis hospital beds, oxygen supply and ambulances for needy during the Covid second wave?"

Lokesh said the government must be more serious about providing free vaccination to the maximum people at the earliest by allocating necessary funds. He also urged the state government to postpone or cancel all the examinations scheduled for May, considering the growing threat from the dreaded Covid19 infection.

"The Chief Minister is well-advised to hold a review meeting at state level on the Covid situation in the first week of May and then take proper decision on the postponement of the exams. The government did well by postponing the intermediate exams three weeks after I sent a letter to the CM and moved court," he said.

maintained that as a responsible political party, the TD has begun special online counselling with help of experts like D. Lokeshwara Rao, who has delivered good results in the US. He pointed out that online treatment has been provided to 195 party members and all of them are now safe.

Bhumana performs last rites of unclaimed Covid victims

PATHRI RAJASEKHAR | DC
NELLORE, MAY 5

Even as blood relations are abandoning bodies of their kin, who succumbed to Covid, Tirupati legislator Bhumana Karunakar Reddy arranged the last rites of 21 unclaimed bodies lying in the mortuary of Ruia Hospital at Tirupati on Wednesday.

He garlanded the decomposed bodies, most of which were emanating foul-smell, and handed them over to his followers, who are members of Muslim Joint Action Committee, for cremation. Incidentally, the JAC team had performed last rites to 501 bodies during the first phase of Covid last year with the cooperation of Karunakar Reddy.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, he lamented that fearing infection people were leaving their kin in the lurch.

Stressing that financial constraints are not the



MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy carries a Covid victim's body along with JAC members at Ruia Hospital in Tirupati on Wednesday.

reason for the relatives to ignore last rites, he said the fear over possible Covid infection has been keeping them away from lighting the pyre.

"I am above 60 years old. I have twice tested Covid positive. Yet I am not afraid to participate in funerals. My intention is to drive away baseless fears among people," he explained.

The MLA distributed

PPE kits to all Muslim JAC members and was there when 21 bodies were being placed on Mahaprasthanam and JAC vehicles.

Tirupati civic body members Venkatesh, Narendra and SK Babu, chairman of Ruia Hospital development committee, Dr Chandrasekhar and superintendent Dr Bharathi were present.

INACTION REQUIRES FURTHER PROBE: LOKAYUKTA

From Page 1

The Lokayukta said, "The very inaction on the representation submitted by the complainant warrants this institution to recommend further inquiry."

The legal authority asked the special CS to inquire into specific allegations which were substantiated with evidence by complainant Meher Kumar, GST officer.

Drawing the contours of the inquiry, the Lokayukta wanted to probe whether the TD MLC applied for transfer, whether he produced a fake B.Com certificate, whether he was allowed to retire in the middle of the month in violation of rules, whether campaigning for a political party while in service was not against service rules and who was responsible for the acts of tampering with the service register.

O2 CONCENTRATOR PRESENTED TO RSASTF

Nellore: An oxygen concentrator, with a generation capacity of five litres of oxygen per minute, was handed over to Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF), by Kanti Rana Tata, Anantapur range DIG, at Tirupati on Wednesday.

The machine was commissioned at the task forces' office in the presence of clinic in-charge Dr Venkateswar Rao.

Meanwhile, four red sander logs were seized by RSASTF, and one person with a country gun was apprehended, during a combing operation of Nagapatla forest in Chittoor district.

Only small farmers can benefit from scheme

From Page 1

Financial assistance will be provided for drip facilities to farmers having water facility farms. Drip facility will be provided free of cost with 30 per cent subsidy through NREGS and 70 per cent from Andhra Pradesh Micro Irrigation Project (APMIP). Additionally, beneficiaries will be paid maintenance expenses for three years. Farmers who

do not have their own water supply but have farm ponds, ditches near the farm and are likely to be irrigated even in summer are also eligible to apply under the scheme. Depending on the type of orchard, it is possible to earn an income of ₹50,000 to ₹2.30 lakh per acre.

However, the scheme is not extended to families in which any member has a government job. Only rural farmers with five

acres or less of land and an employment guarantee job card are eligible. P a n d i l l a p a l l i Yadubhushan Reddy, project director of DWMA, said the target was to grow horticulture orchards on 10,000 acres this year.

He explained that the government has given permission for cultivation of new dragon fruit, jasmine and rose orchards for this year.

people are getting appropriate services.

Ramakrishna Reddy mentioned that the number of beds has been increased to 45,000 for Covid patients, and over 29,000 oxygen beds were made available across the State.

He said that it could have been a disaster if Covid had occurred during the TD regime.

COVID | FIGHT

State has the capacity to vaccinate over six lakh people each day: Govt adviser

Centre defaulting on vaccine supply, says Sajjala

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

Asserting that the state government is tackling Covid-19 quite efficiently, and coming down heavily against Telugu Desam,

government adviser (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy clarified that the supply of vaccines, oxygen and medicines like Remedisiver is

under the control of the Union government and TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu should better be aware of that.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Ramakrishna Reddy said that the state has the capacity to vaccinate over six lakh people each day and the entire vaccination programme could be completed within

35 days. However, the problem lies with the supply of vaccine doses, which is being monitored by the Centre. Although the state government is ready to purchase the vaccine directly from the manufacturing companies, the control is still with the Union government, he said.

He recalled that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has written

letters to the Centre from time to time asking for vaccine doses. He wondered if Naidu was aware of who was in control of the vaccine.

Ramakrishna Reddy stated that the government has been taking all measures to control the spread of the virus and a partial curfew is also in place. He pointed out that the state government has agreed to

procure oxygen from other states as the Centre has not been supplying the required quantity.

He said that the government included Covid treatment in YSR Aarogyasri, thereby implying that over 90 per cent of the population can come under its cover. He stated that the Chief Minister is constantly monitoring the situation and ensuring that

IN BRIEF

COP SAVES COUPLE FROM FALLING UNDER TRAIN

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 5

The presence of mind of an alert Railway Protection Force (RPF) constable P. Satish saved a couple from north Andhra when they alighted from a moving train in Tirupati railway station in the early hours of Wednesday.

According to Circle Inspector of RPF, B. Saideiah, the couple was on a pilgrimage to Tirumala and they had reached Tirupati by Tirumala Express around 4.30 am on Wednesday. However, the couple had overslept. On getting up, they tried to jump out from the moving train. Both fell between the platform and the train even as onlookers were warning them against stepping out the train. At this juncture, constable Satish who was walking towards the end of the platform jumped into action and saved them one after another.

His timely action prevented the couple from getting crushed under the train, Saideiah pointed out.

POLICE ARRESTED DOCTOR FOR BLACK MARKETING

From Page 1

"We teachers of the school created a group in Telegram and added those who wanted to extend some help to the Covid-affected. This group comprises some 8,000 participants. There has been a lot of good work happening in this group. Many have taken up the counselling work, there are people who started providing food for those infected nearby their house. But there are fraudsters too. They have been marketing the medical emergency medicines and equipment at higher rates. One person was selling remdesivir injections for as high as ₹50,000. There are also such deals on oxygen cylinders," she said.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh Bhagwat said, "Sixteen such networks have been busted. They were into the black marketing of remdesivir injections. Around 70 persons have been arrested. All the leads we got were through the social media networks."

"In these two days, we arrested a lady doctor who was black marketing these injections. In another case, a reputed hospital's duty doctor was caught while black marketing remdesivir vials."

The commissioner appealed to the people that if any lead is available about such rackets, it may be passed on to 9490617111.

Many have taken up the counselling work, there are people who started providing food for those infected nearby their house. But there are fraudsters too. They have been marketing the medical emergency medicines and equipment at higher rates.

NEW DARSHAN TIMINGS AT SRI PADMAVATHI SHRINE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 5

Keeping devotees' safety in view, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has decided to conduct all Arjita Sevās at Sri Padmavathi Temple at Tiruchanoor in Ekantha. It has also cancelled evening break darshan and made changes in Sarva Darshan timings.

According to TTD, Sarva Darshan will now be only between 8:30-11:30 am every day after daily rituals. Ekantha Arjita Sevās and morning break darshan will be for half an hour between 11:30 am and 12:00 noon. Temple will be closed from 12:45 pm till 4:00 pm.

Evening Sarva Darshan will be between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm. After Ekantha Sevās, including Unjal Seva, the temple will be closed at 7:15 pm. On Fridays, after Abhishekam to Mula Virat, Sarva Darshan will be allowed from 9:00 am to 11:30 am. Thereafter, there will be break Darshan till 12:00 noon.

Again, after daily rituals, Sarva Darshan will be allowed between 12:30 pm and 6:00 pm and Ekantha Arjita Sevās will continue till closure at 7:15 hours.

TTD has asked devotees to note the changes in Sarva Darshan and break Darshan timings and plan their visit accordingly.



Police personnel try to enforce curfew at Jagadamba Junction in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Commuters defy curfew, shops down shutters

Lack of awareness, urgency of purpose brought few people out of their homes

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 5

The 18-hour curfew evoked mixed response on the first day as commuters were seen on roads during curfew hours here. Lack of awareness and urgency of purpose brought some people out of their homes.

SP K. Fakkeerappa reminded the people that heavy fines would be levied on all violators.

Though shops and businesses establishments downed their shutters as per guidelines, vehicles and pedestrians were seen on the roads as usual.

The state government has imposed curfew from 12 pm to next day morning 6 am for two weeks from Wednesday. However, officials failed to spread awareness about the curfew and timings, said senior citizen Neelakantappa from Krishna Nagar.

Meanwhile, district collector G. Veera Pandian, Fakkeerappa and Kurnool Municipal Corporation commissioner D.K. Balaji went around key circles and junctions appealing to the public on the need to follow curfew regulations failing which they would be booked under relevant laws. A similar exercise was taken by police teams.

There is extra vigil in border areas of Karnataka and Telangana. The administration has set up 'screening' check-posts.

Fakkeerappa said that the police department along with the revenue department held awareness camps at border areas. Nearly 10 inter-state check posts were set up in all border areas, including the major one at Panchalingala on national highway 44 between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and Karnataka.

Meanwhile, the district reported 1,985 new positive cases in the last 24 hours, taking the overall total of Covid positive cases to 86,447.

THE STATE govt has imposed curfew from 12 pm to next day morning 6 am for two weeks from Wednesday. However, officials failed to spread awareness about the curfew and timings, said Neelakantappa.



Police personnel make announcement to create awareness among people on day-time curfew at Bandar road in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Only essential services run; violators warned

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 5

With the Covid pandemic showing no signs of any abatement, officials are strictly enforcing the curfew across the district. The curfew will be in effect from 12 noon to 6 am next day. All activities are allowed only from 6 am to 12 noon. Non-essential services restaurants, shopping complexes and theatres are restricted to operation only from 6 am to 12 noon. People have to finish all outside work and are being driven off roads as the clock is nearing the noon.

The tell-tale sign of the curfew is that with commercial establishments, theatres, eateries not open, literally there is public movement on roads and bylanes, save for those going about rendering essential services. In Kadapa city, the police conducted counselling for traders and businessmen much in advance and are ensuring no commercial activities post noon.

APSRTC ran some services intra-district till 12 noon. Of a total of 780 buses in the division, only 254 operated local services within 8 depots in the district. All private services to Hyderabad and Vijayawada have also been suspended due to the Coronavirus surge.

Leaving nothing to chance, police are patrolling streets and

PATIENTS SCRAMBLE FOR FOOD AT NANDYAL COVID CARE CENTRE

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC
KURNOOL, MAY 5

Lack of proper administration in supply of food to inmates at Covid Care Centre (CCC) in TIDCO housing colony in Nandyal town resulted in jostling with everyone out to grab food packets on Wednesday. The situation turned a potential health hazard as Covid positive patients pushed one another to get their packets.

Women, children, old people and middle-aged men all tested their might in the melee. The elderly had a tough time

in getting their quota.

"The food quantity is so less that it is not sufficient to satisfy our hunger. That is why we rushed to get those packets", a patient said.

Though the menu has been fixed, they are getting less quantity, most patients alleged.

On learning about the incident, district collector G. Veera Pandian ordered officials to supply food to the inmates in their respective rooms. He reviewed the food supply system and other facilities at other centres and asked officials to ensure quality of food as per the menu.

warning those who venture outside. Motorists are being sent back with a strict warning.

District SP Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan inspected the curfew enforcement on Gandhi Road and Sivalayam Road in Proddatur town. Police were instructed to exclude emergency services, hospitals and pharmacies. The SP also visited Mydukur and Jammalamadugu towns and reviewed the situation.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Anburajan informed that a total of 23 check posts had been set up on borders in the

district and people from other areas were not being allowed to enter the district. Only those possessing valid passes and IDs were being allowed to move on roads, he said.

He warned that strict action would be taken against those violating the curfew. He clarified that counselling was conducted for those who had violated the rules and such behaviour would not be brooked anymore and would be dealt with sternly. He added that the police were taking steps to ensure that total compliance with the curfew rules across the district.

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MOVEMENT RESTRICTED IN SOUTH COSTAL AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE MAY 5

Police took control of the roads and prevented movement of people and vehicles in view the 18-hour curfew between 12 noon and 6 am the next day at SPSR Nellore, Chittoor, and Prakasam districts from Wednesday.

Police exempted emergency services including medical services and allowed medical shops and fuel outlets to remain open.

In Tirupati, where a partial lockdown was in force from 2 pm to 6 am the next day, police allowed those holding darshan tickets to proceed to Tirumala.

Tirupati Urban SP Venkata Appala Naidu made it clear they will book cases against those coming out of homes without valid reasons. Police arranged 47 pickets in areas bordering Kadapa, Nellore and Chittoor.

RTC suspended long-distance services to neighbouring states in view of the curfew from Wednesday.

In Nellore district, only 160 buses were operated out of 800 between 6am and noon. RTC regional manager Sessaiah said all advance reservations for long-distance services have been cancelled and the refund will go to the accounts of the passengers.

Buses are being operated within the district and also up to Ongole, from where buses ply to Vijayawada for those heading for capital Amaravati.

Nellore collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu and SP Bhaskar Bhushan have inspected implementation of curfew in Nellore city.

In Prakasam district, SP Siddharth Kaushal took a tour to check on the enforcement of curfew in areas including Ongole city.

TIRUPATI URBAN SP Venkata Appala Naidu made it clear they would book cases against those coming out of homes without valid reasons.

AP marks 22,204 new infections

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 5

The surge in Coronavirus positive cases continued unabated across Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. It registered 22,204 new infections and 85 deaths registered in the past 24. The state created a record by testing 1,16,367 samples, which is the highest till date.

They found 22,204 positive cases taking the overall total to 12,03,337. Of them, 1,70,588 are active cases and 10,27,270 have recovered. The recovery rate in AP is 85.16%. The death toll stands at 8,374.

The single day highest number of 2,344 new corona positive cases were registered in East Godavari district followed by 2,304 new cases in Anantapur district, 2,113 in Visakhapatnam, 2,001 in Prakasam, 1,985 in Kurnool, 1,982 in Srikakulam, 1,972 in Guntur, 1,756 in Chittoor, 1,304 in West Godavari, 1,202 in Vizianagaram, 1,200 in Nellore, 1,138 in Krishna.

The lowest of 903 was reported in Kadapa district.

As many as 11 new Covid deaths were registered in Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram districts followed by 10 deaths in Anantapur, nine in East Godavari, eight in Prakasam, seven in West Godavari, six in Chittoor, five deaths each in Guntur, Kurnool and Nellore districts, four in Krishna, three in Srikakulam and one in Kadapa district.

East Godavari district is on top with a total of 1,52,625 positive cases and Vizianagaram district is at the bottom with a total of 54,724 cases.

Chittoor district's total positive cases were 1,30,885 followed by Guntur with 1,13,897, West Godavari 1,05,522, Anantapur 91,347, Visakhapatnam 89,113, Nellore 86,986 and Kurnool registered a total of 86,447 positive cases. Srikakulam district's total cases are at 78,955, Prakasam 78,854, Kadapa 67,719 and Krishna district 66,263.

Section 144 enforced at border posts

From Page 1

The vehicles which came to the borders in the afternoon hours were not allowed in and only those carrying essentials and medical emergencies were seen through.

People coming to AP for checkups in hospitals, with proper documents, were allowed and those who were coming on bikes without medical emergency after mid-day were stopped at the check posts.

The cops at Garikapadu and Pondugula inter-state check posts asked people not to come in during curfew time.

The public transport services were suspended by APSRTC and private operators and only limited transport services were operated from 6 am to noon due to the curfew. The biggest bus stand, the Pandit Nehru bus station in Vijayawada, the NTR bus station in Guntur and the others in the rest of the 11 districts were a deserted look.

All bus services to Telangana including to Hyderabad, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were suspended.

APSRTC operations director K.S. Brahmananda Reddy said it operated only 2,000 services out of the reg-

ular 10,000. Long-distance and inter-state services were cancelled.

The target revenue generation during the normal day was ₹13 crore, which has fallen to ₹6 crore as a result of the 50 per cent occupancy norm and other Covid restrictions.

He said a revenue of only ₹1 crore is expected with the operation of a nominal 2,000 services.

Relaxation was given to passengers on the way to airports and railway stations, who showed their tickets during the curfew times to reach their destinations.

Exemption has also been given from curfew regulations to industries, agriculture and allied sectors as also for public and private hospitals, doctors and other emergency staff. They would carry their identity card while travelling.

Section 144 was in force at Telangana-AP border check posts.

Andhra Pradesh lorry owners' association state secretary V.V. Eswar Rao said they have given a representation to the government seeking permission for lorries to carry essential commodities during curfew period and the government has accepted the plea.

Vaccination drive held for Simhachalam temple staff

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 5

A special vaccination drive was launched at the Simhachalam temple on Wednesday. The hereditary chairperson, Sanchaita Gajapati Raju, took the first jab. There was a good response from officials and staff to the drive, an official

said. It was initially planned to vaccinate 150 staff members on the first day, but 163 persons turned up for the jab and were vaccinated.

Sanchaita Gajapati Raju oversaw the programme. Temple priests were given preference. The priests who were on leave were asked to report for vaccination.

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IN BRIEF

Himachal goes into 10-day lockdown

Shimla: The Himachal Pradesh government on Wednesday decided to impose a lockdown in the state from May 7 to May 16 to check the spread of Covid-19, an official said here. The decision to impose the lockdown was taken at a state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, the spokesperson added. The meeting was held to review the current Covid-19 situation in the state.

Kerala: Helpline for hearing impaired

Thiruvananthapuram: At a time when the Covid-19 cases are surging, the National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH), an autonomous organisation here and the State Disaster Management Authority, have jointly set up a 24 X 7 Covid-19 helpline exclusively for the deaf and hard of hearing. The facility is primarily meant for answering queries and concerns related to the pandemic and extending counselling to stress-related issues. Sign language interpreters will be available to attend the WhatsApp video calls made to the helpline, an official statement said here. The helpline will also reply to queries related to monsoon and the preparedness for and management of the season, it added. The Helpline numbers are: 9446750983, 9496918178, 9249505723.

ODISHA PERMITS HOME DELIVERY OF FOREIGN LIQUOR

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 5

The Odisha government on Wednesday decided to allow home delivery of foreign liquor during the lockdown. A decision to this effect was taken as all the non-essential shops, including liquor outlets, have remained closed during the 14-day statewide lockdown that began with effect from Wednesday morning. In a letter to the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) P.K. Mohapatra, the excise department principal secretary S.K. Lohani stated the home delivery of liquor is proposed to be permitted during lockdown. "Home delivery of liquor Indian-made Foreign Liquor and beer (IMFL/beer) by duly authorised food aggregators/technology platforms/delivery service providers as well as by IMFL OFF/ON shop licensees following the extant guidelines of Excise Department," the letter read. The government has also decided to allow operation of all the godowns of Odisha State Beverage Corporation for wholesale trade between 6 am to 2 pm. Another decision was also taken to ensure smooth passage of vehicles carrying genuine duty-paid liquor, the letter stated. The decision for home delivery of liquor was taken in view of the past experience during which it was found that consumers had resorted to illegal means to avail the intoxicant beverages.

LOCAL TRAIN SERVICES SUSPENDED IN WB

Kolkata, May 5: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday took stock of the Covid-19 situation in the state, shortly after her swearing-in ceremony, and announced fresh curbs to combat the spread of Covid-19, including suspension of local train services. Banerjee, following a high-level meeting with top officials, said that metro rail and state transport services will be curtailed by 50 per cent from Thursday, as part of the newly imposed set of restrictions. Banks will be operational from 10 am to 2 pm, and government offices have been told to make do with 50 per cent workforce, Banerjee said at the press meet. The state administration has also requested private firms to encourage work from home, the Chief Minister said. "Local trains will be suspended from tomorrow. State-run transport and metro services will be reduced by 50 per cent. Starting May 7, air passengers will be allowed in Bengal only if they carry RT-PCR negative report, which is not older than 72 hours prior to boarding," Banerjee said.

13 die in TN hosp due to lack of O2

Authorities claim 'technical glitch' in oxygen supply, not shortage, caused deaths

SINDHIYA SAMUEL & P.A. JEBARAJ | DC CHENNAI, MAY 5

As many as 13 patients died at the Chengalpattu Government Medical College Hospital on Tuesday night due to alleged oxygen shortage though the district collector A. John Louis, ruled out shortage of oxygen in the hospital. There could have been a 'technical glitch' in the supply of oxygen, John Louis told the media on Wednesday, adding that the director of medical education would probe into it. Narrating the harrowing incident, the relatives of the deceased patients said that the deaths were caused due to insufficient oxygen supply. The 13 patients, aged between 40 and 85, who were in critical care passed away one after the other at around 10.30 pm, they said. They also claimed that hospital staff took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control.

HOSPITAL STAFF took oxygen cylinders from ambulances and tried to save a few patients who needed oxygen the most when the situation went out of control.

But it was in vain. The situation was brought under control around midnight by transporting cylinders from SRM and Karpaga Vinayaga medical colleges to the hospital GH and the situation was brought under control. Yet 13 persons lost their lives, John Louis said he received a call at 11 pm that there were some issues in the hospital and rushed there. The hospital had 10 kilolitre oxygen as against the total capacity of 23 kilolitre, he said, adding that there were also two external 3 kilolitre oxygen set ups. "We also had cylinders that were refilled and when the pressure dropped we continued this. There is no question of oxygen shortage," he said. The Collector further said that those who required oxygen at high pressures survived and that the patients who died were already critical with other comorbidities and issues. Of the deceased, only one patient was Covid positive while others tested negative but had viral pneumonia and comorbidities. The collector deputed a deputy collector to continuously monitor the beds and oxygen supply at the GH and shift the severe cases to the Covid Care Centres. Meanwhile, the Post-graduate doctors at the Chengalpattu government hospital staged a protest on Wednesday morning in the hospital premises against the alleged negligence exhibited by the administrators of the institute. According to protesting doctors, the hospital could not meet the oxygen demand as almost all oxygen beds in the wards treating Covid-19 and those suspected to have Covid-19 were occupied. The hospital that usually requires 2.3 kilolitres of oxygen per day, needed 4.5 kilolitres on Tuesday, which the hospital doctors deliberately ignored.

Similarly, around 50 people from the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), staged a protest outside the Chengalpattu government hospital, condemning the negligence from the hospital side. They held placards and raised slogans against the hospital management. The GH has 325 beds with oxygen lines. "Of the 447 patients, 256 were Coronavirus positive while 191 were suspected to be infected with the virus. Yesterday, 309 patients were put on oxygen support," the collector said. Owing to the increase in the number of infected patients, the GH had to provide 4.5 kl oxygen to the patients yesterday alone as against the daily intake of 2.9 kl. Louis deputed a deputy collector to continuously monitor the beds and oxygen supply at the GH and shift the severe cases to the Covid Care Centres. "Compared to the situation in March, the district is now witnessing a five time increase in the number of infections. We will rise to the occasion if any issues arise," he added.

Grocers, vegetable vendors, tea shop owners and other shop keepers would have to down shutters by 12 noon from Thursday as the new set of restrictions come into force with a view to controlling the spread of Covid-19, which is wreaking more havoc in its second wave. Announcing a new timing for the sales of liquor, the government announced that TASMAC shops will remain open from 8 am to 12 noon, while bars, clubs, pubs, and other places of public gathering have been shut until further orders. In the new restrictions that will be in force till May 20, government and private offices will work with 50 per cent attendance and public transport, too, would run with

TN: New norms to control spike

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MAY 5

Government employees with disabilities have been fully exempted from attending office during the period between May 6 and 20, an official order said. Another GO made it clear that all Group A officers and heads of departments should attend office regularly while the other staff would be attending work on alternate days or as per the schedule drawn up depending on their requirement in office. However, all officers and staff should be available for office work and accessible through electronic mode of communication and all government staff have been barred from leaving headquarters without permission. As far as eateries are concerned, the regulations restrict the timing on all days other than Sundays when a total lockdown will be observed.

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EAM defends holding elections amid Covid spike

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 5

Elections are "sacrosanct" in India and "we are a deeply political society", external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said, defending the government from criticism that the election process including rallies led to the spread of Covid in the country. In an interaction as part of the "Global Dialogue Series", the Minister—who is currently on a visit to London—however conceded that the healthcare system in the country stood "exposed" in the country and blamed it on inadequate spending on health in the past 75 years, adding that this was why Prime Minister Narendra Modi had emphasised the Ayushman Bharat health scheme. EAM Jaishankar also conceded that everyone in the country had let their guard down after the number of cases came down drastically in February this year, adding that while the focus was on reviving the economy after the lockdown last year, the "attempt to instil confidence had created a societal complacency that all of us are part of". Describing the current pandemic crisis in the country as "difficult and painful" as the current strain of the Covid virus ravaging the country was "much more virulent", the EAM however said that the Government was tackling it by "giving it

everything we have and more". He made it clear that all people of the county need to "put the blame game aside" and look at "what we can do" to tackle the situation. Mr. Jaishankar also said that after the first wave of Covid, the Government had authorised 1,200 Oxygen plants and that money had been given to states since Health was a state subject in the Indian federal devolution of powers. "You can't not have elections in a democratic country like India. We are a deeply political country. ... Elections are sacrosanct ... We are a deeply political society," the EAM said. Responding to criticism on the Government allowing the Kumbh mela, the EAM shot back saying that one cannot argue that while religious crowds are a risk, (farmer) protest crowds are not. He pointed out that the Government had been accused in some quarters of imposing lockdown last year to quell the CAA protests when in fact, the Government had declared the Lockdown to save the country from the first wave of the Covid virus. On vaccines and why India exported millions of doses to foreign nations in the past few months, the EAM made it clear that the country had international obligations such as the Covax Initiative and that the Covishield vaccine itself was a British-developed vaccine manufactured in India.

Isolation coaches



The Indian Railways has put together 70,000 isolation beds in more than 4,400 Covid care coaches across the country. A total of 232 coaches with nearly 4,000 beds are in use at 14 railway stations. Around 4,176 coaches are still available for deployment.

— DOMAL KAMRAJ

16% vaccinated test +ve: Study

New Delhi, May 5: A small-scale study on 113 healthcare workers who had received at least one vaccine dose at a private hospital in Delhi found that 18 tested positive for Covid but all except one had mild symptoms. The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal Diabetes and Metabolic Syndrome: Clinical Research and Reviews on May 3, was conducted on employees of the Fortis Centre of Excellence for Diabetes, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology in Delhi. The participants in the study by researchers at Fortis, National Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol Foundation, and Diabetes Foundation (India), New Delhi, included doctors, nutritionists, nurses, paramedical workers, and maintenance staff.

Of the 113 in the study, 107 had received the second dose of the vaccine. Taken in percentage form, the study found that breakthrough infections — Covid infection in vaccinated individuals — occurred in 15.9 per cent (18 persons) of the vaccinated individuals and 95 per cent had mild symptoms. Of these, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose and one person. Except one person who required hospitalisation, all others had mild Covid-19 disease, the researchers said. According to the study, of the breakthrough infections in 18 persons, 17 incurred the infection after the second dose. These 17 had got their second dose after a mean of 34.8 days following the first jab. — PTI

BIZZARE | EVENT

Villagers felt that Covid will go away if water is poured on temple

Guj: Women flout norms to 'eradicate' virus

Ahmedabad, May 5: Cocking a snook at Covid-19 norms, a large number of women turned up at a religious event organised in a village in Gujarat's Ahmedabad district to "eradicate Coronavirus", police said on Wednesday, adding 23 people, including the village head, have been arrested. A video of the incident, which occurred in Navapura village in Sanand taluka on May 3, showed around 500 women carrying water pots on their heads while walking towards a temple. The video grab also shows some men taking these pots to the top of the temple and emptying

them. After the video clip went viral on Wednesday, Ahmedabad rural police said appropriate action had already been taken. A police officer said villagers believed that Coronavirus will just go away if water is poured on the Baliyadev temple. "The incident took place on May 3 at Navapura village where women had gathered in large numbers carrying water pots. A police team rushed to the spot on the same day and arrested 23 villagers, including sarpnach Gafabhai Thakor, for organizing this event. Police had also seized the music system from the

spot," said Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sanand Division, K.T. Kamariya. He said all the accused have been booked for violating a police notification regarding public gatherings under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and the Disaster Management Act and the Epidemic Diseases Act. In view of the surge in Covid-19 cases, the Gujarat government had banned all kinds of public gatherings in the state. As of Tuesday, Gujarat's overall Covid-19 tally stood at 6,20,472 with 7,779 fatalities, the state health department had said. — PTI

CORONAVIRUS NEGATIVE REPORT MANDATORY TO ENTER AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad, May 5: Residents of Ahmedabad who visit other states for work are now required to produce a negative Covid-19 RT-PCR test certificate to return to the city, civic authorities said on Wednesday. Following a direction from the Gujarat High Court, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) has scrapped its April 5 order which said Ahmedabad residents who visit other states for work will not be required to undergo RT-PCR tests

13 STATES REPORT MORE THAN 100 DEATHS A DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 5

India reported 3,584 deaths in the last 24 hours. Over 900 deaths were from Maharashtra, while Delhi and Uttar Pradesh reported 338 and 351, respectively. At least 13 states are reporting more than 100 deaths a day. These include previously uncounted deaths from earlier days. The country reported 3,91,184 lakh cases of the Coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday. Of these, Maharashtra recorded 51,880 cases, while Karnataka reported 44,631. Active cases are now more than 35.58 lakh. Maharashtra reported 57,640 fresh Covid-19 positive cases, 57,006 discharges, and 920 deaths. Karnataka reports 50,112 new positive cases, 26,841 recoveries and 346 deaths in the last 24 hours. 22,204 new cases, 85 deaths and 11,128 discharges reported in Andhra Pradesh in last 24 hours. Kerala reported the highest single-day rise of 41,953 new Covid-19 cases and 58 deaths. Active cases stand at 3,75,658 in the state, 23,106 recovered. Total 13,62,363 patients recovered so far, while 5,565 deaths have been reported till now said Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. 12 states have more than one lakh active cases, seven states have 50,000 to one lakh active cases, and 17 states have less than 50,000 active cases. Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh & Andhra Pradesh have around 1.5 lakh active cases, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary. Meanwhile India has given emergency use authorisation for a Covid-19 antibody drug cocktail developed by Roche (ROGS) and Regeneron (REG.O), expanding its arsenal of drugs to battle a massive second wave of infections. India has become the fastest country in the world to administer 16 crore doses of Covid-19 vaccine in 109 days, said health ministry. Liberalised policy (for vaccination) was started on May 1st. Under this, the drive has begun smoothly in 9 states and 6.71 lakh people in the age group of 18-44 years have been administered vaccines, said Lav Agarwal, Union health ministry Joint Secretary. K. Vijay Raghavan, Principal Scientific Advisor to Centre, has warned that a third wave of Covid infections is inevitable. "A phase three is inevitable, given the higher levels of circulating virus but it is not clear on what time scale this phase three will occur. Vaccines are effective against current variants. New variants will arise all over the world and in India too but variants that increase transmission will likely plateau. Immune evasive variants and those which lower or increase disease severity will arise going ahead," he said.

SHORT TAKES

COPS NAB 31
NDRANGHETA
SUSPECTS

Rome: A joint Italian-German police investigation into the ndrangheta organised crime group led to the arrests of 31 people accused of drug trafficking, money laundering and “systematic” tax evasion on the part of Italian pizzerias and restaurants in Germany, authorities said on Wednesday.

Eurojust, which coordinate law enforcement activities in Europe, said more than 800 police officers and tax officials were involved in the operation in Italy and Germany.

Italian officials hailed what they described as a new model of cooperation and said experts from both countries formed a joint team to investigate the case, a job complicated by the encrypted phone systems the suspects used to communicate.

4 PAK SOLDIERS
KILLED IN
ULTRAS ATTACK

Karachi: Four Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack from Afghanistan while they were working on fencing the Pakistan-Afghan border in the restive Balochistan province on Wednesday, the Army said.

A team of paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) was targeted in Manzakai Sector located in the Zhob district of Balochistan province in the south-west of the country, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the military said in a statement. Four soldiers were killed and six others were injured in the incident, it said.

“Terrorists from across Afghanistan ambushed FC troops moving for fencing... FC troops responded promptly,” the statement said. It did not confirm whether there were casualties on the Afghan side.

BOMB TARGETS
HEALTH STAFF IN
KABUL, 1 DEAD

Kabul: A bomb targeted a minibus carrying medical workers in the Afghan capital Wednesday morning, killing one person, a Kabul police official said.

Three medics were wounded and taken to hospitals by police, said Ferdaws Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief.

The bus was taking the doctors, nurses and other health workers from Kabul toward northern Panjsher province when it was attacked in the northern district of Kalakan in Kabul province, he added. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, and Faramarz said police were investigating.

The attack comes a few days after the remaining 2,500 to 3,500 American troops officially began leaving the country. They will be out by September 11 at the latest. The pullout comes amid a resurgent Taliban, who control or hold sway over half of Afghanistan. The top US military officer said Sunday that Afghan government forces face an uncertain future and possibly some “bad possible outcomes” against Taliban insurgents as the withdrawal accelerates in the coming weeks.

STORMS SPAWN
TWISTERS IN
MISSISSIPPI

Birmingham: Much of the South faced more severe weather Tuesday that has killed at least three people, spawned tornadoes Sunday night and Monday and damaged homes and uprooted trees from Mississippi to West Virginia.

Parts of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee, as well as corners of Arkansas and Georgia were at enhanced risk for the worst weather, according to the national Storm Prediction Center. That zone is home to more than 11 million people and includes the cities of Nashville, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Jackson, Mississippi, forecasters said. “We’ll see all three threats as far as hail, wind and tornadoes on Tuesday,” said Mike Edmonston, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Mississippi.

With warnings about possible tornadoes stretching from Louisiana eastward, dozens of school systems in Mississippi and Alabama dismissed students early so buses and cars would not have to be on the road during potentially violent weather.

Biden aims to vaccinate 70%
of American adults by July 4

US is administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day

Washington, May 5: US President Joe Biden has set a new vaccination goal to deliver at least one shot to 70 per cent of adult Americans by July 4 as he tackles the vexing problem of winning over the “doubters” and those unmotivated to get inoculated. Demand for vaccines has dropped off markedly nationwide, with some states leaving more than half their available doses unordered. Aiming to make it easier to get shots, Biden called for states to make vaccines available on a walk-in basis and he will direct many pharmacies to do likewise.

His administration for the first time also is moving to shift doses from states with weaker demand to areas with stronger interest in the shots. “You do need to get vaccinated,” Biden said from the White House on Tuesday. “Even if your chance of getting seriously ill is low, why take the risk? It could save your life or the lives of somebody you love,” he said.

Biden’s goal equates to delivering at least the first shot to 181 million adults and fully vaccinating 160 million. It’s a tacit acknowledgment of the declining interest in shots. Already more than 56 per cent of American adults have received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and nearly 105 million are fully vaccinated.

The US is currently administering first doses at a rate of about 9,65,000 per day — half the rate of three weeks ago, but almost twice as fast as needed to meet Biden’s target. “I’d like to get it 100%, but I think realistically we can get to that place between now and July Fourth,” Biden said of his new goal. He said the administration would focus on three areas as it tries to ramp up the pace of vaccinations: Adults who need more convincing to take the vaccine.

Those who have struggled or are in no hurry to obtain a shot. — Adolescents aged 12-15, once federal authorities approve vaccination for that age group. Acknowledging that “the pace of vaccination is slowing,” Biden predicted the inoculation effort is “going to be harder” when it comes to convincing “doubters” of the need to get their shots.

He said the most effective argument to those people would be to protect those they love. “This is your choice: It’s life and death, he said. Biden’s push comes as his administration has shifted away from setting a target for the US to reach “herd immunity,” instead focusing on delivering as many



Workers wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) suits extend the crematorium area next to funeral pyres of people who died due to Covid-19 coronavirus disease, at a cremation ground in Kathmandu on Wednesday. — AFP

G7 WORKS ON
GLOBAL COVID
VACCINE PLAN

London, May5: The Group of Seven wealthy democracies on Wednesday worked on plans to scale up global Covid-19 vaccinations, as calls mounted for a drastic increase in funding to help developing nations virtually shut out of early efforts.

Underscoring the challenges faced, the foreign minister of India—where Covid cases have soared in recent weeks — said he decided to participate in the London meeting virtually after potential exposure to the virus.

India was one of several nations invited by Britain for the first in-person G7 meeting since the pandemic began last year, in an effort to rally democracies in the face of a rising China and assertive Russia. The G7 opened its final day with a session focused on open societies before taking up Covid-19. — AFP

shots into arms as possible. Officials said Biden’s vaccination target would result in a significant reduction in Covid-19 cases heading into the summer.

To that end, the Biden administration is shifting the government’s focus toward expanding smaller and mobile vaccination clinics to deliver doses to harder-to-reach communities. — AP

WTO mulls IP
waivers for vax

Geneva, May 5: Ambassadors from World Trade Organisation countries on Wednesday resumed discussions on trade rules protecting the technological know-how behind Covid-19 vaccines amid growing pressure on rich nations to relax them — as a way to help poorer countries fight the pandemic.

The WTO’s General Council was taking up a temporary waiver for intellectual property protections that South Africa and India first proposed in October.

The idea has gained support in the developing world and among some progressive lawmakers in the West. Authors of the proposal, which has faced resistance from many countries with influential pharmaceutical and biotech industries, have been revising it in hopes of making it more palatable. No consensus — which is required under WTO rules — was expected to emerge from the ambassadors’ two-day meeting on Wednesday and Thursday. — AP

NEPAL EXTENDS
LOCKDOWN IN
KATHMANDU

Kathmandu, May 5: Authorities in the Nepalese capital on Wednesday extended the lockdown in Kathmandu and surrounding districts till May 12 due to the spike in Covid-19 cases. Nepal on Tuesday recorded yet another highest single-day rise of 7,660 new cases of the Covid.

The health ministry also confirmed 55 new deaths in the past 24 hours, which is so far the highest number of fatalities recorded in a single day. The local authorities have extended the ongoing prohibitory orders in the Kathmandu Valley till May 12. — PTI

India’s US envoy meets Fauci,
discusses on Covid-19 crisis

Washington, May 5: India’s Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu held a virtual meeting with America’s top public health expert Dr Anthony Fauci and discussed the current Covid-19 crisis in India, the efficacy of vaccines against the new strains and variants of the virus.

The meeting was part of the Ambassador’s intensified and focused outreach to key stakeholders of healthcare and pandemic response in the US. This was for the first time that

a top Indian government official had a meeting with Fauci, who is the top advisor to President Joe Biden on the pandemic.

During the meeting, Fauci expressed his solidarity and support with India in this hour of crisis. The meeting came a day after he termed the situation in India “very desperate” and suggested that the government marshal all its resources, including the armed forces, to immediately build makeshift field hospitals, and urged other countries to help

with not only materials but also personnel.

During his talks with Ambassador Sandhu, the virus strains and variants in India, and the efficacy of vaccines against these came up for discussion. Fauci, who is also the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of Health, offered American assistance, including in research and development. Discussed virus variants, vaccines, response mechanisms. — PTI

FB oversight
board upholds
ban on Trump

Washington, May 5: Facebook’s independent oversight board on Wednesday upheld a ban on former US president Donald Trump while ordering further review of the case, in a decision with a potentially far-reaching impact on the regulation of online speech.

The board, whose decisions are binding on the leading social network, said Trump “created an environment where a serious risk of violence was possible” with his comments regarding the January 6 rampage by his supporters at the US Capitol.

“Given the seriousness of the violations and the ongoing risk of violence, Facebook was justified in suspending Mr. Trump’s accounts on January 6 and extending that suspension on January 7,” the board said after its review.

But the panel also ruled that “it was not appropriate for Facebook to impose the indeterminate and standardless penalty of indefinite suspension.” “Within six months of this decision, Facebook must reexamine the arbitrary penalty

it imposed on January 7 and decide the appropriate penalty,” said the board in its written opinion.

“It is not permissible for Facebook to keep a user off the platform for an undefined period, with no criteria for when or whether the account will be restored,” it added.

The panel said Facebook “can either impose a time-limited suspension or account deletion.” The case had been intensely followed for its repercussions for social networks seeking to curb misinformation and abusive content while remaining open to political discourse.

Trump was suspended from Facebook and Instagram after posting a video during the deadly storming of the Capitol by fired-up supporters challenging his election loss, in which he told them: “We love you, you’re very special.” Shortly after the board ruling,

Trump issued a statement reiterating his false claims that voter fraud caused his defeat in November, and urging his followers to “never give up.” — AFP

Netanyahu again
fails to form
new Israeli govt

Jerusalem, May 5: Beleaguered Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is Israel’s longest-serving premier, has failed to meet a midnight deadline of forming a government, giving his rivals a chance to end his uninterrupted stint at the helm of politics since 2009.

Netanyahu, 71, who is facing trial on a series of graft charges, was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to put together a government on April 6 following inconclusive polls, the fourth in the last two years.

The mandate given by Rivlin to Netanyahu to form a government expired on Tuesday at midnight with no breakthrough in coalition talks, prolonging the country’s political stalemate.

His Likud party emerged as the single largest party in the 120-member Parliament but did not have the necessary 61-member support to form a government.

Likud had won 30 seats in the general election in March. While tasking

Netanyahu with the responsibility of forming the government, Rivlin said that he was doing so reluctantly and also mentioned his “moral dilemma” given the court proceedings and lack of enough support for the Likud leader.

Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing. President Rivlin’s spokesman in a statement said: “Shortly before midnight, Netanyahu informed the President’s Residence that he was unable to form a government and so returned the mandate to the president.”

Rivlin on Wednesday contacted the parties represented in the Knesset (Israel’s unicameral parliament) on the continuation of the process of forming a government. The President met with Yesh Atid party’s chairman, Yair Lapid, and Yamina party’s chairman, Naftali Bennett.

Both Lapid and Bennett reiterated their desire to be given the mandate to form the next government, press releases from the Presidency said. — PTI

India, UK deal to
begin in autumn

London, May 5: India and the UK will begin negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from autumn this year after the Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) was formally signed between the trade ministers on both sides on Wednesday. Following a virtual meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, UK International Trade Secretary Liz Truss confirmed that the ETP agreed between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Boris Johnson at a virtual summit on Tuesday has been officially signed off.

The trade and investment agreement worth around 1 billion pounds has been pegged as aiming for a “quantum leap” in the UK-India relationship, with India elevating the status of its relationship with the UK to a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.” “Today I signed the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership with my friend Piyush Goyal,” Truss said on Twitter soon after her virtual

meeting with the Indian Cabinet minister.

“Together, we have committed to: negotiating a comprehensive free trade deal, starting this autumn; more than doubling trade by 2030; and reducing barriers to trade in key industries,” she said.

The sign off follows talks between Modi and Johnson, which culminated in the two leaders agreeing on a “2030 Roadmap” as a framework for strengthening ties across health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who is in London for the G7 Summit, said he joined those discussions and declared there was a “new energy and thinking” for UK-India relations visible at the virtual summit.

“We are at an inflection point in our contemporary relations. We have two Prime Ministers very determined to take the relationship to a high level,” the minister said, during a virtual Global Dialogue Series. — PTI

Despite warning, GOP moves on voting bills

Austin, May 5: Republican lawmakers around the country are pressing ahead with efforts to tighten voting laws, despite growing warnings from business leaders that the measures could harm democracy and the economic climate. More than 50 companies and business organizations, including some in Texas, released an open

letter on Tuesday expressing opposition to “any changes” that would make it harder to vote in that state. The letter — signed by American Airlines, Microsoft Corp., HP Inc., Patagonia, Levi Strauss & Co. and others — comes amid votes on legislation that critics say would place disproportionate burdens on minority and disabled voters.

“We believe the right to vote is sacred. When more people participate in our democratic process, we will all prosper,” the letter said. “The growth of free enterprise is directly related to the freedom of its citizens.” The statement stopped short of stating opposition to the specific legislation proposed in Texas. Nonetheless, it amounts

to a cautious rebuke of lawmakers using former President Donald Trump’s false claims about a stolen election to make it harder to vote. Texas is emerging as the next major battleground in the fight over voting laws.

The Texas House could vote, as soon as this week, on a bill that effectively targets Harris County, home of Houston and a

Democratic hub, after officials there dramatically expanded voting options in 2020 amid pandemic.

The Texas Senate has advanced its own package, with the two chambers likely headed to a compromise committee that would fashion a final version. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott has expressed broad support for the effort. — AP

EXPENSIVE | WINE

A bottle of Bordeaux spent 14 months in space station

Wine aged aboard ISS to sell for \$1mn

New York YORK, May 5: If a bottle of Petrus 2000 that Christie’s is selling tastes out of this world it might be because it aged for 14 months aboard the International Space Station.

Christie’s hopes the bottle, now up for grabs in a private sale, will fetch \$1 million, which would make it the most expensive wine ever sold.

The bottle is one of a batch of 12 that European startup Space Cargo Unlimited sent into orbit as part of research into how food and drink

matures in space.

The wine spent almost 440 days in space, or the equivalent of 300 trips to the Moon, Space Cargo Unlimited Nicolas Gaume said in a press release.

It left for the ISS on November 2, 2019 in a spacecraft known as a Cygnus capsule and returned on January 14, 2021 aboard a Dragon capsule manufactured by Elon Musk’s SpaceX.

Tests carried out in March by a wine science institute in Bordeaux found that the bottles “positively endured all the



constraints of preparation, travel, and storage on the ISS,” Christie’s said in its press release. At the end of a blind tast-

ing, the researchers noted “remarkable differences in the colour, aroma and taste components,” between the celestial bottles and equivalents which had remained on earth.

“The wines sampled were commended for their complexity and considered to be great wines,” Christie’s added.

The sale is expected to smash the record price for a standard 750 ml bottle of wine.

The most expensive was a 1945 Romanee-Conti Burgundy which sold at Sotheby’s in New York for

\$558,000 in 2018.

The private sale means the buyer and price will remain confidential unless the buyer chooses to identify themselves publicly.

Proceeds will go towards funding future space missions focused on agricultural research.

Petrus, from the Pomerol region near Bordeaux, is considered one of the world’s finest wines. A classic bottle of Petrus 2000, considered a great vintage, currently sells for around 4,500 euros (\$5,400). — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

6 MAY 2021

In the end, IPL proved to be a bridge too far

No normal cricket is possible in the face of an abnormal health crisis. That is the message for the Indian Premier League (IPL), which was a bridge too far to normality when the nation has been overwhelmed by the catastrophic coronavirus pandemic. A dystopian scenario is playing out as Covid-19 patients, gasping for oxygen, die due to gross inefficiencies in reaching the life-giving elixir and funeral pyres are lighting up the night skies over the nation's capital and several major cities across the country. There was no guarantee that one of the world's richest sports boards could run an inviolable bio-bubble at a time when a minuscule organism is playing havoc with lives, snatching loved ones and sending millions into poverty. Was cricket necessary on Indian soil at such a time?

Partners in the cash-rich cricket league may have to take a ₹2,000-crore hit as the league is suspended after 29 of 60 games were played in a bubble for close to a month before it burst. There will be little sympathy for those assumed losses, not among the millions of migrant workers whose lives

The franchises had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May.

have been thrown into turmoil once again even as severe restrictions incommode the lives of over a billion people. There is no one that the pandemic has not touched in some way, though it must be said that for about 97 per cent of 1.4 billion people not infected, the cricket on view every evening did provide some entertainment. The brutal power of the willow, as exemplified in Kieron Pollard's match-turning blitz, was the epitome of aggression at the crease but even that pales in front of an insidious organism that slips in to destroy lives.

The franchises weren't too forthcoming on the Covid-19 trouble that had touched the IPL even before a ball was bowled, as in Devdutt Padikkal testing positive. To keep the show going, they had to hide far too much and if not for the Union home minister's son marshalling the cricket caboodle, the IPL would have had shutters drawn on it long before this virtual cancellation of the season came about in early May. In hindsight, the league would have been better off in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) venues, which hosted the 2020 season without too much ado. The talk then of running the Indian Premier League for "the sake of humanity" was simply pretentious and aimed at staving off criticism that was building up for blithely playing cricket in juxtaposition with death amid chaos.

The attempts to start the IPL as any other economic activity in the time of the pandemic could not be faulted. A full series of matches against the visiting England team was played without stress, but that seems a long time ago now. Timing is the essence of any enterprise and in that the IPL proved a failure because a safe bubble was impossible to maintain when mutating strains are cleverly sidestepping the protection of the vaccine too and infecting people.

And it was when the Indian Premier League began to move as a travelling circus across cities that it invited trouble. Once players were infected, the IPL had to stop, not for any moralistic reason but because it had joined the list of Covid-19 spreaders. A return to an atmosphere of good health for the nation would be a prerequisite for cricket to resume in India. Greed cannot be the engine driving sport.

Action on hate speech welcome

The decision by microblogging site Twitter to permanently suspend the account of actor Kangana Ranaut for her tweet calling for violence in West Bengal is most welcome. The social media platform has found her tweet to be in gross violation of its Twitter Rules, which do not allow the "targeted harassment of someone or incite other people to do so". Stopping people from airing their opinion is not without consequences in a democracy which guarantees the right to speech and expression, and any response to it needs to be measured against a template formed by far too many factors. But the present case offers little defence for the blatant call to violence, which has triggered strong reactions across all the social media platforms.

The actor has responded to Twitter's action by playing the victim card, saying that "a white person feels entitled to enslave a brown person, they want to tell you what to think, speak or do". That, however, hardly washes. The mayhem that West Bengal has witnessed after the Assembly election results were declared may have infuriated the actor, and she has every right to protest against it. In fact, every right-thinking human being must share her angst, but the fact that she can recollect only what happened in Gujarat in "early 2000" as the solution to it is troublesome, whether she is brown or white.

Her request to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to show his "virat roop" of those times could baffle even the most ardent followers of both Ms Ranaut and Mr Modi. If she was referring to the planned loot, arson, rapes and murders that the state witnessed in those horrific times, then she breaches all the limits of acceptable behaviour. Taking recourse to racism to justify her blatant criminal intent is unlikely to convince the defenders of the right to free speech.

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Subhani



Inequity & privilege in the time of a pandemic



Patralekha Chatterjee
Dev 360

As India reels under a devastating second wave of Covid-19 infections, I hear people say that "we are all in this together, we are all equally affected". But I wonder.

Are we? We may be all trying to survive in a lifeboat on the same viral sea, but some of the lifeboats are just more seaworthy than others, as someone pointed out. Even as we grieve and try to navigate our way through these terrifying times, it is important to recognise that some of us are more privileged than others.

I am alive. My family is with me. We are under the same roof. We have food on our table. I have had both doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. I can work from home. These are huge privileges when so many friends, colleagues and people one has loved and cared for have been felled by the coronavirus.

The infection tally has zoomed past the 20-million mark; more than 222,408 people are dead across the country, says the health ministry; the actual number of those who died is likely to be much higher.

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken. Those of us who are not that old, not that poor, do not have co-morbidities or a compromised immune system have a responsibility to protect those who don't have our advantages.

The first step is to acknowledge our privilege.

New Delhi, where I live, continues to be under lockdown, and continues to gasp as friends and families of critical patients run helter-skelter trying to

organise medical oxygen. Hospitals have taken their battle to the courts. The Delhi high court has become the last hope for so many hospitals scrambling to get oxygen for their Covid-19 patients as supplies become precariously short and government officials engage in verbal jousts over who is responsible.

This week, the high court issued a show cause notice to the Central government over the "non-compliance" of its order from last week to provide 700 metric tonnes (MT) of medical oxygen for the treatment of Covid-19 patients in the Delhi. "You can put your head in sand like an ostrich, we will not," the high court said.

Even from my vantage position, it is easy to relate to that.

How does one reconcile the rage and helplessness of people on the street with the Centre's claim that there is no shortage of oxygen? Or the grotesquely grandiose Central Vista redevelopment project continuing in the heart of the nation's capital as part of "essential services" despite a petition in the courts arguing that the project was not an "essential service" and that it posed "a threat to the lives of the citizens of Delhi and beyond, including the lives of the work-force/labour engaged in the project", and that the project construction could prove to be a

Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones...

It's true that the virus doesn't discriminate; it doesn't care if you are posh or poor. But Covid-19 will bludgeon the poor and marginalised unless urgent remedial steps are taken.

Covid-19 "super-spreader".

How does one recognise privilege at a time like this wherever we are?

I found a pandemic privilege checklist on the website of Arizona State University's initiative, Project Humanities.

Some privileges it flagged were: If you have health insurance, if your racial group has not been disproportionately affected by Covid-19, if you have easy access to private outdoor space, if you do not live alone, if you have not been quarantined from someone you live with, if you are below the age of 65, if you have not experienced an income/wage loss in the past two months, if you do not have a compromised immune system, if you have home access to high speed Wi-Fi, if you have not felt unsafe because of your job in the past two months, if you have received professional counselling in the past two months, if no one you know personally has contracted and died from Covid-19, if you have not received food assistance in the past two months, if you have exercise equipment in your home, if you do not have someone in your home that needs adult supervision, if you have a pet.

This is a list for people living in the US. But some of it could apply in this country too.

Even in these traumatic times, those of us who can work from home, for instance, are massively better positioned than those whose nature of work does not offer them that luxury or those who have no work right now.

The first wave of the pandemic took a heavy toll of those working in the service industry,

especially in the lower rungs. People survived by tapping into their meagre savings. Many people went into debt, were forced to cut down on nutritious food. I wonder what is happening to the young spa attendant who shared her dreams with me few months ago, the tailor down the street, the man selling flowers in my neighbourhood market.

Knowing people who matter have always been part of privilege. It continues during the pandemic. At a time when money can't necessarily buy you medical oxygen or an intensive care bed, being on top of the food chain, having connections do help. Those of us who know someone who knows someone else who is resourceful and whose voice is amplified in the social media have a far better chance of saving our loved ones than those with no connections.

Of course, even that does not always work. A former Indian diplomat lost his life while waiting for an ICU bed in the parking lot of a top hospital in the national capital region.

We all live in fear of the virus, of losing our loved ones at a time when citizens appear to have been left to their own devices. Lack of privilege is when one copes with the fear of slipping into destitution.

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has promised help to auto rickshaw and cab drivers in the city whose incomes have taken a huge hit due to the coronavirus. The Delhi government also says it will give free rations to 72 lakh ration card holders. These are baby steps but in the right direction.

However, there needs to be a strong nationwide social safety net for people who are likely to fall through the cracks in the coming days.

We must not let them fall. We must speak out. Privilege brings greater responsibilities.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and the emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

24 DEATHS

It was extremely upsetting and sad to read that 24 patients died in Karnataka's Chamarajanagar district hospital due to lack of oxygen. Considering the enormous spread of Covid-19 in India, an all-out effort must be made by the Centre and the states to draw in draw in skilled manpower for the installation, operation and maintenance of medical oxygen plants in the country.

Dr C Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

HOSPITALS FIRST

Covid-19 and the containment policies aimed at controlling its spread have changed the way we work and live. History shows that such changes are not always temporary, and that such crises can fundamentally reshape our beliefs and behaviours. While some states have already taken precautionary steps, the Andhra Pradesh government has announced a partial lockdown from May 5. It is worth a watch as to how the people and the government prepare themselves for a post-crisis world, rather than waiting for a return to the past?

Charith Betha
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Varsities can't declare exclusive medium

NEW DELHI, May. 5 The Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court today declared that no university in the country can declare a particular regional language as the "exclusive" medium for instruction and examination of candidates studying in that university to the prejudice of the Fundamental Rights enshrined in Article 25 to 30 of the Constitution. In a judgment of far reaching implication on the language policies of State Governments, the five-Judge Bench unanimously ruled that while the Punjab University had the right to prescribe Punjabi as a medium of instruction it could not prescribe it as the exclusive medium nor compel affiliated colleges established and administered by religious minorities or by a section of citizens who wish to conserve their own language, script or culture to teach in Punjab or take examination in that language,

TAILPIECE

A significant recent non-babu event was Dr Karan Singh's ninetieth birthday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi released a unique edition of the Bhagavad Gita, in 11 volumes with 20 commentaries on each verse in facsimile. The function held at the Prime Minister's residence was attended mainly by family members and a few bureaucrats involved in evolving Kashmir policy. Dr Singh opened the proceedings with a talk on the Gita and steered away from current political matters. The Prime Minister spoke, as expected, on the Gita, and closed his speech by paying fulsome compliments to Dr Karan Singh, the elder statesman of the Kashmir region. What the babus were left wondering was how the tea leaves of this event needed to be read.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@Twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Tripura DM who cracked whip at a wedding faces storm of protest

While the administration has been widely rebuked for complacency in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, a district magistrate in Tripura is under fire for being overly enthusiastic in enforcing night curfew rules during a marriage in Agartala, the state capital. A video that recorded the incident went viral on the social media and political parties are gunning for him.

West Tripura DMM Shailesh Kumar Yadav is in the dock for his arrogant behaviour with a bride and groom in the middle of a wedding. Angry citizens and politicians have written to Tripura CM Biplab Kumar Deb seeking strict action against Mr Yadav. Some have even demanded an FIR against the official and sought his removal from service.

In the viral video, Mr Yadav is seen shoving attendees and arresting everyone for flouting Covid-19

norms and tearing up the permission certificate for the wedding that he himself had signed! Sources say the CM has formed a committee of two IAS officers to investigate the incident and submit a report to chief secretary Manoj Kumar for further action. Watch this space for updates.

AD HOCISM IN J&K

If Jammu and Kashmir's change of status was meant to have a positive impact on governance in the Union territory, those hopes have been belied, many say. Ad hocism has become an integral part of governance in J&K, as evident from the list of top bureaucrats and officials who are holding more than one post. Just two examples: Shaleen Kabra, the principal secretary (home), is also the principal secretary (revenue) and financial commissioner. Similarly, Dheeraj Gupta, principal secretary (housing and urban development), is also

J&K's principal resident commissioner in New Delhi.

Sources say as many as 10 IAS officers in the Union Territory are holding additional charge of different departments and institutions due to a shortage of manpower in the higher echelons of the administration. J&K has a stipulated strength of 137 IAS officers, but only 58 are serving in the cadre, of which at least nine officers are on Central deputation. The Centre is apparently aware of the situation, and it recently moved to depute IAS and Group A service officers to the new UT. But this seems to have done little to solve the problem which has afflicted governance for decades in J&K.

PROBE INTO HARYANA COPS

Former Haryana home secretary and retired IAS officer Navraj Sandhu has been appointed chairperson of the Haryana State Police Complaints Authority (PCA). In

addition, retired IPS officer Kamleshwar Kumar Mishra and retired IAS officer Ramesh Chand Verma have been named as members of the authority.

Haryana is one of 17 states that set up a PCA to protect citizens against the abuse of police powers. It adjudicates allegations of improper or shoddy investigations, refusal to register FIRs, allegations of custodial torture and police high-handedness. However, it should be noted that the recommendations of the PCA aren't binding on the state government — which makes the PCA merely a paper tiger.

For five years, the government did not appoint a chairman even as the complaints piled up. Apparently, until 2019, the authority received 681 complaints, but it is not known how many were investigated and forwarded to the government for action. Hopefully, Mr Sandhu's appointment will make up for the lost time.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	48,677.55	0.88
Nifty 50	14,617.90	0.84
S&P 500*	4,186.67	0.53
Dollar (₹)	73.91	-0.05
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.70	-0.19
Euro (₹)	88.72	-0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	46,382.317	0.68
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.32	0.64
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.978	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.600	0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

S&P pegs GDP growth at 9.8% for this fiscal

S&P Global Ratings slashed India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year to 9.8 per cent saying the second Covid wave may derail the budding recovery in the economy and credit conditions. The US-based rating agency in March had a 11 per cent GDP growth forecast for India for the April 2021-March 2022 fiscal on account of a fast economic reopening and fiscal stimulus.

Services sector PMI at 54 in April amid Covid crisis



India's services sector activities eased to a three-month low in April, as the rise in business activity was constrained by the pandemic and sentiment towards growth prospects faded. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index fell to 54 in April from 54.6 in March, the slowest increase in output in three months. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion and a score below 50 is contraction.

Finance majors rush with aid; Citi to donate ₹200 cr

Multinational financiers pitched in with relief efforts, led by a Rs 200-crore commitment by Citibank. The efforts of the financial sector MNCs—a majority of whom depend on Indian personnel to handle back-office work—were focused on providing immediate medical relief. Other financiers which offered support included Citi's US peer Wells Fargo (\$3 million), Swiss bank UBS (\$1.5 mn) and Apollo Global Management (\$1 mn).

Infosys doubles Covid relief pledge to ₹200 cr

IT services major Infosys has doubled its commitment towards Covid relief efforts to Rs 200 crore that will be used to add hospital beds and augment the supply of oxygen concentrators and ventilators among other activities. In an email to employees, Infosys CEO hief Salil Parekh said, "We had committed Rs 100 crore last year...and have expanded our original commitment to Rs 200 crore for Covid relief efforts."



Personal loans, business borrowings also eligible RBI unveils loan recast plan for individuals, biz

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Responding to the second Covid wave, the RBI announced a slew of measures on Wednesday providing relief and liquidity to a large section of customers. It provided loan recast for certain individuals and small businesses. A liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore has been opened for healthcare companies and patients, while small businesses can avail of Rs 10,000 crore credit from small finance banks.

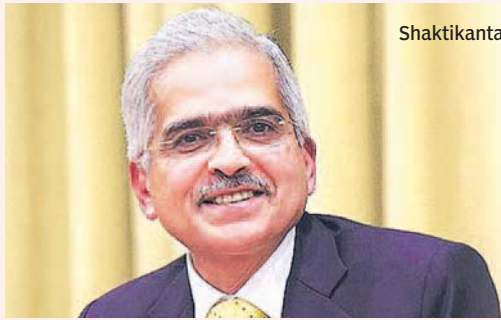
As far as loan recast is concerned, individual borrowers, small businesses and MSMEs having aggregate exposure of up to Rs 25 crore and who have not availed of restructuring under any of the earlier restructuring frameworks are eligible for loan restructuring under Resolution Framework 2.0.

This is the second restructuring scheme announced by the central bank in less than one year, with the first unveiled in August last year.

Loan recast under Resolution Framework 2.0 can be invoked up to September 30, 2021 and has to be implemented within 90 days after invocation. The beneficiaries had to be classified as standard accounts as on March 31, 2021.

In the case of individual borrowers and small businesses which have availed of loan restructuring under last year's loan recast, their plans can be modified by increasing the

GOVERNOR'S OBSERVATIONS



Shaktikanta Das

■ The situation has reversed from being on the foothills of strong economic recovery to facing a fresh crisis.

■ RBI will continue to monitor the situation, deploy tools at command to support businesses impacted by Covid.

■ Covid-19 situation has altered drastically since March, India has been fighting a sharp rise in Covid cases in last few weeks.

■ RBI is committed to using unconventional tools to tackle any Covid-triggered stress.

■ To work with the government to ease stress faced by citizens. Will take big, small steps to tackle

stress through the year.

■ RBI stands ready to keep financial conditions congenial, markets continue to work efficiently.

■ Global growth outlook highly uncertain, clouded with downside risk.

■ Data shows persistence of input price pressures, normal monsoon forecast should help contain food price inflation.

■ Small borrowers, MSMEs, individuals most vulnerable.

■ India mounted a valiant defence, domestically and globally, to ramp up vaccines and medical support, and save lives.

■ Immediate objective is to save lives, restore livelihoods.

period of moratorium or extending the residual tenure up to two years.

Small businesses and MSMEs which have restructured their loans earlier also can get their sanctioned working capital limits reviewed as a one-time measure based

on a reassessment of the working capital cycle, margins and the like.

Later in a notification, the RBI said individuals who have availed of personal loans, loans for business purposes and small businesses, including those engaged in retail and

wholesale trade, other than those classified as MSME, are eligible for the loan recast.

However, compared to the blanket loan moratorium given last year, the proportion of restructured loans will be lower under Resolution Framework 2.0.

In order to provide further support to MSMEs and other unorganised sector entities, a special three-year long-term repo operations (SLTRO) of Rs 10,000 crore at repo rate will be conducted for the small finance banks (SFBs). Under this, fresh lending of up to Rs 10 lakh will be provided per borrower. This facility will be available till October 31, 2021. SFBs are also permitted to lend to smaller microfinance institutions under priority sector lending. This facility will be available up to March 31, 2022.

"As in the recent past, the RBI will continue to monitor the emerging situation and deploy all resources and instruments..." said governor Shaktikanta Das.

Taking the country's healthcare infrastructure into consideration, RBI also announced an on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate for healthcare infrastructure and services companies till March 31, 2022.

The RBI has also decided on a second purchase of government securities for an aggregate amount of Rs 35,000 crore under G-SAP 1.0 on May 20. It had bought government bonds worth Rs 25,000 crore on April 15.

KYC UPDATE EXTENDED TILL DECEMBER END

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the Covid situation, the RBI on Wednesday provided some relief to the customers by asking banks and other financial institutions not to impose punitive action against those who fail to update KYC. This relief is being provided till December end.

"Keeping in view the Covid related restrictions in various parts of the country, regulated entities are being advised that for the customer accounts where periodic KYC updating is due/pending, no punitive restriction on operations of customer accounts shall be imposed till December 31, 2021" the RBI said.

Customers can update their Know Your Customer details during this period. This facility is, however, not applicable if the customer is bound to update it due to any other reason or under instructions of any regulator/enforcement agency/court of law.

The central bank also extended the scope of video-based customer identification process, or V-CIP, for new categories of customers such as proprietorship firms, authorised signatories and beneficial owners of legal entities and for periodic update of KYC.

Limited KYC accounts opened on the basis of Aadhaar e-KYC authentication in non-face-to-face mode can be converted to fully KYC-compliant accounts.

Cabinet nod for privatisation of IDBI Bank

FC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 5

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), on Wednesday, gave its in-principle approval for strategic disinvestment along with transfer of management control in IDBI Bank Ltd. However, the CCEA led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi further said in a statement that the extent of respective shareholding to be divested by the Centre and LIC would be decided at the time of structuring the transaction in consultation with the Reserved Bank of India.

The Government of India and the Life Insurance Corporation of India together own more than 94 per cent equity of IDBI Bank, with GoI holding 45.48 per cent and LIC 49.24 per cent stake. The LIC is currently the promoter of IDBI Bank with management control and the government of India is the co-promoter.

The LIC board has passed a resolution to the effect that LIC may reduce its shareholding in IDBI Bank Ltd by divesting its stake along

side strategic stake sale envisaged by the government with an intent to relinquish management control and by taking into consideration price, market outlook, statutory stipulation and interest of policy holders.

The decision of LIC's board is consistent with the regulatory mandate to it to reduce its stake in the bank. "It is expected that the strategic buyer will infuse funds, new technology and best management practices for optimal development of business potential and growth of IDBI Bank Ltd and shall generate more business without any dependence on LIC and government assistance/funds," the government statement said, adding that resources through strategic disinvestment of government equity from the transaction would be used to finance developmental programmes of the government benefitting the citizens.

The RBI, in March this year removed IDBI Bank from the Prompt Corrective Action framework after a gap of nearly four years on improved financial performance.

₹50K-cr on-tap loans for healthcare firms

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

Considering the massive healthcare infrastructure gap, which got exposed by the pandemic, the Reserve Bank will enable banks to lend Rs 50,000 crore to healthcare infrastructure and services companies.

This on-tap liquidity window of Rs 50,000 crore at the repo rate will be available till March 31, 2022 for a tenure of up to three years. Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment.

In order to incentivise banks for quick delivery, the credit under the scheme has been classified as priority sector lending. These loans will continue to be classified under priority sector till

Under the scheme, banks can provide fresh lending support to vaccine manufacturers, importers or suppliers of vaccines and priority medical devices, hospitals and dispensaries, pathology labs, manufacturers and suppliers of oxygen and ventilators, importers of vaccines and Covid-related drugs, logistics firms and also patients for treatment

repayment or maturity, whichever is earlier. Banks may deliver these loans to borrowers directly or through intermediary financial entities regulated by the RBI.

Banks are expected to create a Covid loan book under the scheme. Such banks will be eligible to park their surplus liquidity up to the size of the Covid loan book with the RBI under the reverse repo window at a rate which is 25 bps lower than the repo rate or 40 bps higher than the reverse repo rate.

"The RBI is now focusing on increasingly channelising its liquidity operations, especially at the

grassroots level," RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said.

"A new term liquidity facility for the healthcare sector at the repo rate will aid in ramping up Covid-related healthcare infrastructure and production and supply of essential healthcare products such as vaccines, oxygen and ventilators. It will also benefit patients burdened by unaffordable medical bills," said Aashit Shah, Partner, J. Sagar Associates.

"The RBI has incentivised banks to offer these facilities by including them within the PSL targets of banks, and also permitting them to deposit the surplus liquidity up to an amount equal to their "Covid Loan" book with RBI at a rate which is 40 basis points higher than the normal reverse repo rate. This will ensure that banks accelerate the provision of liquidity for emergency healthcare services so that India is better equipped financially to deal with the pandemic," he added.

Financials, pharma stocks gain

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 5

The specific liquidity enhancing measures unveiled by the Reserve Bank for microfinance institutions and healthcare sector companies boosted market sentiments and led to sharp gains in financials and pharmaceutical stocks on Wednesday.

The Sensex gained 424 points, or 0.88 per cent, to close at 48,677 while the Nifty-50 gained 121.35 points, or 0.84 per cent, closing at 14,617.85.

"Pharma gained the most as relief measures announced by the RBI included provision of term liquidity facility of Rs 50,000 crore on priority basis for the healthcare

sector. Apart from this, the announcements included a special Rs 10,000 crore long-term repo operation to support small finance banks on-lend to MSEs, and a resolution framework 2.0 for individuals, small businesses and MSMEs, which lifted the banking stocks," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The BSE Bankex gained 1.67 per cent and the Nifty Bank Index gained 1.59 per cent. The Nifty Pharma gained 4.12 per cent. The Nifty PSU Bank gained 1.47 per cent as yield of government securities softened after the RBI announced purchase of government securities worth Rs 35,000 crore on May 20.

IDBI Bank gained 4.40 per cent after the Union Cabinet approved divestment of government and LIC's stake in the bank.

The pharma gainers on the NSE included Lupin (13.71 per cent), Aurobindo Pharma (7.08 per cent), Sun Pharma (5.87 per cent), Cadila Healthcare (5.78 per cent), Torrent Pharma (4.66 per cent), Alkem Laboratories (3.98 per cent), Biocon (2.41 per cent) and Dr Reddy's Laboratories (2.01 per cent).

Pfizer gained 3.99 per cent as reports said Indian drug regulator had approved import of Covid vaccine by the company.

Foreign portfolio investors sold equities worth Rs 1,110.50 crore for the fourth session in a row.

CSR FUNDS CAN BE USED FOR GENERATING MEDICAL OXYGEN

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 5

In order to make companies spend towards mitigating the Covid situation, the government has notified that spending Corporate Social Responsibility funds towards generation of medical oxygen will be considered eligible as a

CSR activity.

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs has clarified that spending of CSR funds for 'creating health infrastructure for Covid care', 'establishment of medical oxygen generation and storage plants', 'manufacturing and supply of oxygen concentrators, ventilators, cylinders and other medical equipment

for countering Covid-19' or similar such activities are eligible CSR activities under Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 relating to promotion of health care, including preventive health care, and, disaster management, respectively.

The Companies Act also considers contribution to specified R&D projects as CSR.

CIPLA TO SELL ROCHE'S ANTIBODY COCKTAIL

New Delhi, May 5: Drug firm Roche India on Wednesday said it has received Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) from the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation for Roche's investigational antibody cocktail used in the treatment of Covid-19.

The approval of antibody cocktail of Casirivimab and Imdevimab in India was based on the data filed for the EUA in the US, and the scientific opinion of the Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) in the European Union, Roche India said in a statement.

"This Emergency Use Authorisation will now

enable Roche to import the globally manufactured product batches to India and will be marketed as well as distributed in India through a strategic partnership with Cipla Limited," it added.

The antibody cocktail is to be administered for the treatment of mild to moderate coronavirus disease in adults and pediatric patients (12 years of age or older, weighing at least 40 kg) who are confirmed to be infected with Sars-Cov2 and who are at high risk of developing severe Covid-19 disease, the statement said. It could significantly help these high-risk patients before their condition worsens, it added.

—PTI

Amazon work rules govern tweets, body odour of contract drivers

JOSH EIDELSON &
MATT DAY
MAY 5

The thousands of people driving those ubiquitous Amazon-branded blue vans aren't employed by the Seattle leviathan. They work for small, independent businesses with contracts to transport packages for Amazon. But that hasn't stopped the company from dictating the state of their fingernails-and a whole lot more.

"Personal grooming must be maintained at an acceptable level, including but not limited to prevention of unpleasant breath

or body odour, modest perfume/cologne, and clean teeth, face/ears, fingernails and hair," Amazon.com Inc says in a recent version of its policies governing these small delivery companies, or what the company calls Delivery Service Partners. The document, reviewed by Bloomberg, also requires that drivers refrain from "obscene" social-media posts, undergo training programmes approved by Amazon, follow instructions from Amazon's delivery app and be drug tested whenever Amazon representatives ask.

The DSPs are required to

adhere to Amazon's policies, which the company can unilaterally change whenever it wants, according to a recent contract also seen by Bloomberg. They also have to provide Amazon physical access to their premises and all sorts of data the retailer wants, such as geo-locations, speed and movement of drivers-information the company says it has the power to use however it wants.

For several years, Amazon has sought to bring order to its farflung delivery operations, which were plagued by accidents, complaints about thrown

packages and infamous incidents such as the time a contract driver relieved himself in a customer's driveway. But in exerting more control over these workers, legal experts say, the company has created legal risks for itself. Amazon has chosen not to directly employ DSP drivers, an arrangement that shields it from costs and liabilities the work incurs. Amazon's growing sway over its delivery partners, however, could convince courts and government agencies that the company is actually a "joint employer" or "vicariously liable" party.

—Bloomberg

EMIRATES FITS A380S WITH UPSCALE COACH CLASS

LAYAN ODEH
MAY 5

Emirates will install premium-economy cabins in three of its existing Airbus SE A380 super-jumbos as it prepares for an anticipated shift in demand once the airline industry emerges from the coronavirus crisis.

The world's biggest long-haul airline will retrofit the seats-which offer more room than coach at a cheaper price than business class-into planes supplied by Amedeo Air Four Plus Ltd, the leasing firm said in a statement on Wednesday.

The change should help adapt the Emirates fleet to a post-Covid travel market in which well-heeled leisure passengers may be prepared to pay more for extra personal space amid continuing health concerns, even as demand for business trips remains subdued or switches to less costly options.

Though Emirates, the largest A380 operator, had begun requesting premium economy for its last few new double-deckers, President Tim Clark only revealed last month that it would convert older ones amid strong demand.

Sill, the Dubai-based carrier has been a late convert to the class, which was first introduced at Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd and Taiwan's EVA Air in the early 1990s. Superjumbo operators, including British Airways, Singapore Airlines Ltd and Qantas Airways Ltd, have long offered the product on their planes, while Deutsche Lufthansa AG introduced it in 2015.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

MacGill kidnapped and then released

Sydney: Former Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill was allegedly kidnapped from his home in Sydney and then released after an hour-long ordeal last month, New South Wales police said on Wednesday. Quoting Australian police, the country's media reported that four men were detained in connection with the alleged kidnapping following a raid. The incident took place on April 14 when he was bundled into a car and driven to a remote location, after which he was assaulted and threatened with a firearm. "I know it was only an hour that he was held but it would have been a horribly frightful hour to endure," NSW Police superintendent Anthony Holton was quoted as saying by the local media. New South Wales state police said an incident was reported to them on April 20. — PTI

Hockey coach Kaushik tests +ve

New Delhi: Former India hockey player and coach MK Kaushik has tested positive for COVID-19 and admitted to a nursing home here. The oxygen saturation level of the 66-year-old, a member of the 1980 Moscow Olympics gold-medal winning Indian team, keeps fluctuating, according to his family. "He is suffering from COVID-19 and is hospitalized in a city nursing home here," his son Ehsan said. "He first developed symptoms on April 17 but RTPCR and RAT tests came negative. Then we did his CT scan on chest on April 24 and pneumonia due to Covid was detected. Since then he has been hospitalized and his condition is between, neither stable nor serious. His oxygen level drops drastically at night which is a major issue," he added. — PTI

Mary Kom to begin Games preparation

New Delhi: Six-time world champion MC Mary Kom, along with two other Olympic-bound boxers, will train at the Army Sports Institute in Pune leading up to the Tokyo Games after the national camp for women in Delhi had to be disbanded owing to COVID-19 cases among pugilists and support staff. Mary Kom (51kg) will join another Olympic-bound boxer Lovlina Borgohain (69kg), who is already at the facility. Simranjit Kaur (60kg), also bound for Tokyo, will train there too but after completing the COVID-19 post-recovery isolation. The boxers will be placed in three separate groups with two sparring partners each to ensure that the risk of infection is minimal. — PTI

Sailors want Oz coach retained

New Delhi: Olympic-bound Indian sailors Varun Thakkar and KC Ganapathy want to continue training under experienced Australian coach Ian Stuart Warren, who helped the duo qualify for the Tokyo Olympics. The duo said it will be "difficult" to push themselves to the next level and perform well at the quadrennial event if the Australian is not around in the next three months. — PTI

Brilliant chess at weekend

Hyderabad: The Brilliant Chess Academy is conducting the 180th Brilliant Trophy Open Chess Tournament online on Saturday and Sunday. A total of ₹10,000 prize money will be given to top 20 places in the Open category while special prizes will be given to top two places in the Under 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 age groups for boys and girls. Players should register their names before 1 pm on Saturday with J. Subrahmanyam, on phone number 9247399717.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL
Europa League (Semifinal, second leg): Roma vs Manchester United from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2; Arsenal vs Villarreal from 12.30am (Friday) on Sony Ten 1

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MAD SCRAMBLE

Left in lurch Aussie cricketers await flight to Maldives

New Delhi, May 5: The Englishmen were the first ones out with eight of them landing in London, while the Australians awaited an escape to Maldives as the now-suspended IPL's foreign recruits charted their way back home assisted by the BCCI on Wednesday. Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Sam Billings, Chris Woakes, Moeen Ali and Jason Roy landed in London to begin a 10-day quarantine before heading to their respective homes. The league was suspended indefinitely on Tuesday after multiple COVID-19 cases in its bio-bubble.

England skipper Eoin Morgan, Dawid Malan and Chris Jordan are expected to board a flight to London within the next 48 hours.

ENGLAND PLAYERS TO QUARANTINE IN LONDON

"I can confirm that 8 of the 11 England players in India managed to get on a flight to Heathrow last night and have landed this morning," an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesperson said.

"They will now quarantine in government approved hotels. The remaining three — Jordan, Malan, Morgan — should leave India within the next 48 hours," he added.

The Australians, on the other hand, were still waiting to know when they can fly out to Maldives, where they will stay for a few days before flying home. The detour has been forced by the Australian government's travel ban on India till May 15 because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases here.

Their Prime Minister



(From left) Australia's David Warner, Tom Moody and Trevor Bayliss.

— IPL

Scott Morrison has refused to consider an exemption and Cricket Australia has also ruled out seeking one from the government.

"All Australians are assembling in Delhi and from there they will head to Maldives by a charter flight," a franchise said.

CA ACKNOWLEDGES BCCI HELP

CA's interim chief Nick Hockley said the BCCI is helping in every possible way to ensure a smooth return for the 14 players,

members of the coaching staff and commentators, who are in India right now.

"What the BCCI is working to do is to move the entire cohort out of India where they will wait until it's possible to return to Australia," Hockley told reporters in Sydney.

"The BCCI has been working on a range of options. That's now narrowed down to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. The BCCI is committed not only to the first move but also to putting on a

charter to bring them back to Australia," he added.

IPL also featured cricketers from South Africa (11), New Zealand (10), West Indies (9), Afghanistan (3) and Bangladesh (2).

KIWIS TO FLY TO UK AFTER MAY 10

New Zealand's players association head Heath Mills told *ESPNCricinfo* that one group of Kiwis will head to the UK for an upcoming series but that would be after May 10,

when the travel ban on flights from India is reconsidered there.

"Due to the UK border restrictions, that group cannot get into England until May 11. It is obviously challenging for them to wait for another few days," Mills said.

The ones headed for UK include Kane Williamson, Trent Boult, and Kyle Jamieson among others.

The ones who have to get back to New Zealand are Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, and Mike Hesson among others.

"The group going home to New Zealand is a real challenge. Might be one or two of the franchises might put them on a charter plane, which will be fantastic," Mills said.

"We'll have that confirmed in the next 24 hours," he added.

HUSSEY TO COMPLETE QUARANTINE IN DELHI

CSK batting coach Mike Hussey will stay in India to serve out his quarantine while others head back in the next few days.

The 52-day 60-match tournament would have concluded in Ahmedabad on May 30. However, only 24 days of cricket was possible with 29 completed games before the virus halted proceedings.

India is currently recording over 3 lakh cases everyday and more than 3,000 daily deaths.

The unprecedented number of cases has severely burdened the country's health-care facilities causing an acute shortage of oxygen, hospital beds and crucial medicines. The gut-wrenching scenes at hospitals and funeral places have had an impact on the participating players as well. — PTI

IPL could have tweaked a few things: Pat

Melbourne, May 5: Australia pacer Pat Cummins feels the IPL organisers, in hindsight, could have "tweaked a few things" after deciding to host the league in India amidst a raging Covid-19 pandemic.

Cummins, a key part of the Kolkata Knight Riders team, said previous edition held in UAE was incredibly "well-run" and the organisers pushed it "little step further" by organising it at home this year.

The IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday,

following multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

Last year, IPL was first postponed and then shifted to the UAE with India being in the grips of the first wave of virus.

"Last year we had the IPL held over in the UAE and that was an incredibly well-run tournament," Cummins told *Foxsports*.

"This year, they tried to push it that little step further and have it over here in multiple cities in India. I'm sure looking back they might have tweaked a few things."



Pat Cummins

Cummins, however, didn't specify what exactly could have been done differently in his comments which were made before the postponement of the league on Tuesday.

There were a lot of criticism for conducting the T20 league at a time when India was facing such a devastating health crisis.

"It's two different worlds. We're lucky, we're safe, we're comfortable and there's people just trying to get basic medical treatment," the Australian vice-captain said.

"First thing was to find out whether us playing the IPL was the right thing and basically everyone said, we would be lost without the IPL for three or four hours every night.

I'm just trying to do my bit. India's been such a good country to me and cricketers."

With the T20 event being postponed, the Australian IPL players and support staff might fly off to Maldives in a bid to get home.

The Australian government had last week banned travellers from Covid-ravaged India till May 15 with the country's Prime Minister Scott Morrison making it clear that the IPL players will have to make their own arrangements. — PTI



Delhi hosted four IPL matches this season.

— IPL

Bookies hired a cleaner at Kotla

New Delhi, May 5: The recently-suspended IPL witnessed potential corruptors plugging an accredited cleaner at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground for doing "pitch-siding" which helps ball-to-ball betting, BCCI Anti-Corruption Unit chief Shabbir Hussain Shekhadam Khandwawala has revealed.

The new modus operandi was observed during one of the IPL games at New Delhi where a designated cleaner was using the time lag between actual match action and live TV coverage to help in ball-by-ball betting, which is also known as court-siding or pitch-siding.

Pitch-siding is the practice of transmitting information from sporting events for the purpose of gambling, or directly placing bets.

"One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police," Hussain, a former DG of Gujarat Police, said. "We are thankful to Delhi Police that in a separate incident they caught two other persons from the Kotla on ACU tip-off."

The Delhi Police arrested two people with fake

One of my ACU officers caught a person and handed over the details to Delhi Police. While that particular offender managed to flee leaving behind his two mobile phones, ACU lodged a complaint with the Delhi Police.

— SHABBIR HUSSAIN
BCCI ACU chief

accreditation cards during the IPL match between Rajasthan Royals and SunRisers Hyderabad on May 2.

So how did cleaning staff come under the ACU radar? "He was standing (inside Feroz Shah Kotla premises) in a secluded area all by himself and so one of our officers approached and asked him 'What are you doing here?'"

"He said: 'Main apne girlfriend se baat kar raha hoon. (I am talking to my girlfriend).'"

"My officer then asked him to dial the number he was talking to and then asked him to hand over the phones. Just when he was going through the contents of his phone, the guy fled from the spot," Hussain revealed but did not divulge during which match the incident took place. — PTI

ACA CHIEF SAYS PLAYERS UNDER ENORMOUS STRESS

Melbourne, May 5: Australian Cricketers Association chief executive Todd Greenberg has asked its players to do their "homework" and consider the risks involved before signing overseas T20 deals in the near future as the world grapples with an evolving pandemic. "I'm not sure it will create reticence (in the future) but it will ensure players do their due diligence before they sign agreements," Greenberg was quoted as saying *ESPNCricinfo*.

Greenberg acknowledged the Aussie contingent may be dealing with anxiety and stress at the moment, but promised help once they return to their country. "I was at pains to point it out during the week, the public will see our best Australian cricketers as almost superheroes, they're brilliant athletes, great cricketers, but they're human beings, some of them are fathers and husbands and they're under enormous amounts of stress," Greenberg, said. — PTI

Smart City storm into final

Manchester, May 5: After a decade of disappointment, Pep Guardiola is back in a Champions League final and just one game away from delivering on his task to make Manchester City champions of Europe for the first time.

In the battle between two clubs with seemingly endless resources but no Champions League titles to their name, City kept their cool to beat Paris Saint-Germain 4-1 on aggregate as the French champions paid for losing their heads in both legs of the semi-final tie.

Riyad Mahrez, born and raised in Paris, scored twice to secure a 2-0 win for City in Tuesday's second leg before Angel di Maria's red card for lashing out at Fernandinho rounded off another miserable European exit for the French champions.

A first Champions League final for City, against Real Madrid or Chelsea in Istanbul, is the culmination of the club's rise since an Abu Dhabi takeover in 2008 transformed their fortunes.

In the coming days, they will seal a fifth Premier League title in the past 10 years. Once dubbed the "noisy neighbours" by legendary former Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson, City are now not just the dominant force in Manchester but also in English football.

By the end of the month,



Manchester City's Algerian midfielder Riyad Mahrez (left) vies with Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar during their UEFA Champions League second leg match in Manchester on Tuesday.

— AFP

the mix of Emirati wealth and Guardiola's coaching may have also conquered Europe.

"Of course we invest a lot of money since Sheikh Mansour took over, but it is not just this," said Guardiola. "It is a lot of incredible things behind the scenes."

"Reaching the final of the Champions League, helps us realise in the bigger picture what we have done in the last four years. What we have done these four years is incredible."

'Remarkable' consistency

Since a difficult first year in England, Guardiola has led City to four League Cups, an FA Cup and the brink of a third Premier League title in four seasons. However, until now, that domestic success always came with the caveat of Champions League collapses.

Guardiola has won the competition twice before as a coach during his time at Barcelona, but not since 2011.

City did not even progress beyond the last eight in his first four seasons in charge.

THE RESULT	
Manchester City (Mahrez 11, 63)	2
PSG	0
City advance on aggregate (4-1)	

It was a similar story for the Catalan in his three years at Bayern Munich between 2013 and 2016 as three Bundesliga titles were overshadowed by three semi-final exits to Spanish opposition.

"People believe because it happened in the past I have to arrive every year in the final of the Champions League," added Guardiola. "This is a little bit unfair because the consistency these guys have shown in every competition these last four or five years is remarkable."

City exorcised many of their Champions League demons against PSG.

Missed chances, controversial refereeing decisions and sloppy defending frequently combined to cost them in recent seasons.

This time an early penalty awarded against Oleksandr Zinchenko was overturned after a VAR review, Mahrez was deadly with his two chances and City's much-improved defence withstood a first-half barrage. "The first-half they were so good but we defended so well. We defend all together, helped each other," said Guardiola.

— AFP

ARSENAL LOOK TO SET UP DATE WITH UNITED

London, May 5: Arsenal's season appeared to be ending with a whimper when they were reduced to 10 men after falling 2-0 behind against Villarreal in last week's first leg of their Europa League semi-final.

Instead, a precious away goal gave them hope they can finish an inconsistent campaign on a high by setting up a showdown in the Polish city of Gdansk against Manchester United. Arsenal are ninth in the Premier League table and are unlikely to qualify for Europe next year via that route but winning the Europa League would give them a ticket back to the Champions League.

Mikel Arteta's side won the FA Cup last season but have failed to build on that triumph and are on course for a fifth consecutive finish outside the top four in EPL. Standing in Arsenal's way is their former boss Unai Emery, who won the trophy three years in a row from 2014 when he was in charge of Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the 2019 final.

Villarreal have never reached the final of the Champions League or Europa League. They have put out a promotional video, with the message: "Let's flip the script... It's our time."

— AFP