

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | MONDAY 17 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 26°C
Rainfall: 2%

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Vaikasi 3
Tithi: Panchami
Star: Punarpoosam
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am
Yamagandam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

PRAYERS

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

SUNSET TODAY 5.59 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.00 AM

MOONRISE TODAY 10.16 AM

MOONSET TOMORROW 12.10 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,11,000)	(+4,077)
2,84,57,400	2,74,395

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+33,181)	311
TN: 15,98,216	17,670

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

16,35,61,723

DEATHS

33,89,927

COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES 219

worldometers.info

Police lob tear gas, use force as farmers tried to disrupt Khattar's prog

Chandigarh: Police on Sunday lobbed tear gas shells and used force to disperse a group of farmers who tried to march towards the venue where Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar was scheduled to inaugurate a COVID hospital. Police said the farmers jumped police barricades and they had to use force and resort to tear gas shelling to disperse them. Khattar inaugurated the newly built 500-bedded Chaudhary Devi Lal Sanjeevani COVID Hospital in Hisar and farmers were stopped before they could reach the venue, the police said. The farmers claimed that a few of them were injured in police action. A police spokesman said farmers pelted stones at the force and some personnel were injured and subsequently hospitalised.

COUNTER

POINT



14 days quarantine for those who criticise our minister over vaccination!

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Battled anxiety for
years, says Sachin



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Covaxin effective against more strains, says study

More states extend lockdown as daily toll remains high

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 16

Even as several states extended lockdowns to check the spread of the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19 and high fatalities due to it, Bharat Biotech, makers of the indigenously developed Covaxin has said their Covid-19 vaccine has been found to be effective against strains found in India and the UK.

The Hyderabad-based company cited a study published in peer-reviewed medical journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* and said vaccination with Covaxin produced neutralising titres against all key emerging variants tested, including B.1.617 and B.1.1.7, first identified in India and the UK, respectively.

The study was conducted in collaboration with the National Institute of Virology and Indian Council of Medical Research, it said. The study found a modest reduction in neutralisation by a factor of 1.95 against B.1.617 variant compared to vaccine variant D614G, Bharat Biotech noted.

The company is learnt to be in talks with Gujarat-based Hester Biosciences for the production of Covaxin.

Delhi, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday announced that they were extending the lockdown for another week, while Himachal Pradesh extended it till May 26 and Punjab till the end of the month. Many more are going the same way as the country on Sunday registered 3.11 lakh new Covid-19 cases and 4,077 deaths. Though the decline in cases may give some sense of relief to the Centre and state governments and the battered healthcare system, it is the rise in deaths that remains a major cause of worry as the fatalities are believed to be much more than reported or documented.

State to make Remdesivir available in pvt hospitals

D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 16

The state government will distribute Remdesivir directly to private hospitals to avoid overcrowding in places designated for the sale of the antiviral drug prescribed for Covid-19 patients.

The hospitals can register online for getting doses of the drug for their Covid-19 patients. The government was retailing the drug at Kilpauk medical college hospital but had to shift distribution to Nehru Indoor Stadium and since the crowds become unmanageable.

Meanwhile the union government has increased the quota of the drug allotted to the state. The Centre announced a steep rise in Remdesivir allocation to Tamil Nadu from 7,000 doses a day to 20,000 doses, which could facilitate meeting the high demand for the drug whose usefulness in treating Covid

Govt forms all-party panel on pandemic

R. MOHAN | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 16

The Tamil Nadu government announced the formation of a Covid-19 committee with representatives from all political parties. The committee will meet periodically when the representatives can join in the discussions over the handling of the pandemic as well as put forward their suggestions. The committee is also expected to act on information that the members may have about

beds, oxygen and drugs shortage at treatment centres.

The committee comprises Dr N. Ezhilan (DMK), Dr C. Vijaya Baskar (AIADMK), A.M. Munirathnam (Congress) G.K. Mani (PMK), Nainar Nagendran (BJP), Dr D. Sadan Thirumalai Kumar (MDMK), S.S. Balaji (VCK), D.P. Nagai Mali (CPM), D. Ramachandran (CPI), Jawahirullah (MNMK), R. Easwaran (KNMK), D. Velmurugan (TVK) and Poovai Jagannurthy (Puratchi Bharatham). ■ P3

patients is not endorsed by WHO. Doctors in hospitals still keep prescribing the drug for patients with severe Covid-19 infections for its usefulness in cut-

ting a patient's hospital stay by a few days. Chief minister M.K. Stalin shot off a letter to Piyush Goyal thanking him for increasing supply to the state.

Quacks come in way of enhancing testing

SANJAY BASAK | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 16

With Covid-19 cases and deaths raging across India, testing hesitancy among the rural population and small towns has emerged as a major obstacle.

A considerable number of people living in the villages and small towns are rushing to "jhola chap" doctors (quacks) to get treated for their fever, cough and cold rather than going in for Covid tests. The fear that is stalking these sections is that "those testing posi-

tive would be shifted to Covid hospitals, from where no one comes out alive".

Sandeep Sharma, a resident of a small village, Milak Khamera, in Uttar Pradesh, got himself tested only after a team of health workers reached the village on May 12. Speaking to this correspondent, he said: "We are not going for tests. It's not safe to go to the hospitals for tests." Sharma claimed that most of the villagers believed that "test karane gaye toh who pakar lenge aur hospital mein dal denge". ■ P4

States told to set up testing centre in every village

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 16

With the spread of Covid infections now getting deeper into rural areas, the Centre has issued guidelines on the containment and management of infections in semi-urban, rural and tribal areas that have much fewer means to detect, contain and treat the deadly virus.

The districts have been asked to set up a dedicated

testing centre in each village to increase surveillance and testing, have Covid Care Centres in blocks and districts must have dedicated Covid hospitals. All mild patients have to be kept in home isolation with proper monitoring, it said.

Since tribal communities are geographically and socio-economically relatively segregated and have poor access to health care, the SOP suggests

strengthening community-based management through Gram Sabha and having Mobile Medical Units (MMUs) that have medical officers, pharmacists, staff nurses and lab technicians.

This team will also carry out Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT), take samples for RT-PCR, provide treatment for mild illness, and help establish referral linkage with district health care centres.

Israeli air strikes target apartments

Gaza City, May 16: Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City flattened three buildings and killed at least 42 people on Sunday, medics said, making it the deadliest single attack since heavy fighting broke out between Israel and the territory's militant Hamas rulers nearly a week ago.

The violence, which came as international mediators worked to broker a ceasefire and stave off an Israeli ground invasion of the territory, marked the worst fighting here since the devastating 2014 war in Gaza.

The airstrikes on Sunday hit a busy downtown street of residential buildings and



The building housing the offices of The Associated Press and other media in Gaza City collapses after it was hit by an Israeli airstrike Saturday. — AP

storefronts over the course of five minutes just after midnight, destroying two adjacent buildings and one

about 50 yards down the road. At one point, a rescuer shouted, "Can you hear me?" into a hole in the rub-

ble. "Are you OK?" Minutes later, first responders pulled a survivor out and carried him off on an orange stretcher. The Gaza Health Ministry said 16 women and 10 children were among those killed, with more than 50 people wounded, and rescue efforts are still underway. Earlier, the Israeli military said it destroyed the home of Gaza's top Hamas leader, Yahiyeh Sinwar, in a separate strike in the southern town of Khan Younis. It was the third such attack in the last two days on the homes of senior Hamas leaders, who have gone underground. ■ Full story on P5

Cyclone Tauktae kills 6, hurtles towards Gujarat

DC CORRESPONDENTS
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, MAY 16

Gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tidal waves swept the coastal belt of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa as Cyclone Tauktae hurtled north towards Gujarat Sunday, leaving at least four people dead in Karnataka and two others in Goa, and damaging hundreds of houses, uprooting electricity poles and trees and forcing evacuation. Union home minister Amit Shah has directed states to ensure power supply for Covid hospitals and the cold chain taking care of vaccines.

The India Meteorological Department said Sunday evening that Cyclone Tauktae could cause heavy to very heavy rains at isolated places in north Konkan, Mumbai, Thane and Palghar in Maharashtra on Monday. It has predicted extremely heavy rainfall in Raigad on Monday.

The IMD has said while Mumbai was not in the direct line of the threat of the cyclone, as it passes through the sea near the Mumbai coast, its effect is likely to be accompanied by rain and strong winds. Mumbai had got light rain on Saturday night but not on Sunday despite the sky being mostly overcast. ■ P3



High sea waves due to cyclone Tauktae hit Bhagavathi Prem Sinken Dredger, at Surathkal Beach near Mangaluru. — PTI

Efforts on to rescue missing fishers: Min

DC CORRESPONDENT
KANYAKUMARI, MAY 16

The Tamil Nadu government has alerted the Maritime Rescue Co-ordination Centre (MRCC) to rescue the nine fishermen from Nagapattinam and Cuddalore who have been missing in the sea, fisheries and animal husbandry minister Anitha R. Radhakrishnan said.

The fishermen ventured for multi-day deep sea fishing from Kochi on April 29 have been missing after their boat was caught in the turbulent sea caused by tropical cyclone Tauktae, while fishing 300 nautical miles

off the coast.

The state government has been working in close coordination with the governments of Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Lakshadweep to ensure the safe return of the fishermen. Mr Radhakrishnan said. The Coast guard search and rescue vessels and flights have been involved in the rescue operation, he said.

The minister also visited the rain affected villages in the coastal district of Kanyakumari and gave away assistance from the chief minister's general relief fund to the families of the two persons killed in the heavy rain. ■ P3

SOUMYA'S BODY LAID TO REST IN IDUKKI CHURCH

Idukki, May 16: The funeral of Soumya Santhosh, who was killed in a Palestinian rocket attack in Israel, was held at a cemetery in Keerithodu on Sunday by adhering to Covid-19 protocol.

According to Senior church priest Fr Jose Plachickal, bishop of Idukki diocese John Nellikunnel officiated the funeral ceremonies held at the Nithya Sahaya Matha Church in Keerithodu, at around 3.45 pm.

A message of Syro-Malabar church head, Cardinal George Alencherry, was read out at the funeral.

Earlier, people, following Covid protocol, paid tribute to the departed soul as the body was kept at her residence.

Besides locals and politicians, consul-general of Israel in south India Jonathan Zadka also visited Soumya's residence to pay homage.

Talking to her relatives, Mr Zadka said Soumya is regarded as an angel by the people of Israel.

"I cannot imagine how difficult this loss would be for her family," he said.

Later, in a tweet, Mr Zadka said, "Honoured to pay my respects & convey our sympathies to the family and friends of Ms Soumya Santosh as she was laid to rest in her home town Keerithod, #Kerala. May she R.I.P. Our prayers are with the family that lost an angel in a cowardly #hamas-terror attack."

"On behalf of the Israeli people, @israelinbengaluru extends its condolences to the family at loss. We hope peace restores soon," the consul-general tweeted.

Soumya's mortal remains were brought to Kerala on Saturday via New Delhi. Soumya, 30, had been working as a housemaid in Israel for the last seven years. She was killed on Tuesday when the rocket fell on her residence in Ashkelon. — PTI



People visit a crowded market during relaxation hours from COVID-induced lockdown, in Hyderabad on Sunday. — PTI

Rains lash Kerala, water level in dams on the rise

Kochi, May 16: The water level in many dams across Kerala showed a rising trend on Sunday even as cyclone Tauktae moved away from the state's coast after wreaking havoc.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued orange alerts --a warning indicating heavy to very heavy rain-- on Sunday in three districts-Ernakulam, Idukki and Malappuram.

The catchment areas of many dams in the central Kerala districts have reported heavy rains, prompting the authorities to sound alert warnings before upping their shutters.

The Thrissur district administration said spillway shutters of the Peringalkuthu dam will be opened if the water level crosses the permitted limit of 419.41 metres.

In a statement, the administration has urged

the people living on the banks of Chalakudy river to be cautious.

Shutters of Malankara dam in Idukki district will be opened on Sunday, as the water level has increased, the district authorities said.

The administration has directed those people living on the banks of Thodupuzha river, Muvattupuzha river and their tributaries to be cautious.

In the coastal areas, high tidal waves continued to wreak havoc. Hundreds of families living in coastal areas and low lying areas of the state have been shifted to relief camps.

Indian Navy on Sunday deployed its diving and quick reaction teams in the coastal village of Chellanam in Ernakulam district, which was heavily hit by tidal waves.

The teams, braving harsh weather conditions,

undertook rescue and rehabilitation of people who got trapped in houses.

They were shifted to a relief camp at St Mary's High School in Chellanam, a Navy official has said.

Besides Chellanam in Ernakulam district, rough sea and high tidal waves had wreaked havoc in K a i p a m a n g a l a m, Chavakkad and Kodungallur in Thrissur, Pallithura in Thiruvananthapuram, Thrikkunnapuzha in Alappuzha and Bepore and Koyilandy in Kozhikode districts.

Hundreds of houses were damaged in coastal belts across the state as sea water seeped in following high waves.

According to the state government, at least nine districts have been severely affected by the sea incursion. A large number of people were shifted to relief camps in various districts. — PTI

OTHER STORIES

India Vision Institute wins India-Oz award

Chennai: India Vision Institute (IVI), an Indian NGO working to provide access to the underprivileged in remote areas and villages with vision screening and a pair of free spectacles to those in need across 20 states of India and benefiting over 400,000 children and adults, has won the IABCA Community Services Excellence Award (Organisation). The award was announced at the India-Australia Business and Community Awards (IABCA) Gala in Sydney yesterday in the presence of some 1,000 invited guests. IVI wins the award for achievements that has enhanced community spirit through initiatives empowering rural and remote underprivileged communities in India. IVI's CEO, Vinod Daniel, said "The award will encourage us to work even more with our vision to augment the primary eye care capacity of India and help children do well in their studies and adults work better and be more productive."

Ramco Cements commissions medical oxygen plant

Chennai, May 16: Ramco Cements Ltd, a part of the diversified conglomerate Ramco Group, has commissioned a plant to produce medical oxygen in Tamil Nadu at an outlay of Rs 50 lakh, the company said on Saturday.

The unit, set up at Virudhunagar, can produce 48 oxygen cylinders per day. Each cylinder can store 45 litres of liquid oxygen equal to 7,000 litres in gaseous form, a statement from the company said.

At the rate of 10 litres per minute, one cylinder can cater to a patient for 10 to 12 hours. With the continuous supply of medical oxygen from this plant, around 24 lives can be saved every day, the company said.

The medical oxygen produced at the plant would be supplied to government healthcare facilities in Rajapalayam, Virudhunagar, Sivakasi, Aruppukottai and Sathur. Tamil Nadu Industries Minister Thangam Thennarasu, Revenue Minister K K S Ramachandran and Virudhunagar district collector R Kannan formally inaugurated the facility at a function recently, the statement added. — PTI

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Civic body to intensify fever clinics in most affected zones

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 16

As the active cases and test positivity rate in the city continue to rise, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has decided to intensify fever camps, especially in zones which have the most number of active cases.

The award-winning programme which helped the GCC administration to successfully flatten the curve of the first wave had been credited with the declining trend of Covid19 related deaths in the city

The award-winning programme which helped the GCC administration to successfully flatten the curve of the first wave had been credited with the declining trend of Covid19 related deaths in the city in 2020.

Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Commissioner, GCC, who chaired a meeting on

Sunday in this regard, said that they would ensure at least two camps in each ward in the Corporation. All arrangements have been made to conduct 400 camps in 200 wards in the city. So far 1,29,324 camps have been conducted in the city since May 8 last year. A total of 65,92, 859 people attended the camps. Out of this, 18,46,773 patients were subjected to RTPCR test and subsequent treatment.

"These camps will help people to understand their health condition includ-

ing oxygen saturation level and blood sugar. The residents who are suffering from respiratory problems, especially in the most affected zones, should utilise the service of the camps," he said.

At present at least three zones – Ambattur, Anna Nagar, Kodambakkam and Adyar- have been reporting 4,000 plus active cases. Before the lockdown, the number of active cases in these zones was a little over 3,000. However, other critical zones such as Teynampet (3,765), Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar (3,859), Valasaravakkam (3,460) and Tondiarpet (3,175) continue to report 3,000 plus active cases.

Teynampet continues to be number 1 in the death toll with 674 cases. Anna Nagar (671) and Kodambakkam (662) have also crossed the 500 mark. The zone-wise death toll is as follows: Tondiarpet (422), Royapuram (457), Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar (620), Ambattur (414), Adyar (450), Madhavram (152), Valasaravakkam (289), Alandur (229) and Perungudi (216).

The death toll in the city reached 5,703 till Saturday. The fever clinics were introduced in May last year after the civic body concluded that at least 20 percent of Covid19 deaths in the city took place due to the failure from the part of residents in revealing symptoms to health workers who visited their homes as part surveys.



Health minister Ma. Subramanian inaugurates Covid health centre with 100 beds and oxygen support at Eachampakkam, on Sunday. — DC

ISRO team at Sterlite to fix snag in O₂ production

Chennai, May 16: Vedanta Ltd owned Sterlite Copper plant has roped in experts from ISRO to help rectify the technical glitch developed in the cold box of its oxygen plant, leading to a suspension in production of the life-saving gas.

The company formally commenced production of medical oxygen on Thursday and the very next day, the facility in Tuticorin, about 600kms from here, suffered a jolt in operations after developing a 'technical snag'.

In a statement shared on the micro-blogging site on Sunday, Sterlite Copper said, "efforts to resume production at our oxygen plant are progressing.

Today, an expert team from the Indian Space Research Organisation arrived at the premises to support our ongoing efforts and collaborate with our technical team."

The expert team has suggested some measures to fix the snag and resume production of oxygen. "This has helped fastrack the repair process for which we are thankful to the local administration, which was instrumental in facilitating this cooperative effort to recommence our oxygen production," Vedanta said.

The facility began producing medical oxygen on May 13 to meet the demand for the life-saving gas following a surge in

COVID cases in the state. The first set of oxygen tankers have been dispatched to the beneficiaries.

The Sterlite copper smelter plant was accorded approval by the then AIADMK government on April 26 at an all-party meeting to produce medical oxygen at its facility for a period of four months in Thothukudi.

The unit was sealed by the state government in May 2018, days after 13 agitators who were part of a protest against the company over environmental concerns, were killed in police firing during a violent anti-Sterlite stir in the southern district. — PTI

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Due to total lockdown Adyar wears a deserted look on Sunday.



NIA scanner on social media posts advocating ISIS ideology

Chennai, May 16: The NIA on Sunday carried out searches at four locations in Madurai in connection with a case relating to incriminating Facebook posts by an extremist advocating the ideology of the Islamic State terror group and fundamentalist organisation Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, an official said.

The case pertains to uploading some incriminating posts on Facebook by Mohammad Iqbal, a Madurai resident, who was arrested in December last year, he said. In social

In social media posts, Iqbal, an extremist, advocated the ideology of the ISIS terror group and Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, a fundamentalist organisation, the official of the premier investigation agency said

media posts, Iqbal, an extremist, advocated the ideology of the ISIS terror group and Hizb-Ut-Tahrir, a fundamentalist organisation, the official of the premier investigation agency said.

The posts on a Facebook page titled "Thoonga

Vizhigal Rendu is in Kazimar Street" was uploaded by Iqbal for denigrating a particular community, the official said, adding they were designed to incite communal disharmony amongst different religious groups, in a manner prejudicial to

the maintenance of public order.

The searches were conducted at Kazimar Street, K Pudur, Pethaniyapuram and Mehaboob Palayam in Madurai district.

During the operation, 16 digital devices, including a laptop, hard disks, mobile phones, memory cards, SIMs, pen drives and many incriminating books/pamphlets/documents have been recovered, the official said. Further investigation in the case continues, he added. — PTI

Covid numbers climb to scary heights in Nilgiris

B.RAVICHANDRAN
OOTY, MAY 16

The coronavirus count in Nilgiris is proving scary. The number of positive cases touched the 300 mark for the first time on Friday and on Saturday too the figure was breached as 330 cases were added to the tally. Continuing heavy rains are also adding to the woes of hill residents.

There is a ban on tourism despite which there has been a rapid surge in the corona

count. This has become a cause of concern and rising cases are posing a stiff challenge. The officials are putting up a stiff fight to check the spread in Nilgiris. They also have to contend with the topography with quite a lot of tribal hamlets being located inside deep jungles.

While 306 persons tested positive on Friday making the Nilgiris touch the 300 mark for the first time since the virus threat began a year ago, the positive

count figure touched 330 on Saturday. This showed the gravity of the situation. The local body administrations across the district have plunged into action and their staff now crisscross their jurisdiction for door-to-door surveys to identify

persons with possible symptoms. Eight private hospitals across the hills have created special Covid wards to treat Covid-19 positive cases.

Adding to the Covid woes

are the continuing heavy rains in Nilgiris, especially in the Gudalur, Pandalur and Kundah belts since Friday night. The disaster management teams are in a state of alert to respond to any emergencies that may arise due to rain and flood. On Sunday morning, Pandalur in western Nilgiris recorded 180 mm of rain. Devala near Gudalur recorded 145 mm of rain and Upper Bhavani near Ooty recorded 106 mm of rain.

Science and truth will help most in this Covid crisis



R. Mohan

Namma Chennai Diary

The second wave of the coronavirus pandemic has proved catastrophic. When viewed from afar, with a couple of thousand dead bodies floating down the Ganga, patients gasping for breath and dying in ambulances outside hospitals, ICUs appearing to have come straight out of hell and caregivers as well as Covid-19 affected scared out of their wits by what tomorrow could bring, the scene is apocalyptic. There is not even dignity in death as the poor, unable to pay for funerals, consign their

loved ones to the waters of a life-giving river.

What a monumental failure we have been as a nation, unable as we were to foresee the second wave, made worse by being unwilling to give up the belief that the worst was past us, proving incapable of saving lives that could have been rescued had we only prepared for the worst instead of celebrating a dip in the Covid surge and stupidly pointing a finger at those who think today's India resembles a line straight out of Dante's

Inferno (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here). As bodies line up in long queues at crematoriums, a dystopian scenario is playing out every minute.

Far from getting down humbly to the task of tending to the sick and tracing those who were in contact with them, we were pointing to one early religious event as the super spreader. Now, India is seen as the super spreader, the dominant strain of the coronavirus that is spreading from here causing concern to the very rich nations that may have passed on the original virus to us. This Indian variant is significantly more transmissible than even the Kent variant and along with other strains coming in from around the world may have triggered this deadly second wave in India.

Unless we have already



accepted philosophically that successive waves of the virus will carry away more Indians while we bumble along on this indistinct path, there are tasks to undertake scientifically to mitigate the crisis. Primarily, there are two things that will help us tide over this serial crisis - science and truth. Science did not say that clanging pots and pans and shining cell phone torches from dark balconies and terraces would drive the pathogen away. Truth would help us assess the extent of the

catastrophe, that is if we stop lying about the number of positive cases and, more importantly, the number of deaths.

The Covid tracker for India showed on Sunday morning that around 2.70 lakh people have classified as dead from the virus. Multiply that figure by at least four to get the true picture. Maybe, we have lost more than 10 lakh people already and those numbers will only increase as the virus travels into the hinterland and indiscriminately kills the weak and the vulnerable who do not even have access to the miracle liquid medical oxygen that could possibly save them when desaturation strikes. But then the world itself has undercounted deaths. One projection by the Economist, 'based on using known data on 121 variables, from recorded deaths

to demography' has it that one crore people have already died worldwide who would otherwise have been living if not for the Covid virus.

Unless vaccines go global, the India crisis will spread fast to the poorer nations near us first and to the rest of the world. Let us look at a particularly interesting facet of vaccine data from the US - "Of more than 117 million Americans who have been fully vaccinated, 9,245 tested positive later for Covid-19. Those illnesses have generally been mild."

Best not to let a positivity rate of 0.000079 per cent scare us off the vaccines. In the UK, with its very high degree of vaccination among the 18+ population, there were only four recorded deaths from the Indian mutant till Saturday. Even then, Big Pharma will make tons of money and if the

world's billionaires like Bill Gates were wise enough to invest in vaccines, they would be tripling their wealth that already runs into billions of dollars. Never mind that. Those who wish to live on with optimism to whatever degree of normality that may be permissible as we fight the virus must simply go and get the jab.

Forget for a moment that India's political divisions threw up an embarrassing amount of vaccine scepticism to begin with. Those very guys are lining up for the Indian vaccines now. Forget the anti-vaxxers. If they wish to defy science and live on with the risks, let them do so, though they would be threatening the health of those around them. Let science guide us further on what to do about the immunocompromised young people. Till then, it

would be best that all the world's adults vaccinate first to find the balance between precautions and a normal life.

Data on how many Indians have died since taking both doses of any of three vaccines currently available would help spread the message better because those deaths, while not non-existent, would at least throw light on the safety forms serious illness and death that the vaccines offer. Try and convince everyone who is hesitating about the vaccine to place go and get the jab in the arm. That is the duty of each citizen. Get vaccinated and rev up the hope that you will not die prematurely from Covid-19.

(R. Mohan is the Resident Editor of the Chennai and Coimbatore editions of Deccan Chronicle)

OTHER STORIES

TN receives third Oxygen Express from Jharkhand

Chennai, May 16: Tamil Nadu has received its third Oxygen Express from Jharkhand taking the total capacity of medical oxygen delivered to the southern State to 151.4 tonne, Southern Railway said on Sunday. The express from Tatanagar, Jharkhand, arrived at the Inland container depot, Tondiarpet, here, at 10 am Sunday bringing 40 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen, a press release said. Already, Tamil Nadu has received two such expresses from Odisha and West Bengal to serve COVID-19 patients.

"With the arrival of the third, the total capacity of the liquid medical oxygen is 151.4 tonne," the release said. Southern Railway said the fourth and fifth loaded oxygen expresses from Rourkela and Tata Steel Siding at Kalinganagar, Odisha, are in transit and are expected to arrive here on Monday. Meanwhile, an oxygen express left Chennai with four empty containers to Rourkela. — PTI

Rain fills Kanyakumari water bodies

From P1

Kanyakumari district has been experiencing heavy rains for the last couple of days resulting in several water bodies and reservoirs overflowing above the danger mark.

The authorities have since shifted the people living in low lying areas along the water bodies to safer places. Twenty seven houses in the district were reportedly damaged due to the rains.

Having registered widespread rainfall, Kanyakumari district on Sunday recorded a total rainfall of 830.40mm with level of 79 mm and 75.4 mm recorded respectively at Sivalogam and Surulode in the district.

Stalin appeals to media not to create fear in people's minds

From P1

The formation of the committee is seen as another step Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has taken to usher in a new era of good relations between the government and the Opposition parties and towards fostering healthy political ties. This represents a sea change from decades of rivalries between the two major Dravidian parties that used to spill over into the Assembly.

The Chief Minister also appealed to the media not to write reports that would put fear in the minds of people. He pointed out instances of government decisions being misquoted as in the issuance of orders for e-registration for movement of people which the media made out to be an e-pass system. He also asked the media not to exaggerate the situation in crematoriums.

Amit Shah chairs high-level meeting to tackle Tauktae

From P1

The very severe cyclonic storm is likely to intensify in the next 24 hours and reach the Gujarat coast on Monday evening, the IMD said earlier. It is likely to cross the Gujarat coast with wind gusts of up to 175 kmph between Porbandar and Mahuva in Bhavnagar district in the early hours of Tuesday morning.

Meanwhile, Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday chaired a high-level meeting to discuss preparedness for Cyclone Tauktae. The meeting was attended by the chief ministers of Maharashtra and Gujarat, among others, via video conferencing.

Mr Shah asked states to ensure uninterrupted power supply, particularly in hospitals where patients are recovering in ICUs and wards. Mr Shah also said power supply to cold chains storing vaccines should not be hit. It was also decided that district magistrates should ensure oxygen supplies in their districts are not affected.

Sources said the home minister was particularly concerned that health services during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic should not be affected in any manner. Adequate arrangements are being made to ensure that the supply of oxygen, medicines and transportation for critical patients to hospital should not be hampered during Cyclone Tauktae. The states were advised to take help from the National Disaster Response Force.



Milk and dairy development Minister S M Nazar launches the price-reduced Aavin milk, which is now cheaper by Rs 3 a litre, in Chennai on Sunday. Aavin GM G. Ramesh and Mylapore MLA T Velu are also present. — DC

Govt to bring 1,000 oxygen concentrators from Singapore

R.VALAYAPATHY DC TIRUCHY, MAY 16

Efforts are on to get 1,000 units of oxygen concentrators from Singapore to Tiruchy, according to State Urban development Minister K.N.Nehru. He revealed this while launching covid-19 preventive field review and the distribution of Covid-19 preventive medical kit at Karumandapam area in the city on Sunday under the presidency of District Collector Mrs S.Divyadarshini, in the presence of the State School education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi.

Front line field staff will go to door to door in these 35 wards and conduct fever, test etc. and will supply medical kits to the general public. The public can use the medical kits to recover while the most affected would be admitted in hospitals.

Mr Nehru said that there are 65 wards in the Tiruchirapalli city Corporation of which 35 wards are most affected by Covid-19. The front line field staff will go to door to door in these 35 wards and conduct fever, temperature test etc. and will supply medical kits to the general public. The public can use the medical kits to

recover while the most affected would be admitted in hospitals.

Mr Nehru said there are adequate bed facilities in Tiruchy district in Government hospitals but there is a shortage of oxygen and efforts were on to set right this shortage. The government is insisting that BHEL, Tiruchy restart oxygen production and BHEL authorities have assured that they would restart the oxygen production within a month, he added. Among others, Tiruchy east MLA Inigo Irudayaraj and Corporation commissioner S.Sivasubramanian participated in the event.

Two officials deputed for transportation of LMO

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 16

Two senior officials have been deputed for two weeks to coordinate the logistics of the transportation of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to the state from Kalinga Nagar and Rourkela through containers and tankers. The officials will be stationed at Bhubaneswar and Rourkela for a couple of weeks to ensure the smooth transportation of medical oxygen, the government order said.

The order, issued by Chief Secretary V. Irai Anbu, said that A. Periasamy, Conservator of Forests, Salem and Nishant Krishna, Under Secretary, Agriculture Department had been entrusted to coordinate with the Industries department and Tangedco in Chennai

The officials are deputed

after the state has been given allotment of 100MT LMO per day from Kalinga and Rourkela in view of spiralling cases of Covid19 that necessitated high demand of Medical Oxygen across the state.

Tangedco has so far brought in at least 110MT of LMO through containers and tankers using Railways infrastructure. These officials were selected on the recommendation of Tangedco Managing Director Pankaj Kumar Bansal.



Covid special ward preparations at Wesley school grounds at Royapettah, in Chennai on Sunday. — DC

CM to decide on June 12 Mettur dam opening: Min

G.SRINIVASAN | DC THANJAVUR, MAY 16

Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin will take a decision on opening the Mettur dam on June 12, the traditional date of opening the dam for kuruvai cultivation. The decision will be based on the views and suggestions given by farmers of delta districts at the meeting held at Thanjavur on Sunday, according to Durai Murugan, minister for water resources.

The minister heard the views of farmers representatives from nine delta districts — Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Ariyalur, Pudukottai, Tiruchy, Karur and Mayiladuthurai — at a meeting held at the collectorate here on Sunday. He said that farmers have expressed their views for and against opening the dam on June 12. They will be put before the chief minister who will decide and announce about the opening of the Mettur dam for kuruvai cultivation.

The minister said that water level stood at 97 ft at Mettur dam on Sunday. "Even if it is 92 ft, the dam can be opened for cultivation. That is a sufficient level. But to sustain the flow, the behaviour of south west monsoon should also be taken into consideration. Considering all these facts and your views, a decision will be taken by the chief minister," Durai Murugan said.

The minister dwelt at length on the Cauvery issue. He said, "The DMK government had, under



Durai Murugan, state water resources minister speaking at a meeting of farmers at Thanjavur on Sunday. — DC

the leadership of M.Karunanidhi, ensured the formation of a tribunal, an interim order and final order by the tribunal. After that DMK was not in power. But unfortunately, in the final order on the issue given by the Supreme court 14 tmc of water was reduced from the final award given by the Tribunal and the court also said that underground water should be taken into consideration. In essence, we lost 14 tmc of water."

Describing the Cauvery delta as a unique irrigation system, the minister said that PWD will be equipped with all manpower to maintain the sys-

tem. He said desilting proposals have been sent to the finance ministry for approval and desilting will be taken up wherever necessary.

A majority of the farmers who spoke at the meeting favoured the opening of the dam on June 12. Thanjavur MP, S.S.Palani Manickam said, "It is not enough if A, B, C canals are desilted, the rivers should also be desilted. Weed growth in major rivers hinders the flow of water. They should be removed and water flow ensured. Then only it will reach branch canals.

Farmers P.R.Pandian, Sundara Vimalanathan, expressed their views on

opening of dam and desilting at the meeting. Ministers

M/s M.R.K.Panneerselvam (agriculture and farmers welfare), K.N.Nehru, (municipal administration), Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi (school education) MPs S.S.Palani Manickam and S.Ramalingam, MLAs Durai.Chandrakumar and T.K.G.Neelamegam (Thanjavur), Jawahirullah (Papanasam), K.Manivasan, principal secretary, PWD, K.Gopal, principal secretary, agriculture, M.Govinda Rao, Thanjavur district collector participated in the meeting.



N Chennai youth convert autos into ambulances

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, MAY 16

A group of youth has converted auto rickshaws into ambulances fitted with medical oxygen cylinders for the benefit of poor Covid-19 patients in North Chennai. The youngsters, mostly law college students, have been engaged in the service for two weeks in Vyasarpadi.

They have helped nearly 13 patients including 11 virus-affected patients to reach hospital free of cost, said G Sarathkumar, 27, Coordinator of Viyasai Friends. Peridar Makal Udavi Maiyam, Viyasarpadi has been coordinating the logistics. Sarathkumar said five

autos were being used to transport the patients from their home to hospital and take them back home. Of the five autos, three are fitted with medical oxygen cylinders. As many as eight drivers were roped in for driving the autos and of these five are advocates and law college students doing LLB. Advocate B Premkumar, 27, LLB students - R Tamilmani, 27, T Anbarasu, 28 and N Suresh Babu, 27, are either coordinating or driving the autos.

Considering the desperate need for ambulances and medical oxygen for poor Covid patients, they have decided to run the autos fitted with the medical oxygen cylinders

enabling them patients to reach the hospital without facing any trouble. Learning about the noble gesture of the youth, local auto drivers have handed over their autos to them and they have been transporting needy patients in the five autos for nearly two weeks now.

As they have displayed their contact numbers in social media, they get phone calls from far off places including Chengalpattu and Gummidipoondi. They have been running the operation with funds received from friends and well wishers. "We plan to expand the operation after getting necessary approval and required fund", he said

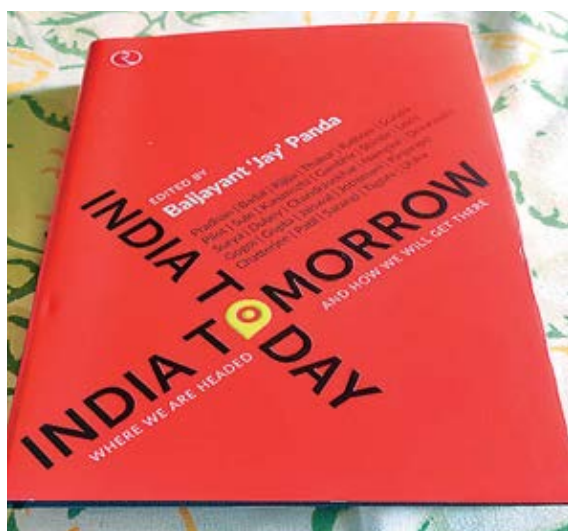
Thoughts on road ahead for modern India

R. MOHAN | DC CHENNAI, MAY 16

India was aspiring to march towards becoming a significant power at the world stage when Covid-19 struck. Great ambitions were derailed. The premise of this book of essays on how if this is truly the Asian century, as projected by analysts, then surely it is as much an Indian century, is sound enough. The timing may have spoiled it somewhat, with the march of the pandemic from March 2020. The authors were, however, able to revise their contributions in time to bring in how the virus may have

derailed India's greatest aspirations. But then it might also have brought a tie for course correction.

What make the project worthwhile is the excellent set of concepts that jumps out of the book at various times, with experts laying out what could be ideal ways for building a road map. The projection that China, which saw epochal growth in its economy over the past four decades, may see its trajectory plateau is, perhaps, wishful thinking because that country's economy has been far less damaged by Covid than any other. The precept that India is knocking at the



BOOK

REVIEW

doors of middle-income country status, is, however, acceptable.

What India does from here as it attempts to rise out of Covid-induced depths that the economy struck may define its future. The assumption is that we would have learnt so much from the disruption as to be able to rise

more uniformly as a nation and as an economy. There are useful inputs from everyone in an array of contributors from eminent thinkers on a whole range of topics and facets of India that could help lay out the correct road map.

Policy makers may do well to absorb tips from essays on administrative reforms to the energy landscape, from utilising India's demographic dividend to the gender imperative, from smart cities to the future of jobs, from promoting Indian indus-

tries to the significance of healthcare in a post-Covid world.

It may be invidious to name anyone from a cream of writers. To the credit of the compiler the articles do not reflect any particular political ideology as the intent was to gather a wide spectrum of opinion ahead of India's 75th year of Independence falling in 2022.

The compiler, Balraj Pandey, is frank enough to admit that there is no attempt at homogenisation here. And there can't be a particular worldview in "the largest, loudest and most boisterous democracy in human history."

India today, India tomorrow - Edited by Balraj J. Pandey (Rupa Publications)

SHORT TAKES

KEEP RATION SHOPS OPEN ON ALL DAYS: CENTRE

New Delhi, May 16: The Centre on Sunday asked the state governments to keep ration shops, also called fair price shops, open for a longer duration and on all days to ensure timely and safe distribution of both subsidised and free foodgrains to the poor.

An advisory in this regard has been issued by the Union Food Ministry following representations that during the current lockdown in some states/UTs, ration shops' timings have been curtailed due to which the intended beneficiaries might not be getting adequate time to lift their entitled foodgrains.

"In view of ongoing lockdown in some States/UTs, that may curtail the functioning hours of Fair Price Shop (FPS), an advisory has been issued on 15th May, 2021...to keep the FPSs open, preferably on all days of the month," the ministry said in a statement.

The Centre is distributing highly monthly subsidised foodgrains of 5 kg per person at ₹1-3 per kg via ration shops to over 80 crore poor under the National Food Security Act (NFSA).

Over and above this, additional 5kg of free grains are being distributed to the same beneficiaries under the PMGKAY (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana) scheme for two months — May-June in order to minimise economic hardships being faced by the NFSA beneficiaries during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic.

ANTI-COVID DRUG 2-DG TO BE RELEASED TODAY

New Delhi, May 16: The first batch of anti-Covid drug 2-DG, developed by the DRDO, will be released on Monday by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, officials said.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DGCI) has approved the oral drug for emergency use as an adjunct therapy in moderate to severe coronavirus patients, the defence ministry said earlier this month.

The officials said the first batch of the drug will be released by the two ministers at an event at the headquarters of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) here.

The ministry, on May 8, said the clinical trials of the drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose (2-DG), showed that it helps in a faster recovery of hospitalised patients and reduces supplemental oxygen dependence.

The approval of the drug has come at a time when India is grappling with a record-breaking wave of the coronavirus pandemic that has stretched the country's healthcare infrastructure to its limit.

"In the ongoing second Covid-19 wave, a large number of patients are facing severe oxygen dependency and need hospitalisation. The drug is expected to save precious lives due to the mechanism of its operation in the infected cells. This also reduces the hospital stay of Covid-19 patients," the ministry had said.

PURI JAGANATH TEMPLE CLOSED TILL JUNE 15

Puri, May 16: Keeping in view the surge of Covid-19 cases in Odisha and also in Puri, the authorities of the temple of Lord Jagannath in the pilgrim town on Sunday announced that the 12th century would remain out of bounds for the public till June 15. The famous temple is closed for the devotees since May 5 as a state-wide lockdown was imposed by the Odisha government.

The Shree Jagannatha Temple Administration made the decision to keep the temple closed for people till June 15 at a review meeting chaired by SJTA Chief Administrator Dr Krishan Kumar and attended by Puri Collector Samarth Verma. The administration of the temple in Puri is under the law department of the state government and the SJTA, which is responsible for management of the shrine, is headed by a senior IAS officer.

It was also decided at the meeting to review the standard operating procedure from time to time, keeping in view the evolving situation. Though members of the temple will not be allowed to enter the temple, all the age-old rituals of the deities continue with the help of servitors and the temple administration officials, Kumar said.



A deserted view of the Howrah Bridge during the first day of the ongoing Covid induced lockdown in Kolkata on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY



Health workers wearing PPE wait to admit a Covid-19 patient upon his arrival at a newly constructed 500 ICU beds Covid-19 care centre at Ramlila maidan opposite LNJP hospital in New Delhi, on Sunday. —PTI

New SoP for close monitoring of O₂ level

Modi directs states to intensify the vaccination drive to cover the population as soon as possible

From Page 1

It has been advised to utilise tele-medicine and tele-consultation to bridge the geographical inaccessibility in tribal areas.

Patients, their contacts and suspected cases have to be closely monitored for oxygen levels and lung infection. The SOP prescribes home isolation for mild cases to be managed with paracetamol, and if needed other drugs like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Naproxen or ibuprofen. In mild cases, if symptoms persist beyond seven days (persistent high-grade fever/ worsening cough) low dose oral steroids -- dexamethasone 6

mg/Methylprednisolone 32mg -- can be used. For moderate cases, Tab Ivermectin or HCQ, inhalational Budesonide can be given. Anticoagulation shall also be provided.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday held a meeting with the chief ministers of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Puducherry to review the Covid situation.

The states have been asked to intensify the vaccination drive to cover the population as soon as possible. The priority has to be given to 45-plus people who are going for their second dose.

In several parts of the country nearly no vaccinations took place Sunday as vaccines stocks ran out.

CONG. MP SATAV DIES AFTER BATTLING VIRUS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, MAY 16

Senior Congress leader Rajiv Satav breathed his last on Sunday in Pune's Jehangir hospital days after recovering from the Coronavirus infection. The 46-year-old Congress leader was battling with the Covid related complications from the last 23 days.

He was also suffering from Cytomegalovirus. Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and leader of opposition in Maharashtra Assembly Devendra Fadnavis among other leaders have expressed grief over the death of Satav and paid their rich tributes to him.

In a statement issued by Jehangir hospital said, "Rajeev Satav became RT-PCR swab negative on May 9, 2021. However, after a prolonged illness he succumbed to secondary pneumonia with multi-organ dysfunction on May 16."

Mr. Satav was on ventilator and road to recovery from the disease, but he was also suffering from Cytomegalovirus and other infections. As a result, his condition was critical. Maharashtra public health minister Rajesh Tope was personally monitoring his conditions and was taking updates from the doctors.



A nomad woman walks with her horse along the deserted Dal Lake during strict lockdown imposed in Jammu and Kashmir by Government administration to contain the surge in Covid-19 cases, in Srinagar, on Sunday. — PTI

Quacks come in way of enhancing testing

FROM PG 1

(If we go for tests, we will be forcibly admitted to the hospitals). Of the 500 villagers living in Milak Khanderi, the team of health workers managed to test only 75 of them. Sharma was among those tested. They are still waiting for the reports.

Sharma virtually boasted that there had been "no Covid-19 cases" in his village. When asked how he would know since no one had got tested so far, he only said: "Koi tot abhi tak mara nahi" (No one has died so far).

A similar problem continues to plague Chausa, the village in Bihar which

hit the headlines as several bloated and decomposed bodies were flushed out from the river in this particular region. Ashwini Varma, a social activist, lawyer and president of the Mahararishi Chausa Thermal Power Mazdoor Sangh, claimed that "log darke maare test nahi kara rahe hain" (People are not getting tested as they are scared). It's the fear of testing positive which is apparently preventing the villagers from getting tested. Varma further claimed that besides fear, the lack of infrastructure in Buxar was another major reason for the lack of testing. "Shortage of oxygen, hos-

pital beds and vaccines" continue to hit Buxar, Varma said.

In fact last year, a paper published on "Coronavirus Testing Hesitancy among the Masses in India", by Priya Thappa and Kirtan Rana, had said clearly that "in spite of the clear instructions from the government that no loss of wages should be suffered by people undergoing quarantine, many people, especially the ones belonging to the economically weaker sections of society, still face the fear of losing their livelihood". One of the other major factors contributing to the hesitation could be the long

waiting period between the sample collection and declaration of reports. The paper further claimed that "apart from these spheres, the lesser discussed issue is the social stigma associated with it".

In Jaipur, Deepak Khandelwal, a businessman, was facing a herculean task to get his workers tested. Even threats of "sacking" them have failed to work. "The workers are scared that if they go for tests, they would be forcibly quarantined in some centres and no one would come out alive."

Khandelwal claimed the majority of his workers were in a "denial mode".

Cyclone: Vaccination drive on hold

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 16

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation of (BMC) has cancelled Covid vaccination scheduled on Monday in view of the IMD alert regarding cyclone Tauktae. The BMC on Saturday night shifted 580 patients from jumbo Covid facilities to state and civic-run hospitals in Mumbai. The IMD has said there is likelihood of heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in Mumbai on Monday. An orange alert has been issued for Mumbai and red alert for Raigad district in Maharashtra.

As per Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) warning the Cyclonic storm Tauktae is

likely to pass close to Mumbai city.

The Mumbai civic body has also informed that the revised schedule will be Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (May 18 to May 20). According to the IMD, cyclone Tauktae has intensified into a "very severe cyclonic storm" and is expected to reach the Gujarat coast in the evening hours of May 17 and cross it with wind gusts of up to 175 kmph (109 mph) between Porbandar and Mahuva in Bhavnagar district around the early Tuesday morning.

The BMC had already suspended the inoculation drive on May 15 and 16 to avoid troubles for people due to the heavy rain and windstorm ahead of cyclone Tauktae.

UDDHAV URGES FAMILY PHYSICIANS TO JOIN STATE'S COVID-19 FIGHT

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MAY 16

In a bid to make a fight against the Coronavirus pandemic more comprehensive, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has appealed to the family physicians in the state to lend a hand in treating the Covid-19 patients, who are under home isolation.

He has also requested the private doctors to extend their services in the Covid care centres in their vicinity.

"Nearly 70 to 75 per cent coronavirus patients are asymptomatic and undergo treatment by staying in

home isolation. It makes the role of family physicians very important as they can help in managing the treatment protocols of these patients more effectively," said Mr Thackeray on Sunday.

He was addressing an online medical conference on Covid treatment, which was attended by nearly 17,500 private medical practitioners across the state. The conference was a part of Maharashtra Government's Majha Doctor (My Doctor) initiative launched with an aim of involving family doctors in the state's fight against the Coronavirus.

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 16

In an unprecedented outburst, heavyweights Trinamul Congress MLA Madan Mitra raised his voice against the rampant sale of emergency requirements — from oxygen cylinders to Remdesivir to hospital beds — for Covid-19 patients in West Bengal at exorbitant black market rates.

Though the former state transport minister did not name the brains behind the illegal business of profiteering, his explosive claims are bound to cause an embarrassment to party supremo Mamata Banerjee as she is not only the chief minister but the state's health minister too.

Mr Mitra's high-voltage allegations came days after he failed to get a berth in Ms Banerjee's third Cabinet despite his victory by a good margin over Raju Banerjee of the

BJP at Kamarhati, where he had lost to Manas Mukherjee of the CPI(M) in 2016.

On Facebook Live Saturday, the TMC MLA said: "On one hand oxygen, which saves life, and Remdesivir and steroids, which are life-saving drugs, are sold in the black market while on the other, beds are unavailable in the hospitals. I know such nursing homes, which I do not want to name, charging anything in between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakhs per bed."

He added: "In the name of treatment on a ventilator, a patient is shown getting the facility only when his family members come to visit him. As soon as they leave, the patient is shifted to the general ward. Even after brain death, it is said ECMO has been underway, the patient is on life support, ventilator, etc."

SELF ISOLATION

Edamalakkudy, the first tribal panchayat where there is zero positive cases

Kerala tribals face Covid by 'self lockdown'

Idukki (Ker), May 16: Confining himself to his forest hamlet isolating from the outside world seems to be a non-issue for Rajesh, a tribal youth living in Oonjampara, a settlement located over five kms away from Marayur here. If anyone asks if he is not missing his frequent trips to the nearby town these days, he has a clear but sure answer: "This isolation is for our well-being only...to keep this disease away. Isn't it?" This wisdom has helped a section of forest dwellers in this

hill district to keep Covid-19 at bay in their hamlets, at a time when the entire country is reeling under its second wave.

Long before the government clamped lockdown officially, they were confined to their fringe hamlets isolating themselves to ensure that no one among them got infected. They came out of the shelter of forests only rarely to collect essential articles, baby food and medicines.

They were also not hesitant to request the outsiders including police

● **HEALTH AND FOREST department officials are constantly monitoring the situations and conducting periodic health checks in these settlements.**

and health workers to ensure that they are not carriers of the virus while visiting them. Edamalakkudy, the first tribal panchayat of the state located about 30 kms away from the tourist town Munnar here, is the only panchayat in the southern state now where there is

zero positive case, thanks to the self isolation.

A habitation of Muthuvann community, around 3,000 people, belonging to over 750 families are living in more than 25 settlements in this village. Located inside the Munnar forest division, the remote hamlet, having no proper road or other connectivity, has now become a model for the entire world outside to emulate in their fight against the pandemic.

Besides Edamalakkudy, the inhabitants of Koodalkattukudy, a tribal

ward in Marayur panchayat, have also succeeded in keeping their settlements Covid free so far through self-isolation.

Located about five kms away from Marayur, there are over 1,300 tribals, belonging to 500 families of Muthuvann and Hill Pulaya community, living in 9 settlements in this panchayat ward. If 'oorukootam', the tribal council, of Edamalakkudy had decided to adopt self-isolation when the first wave of Covid-19 hit the country, the dwellers of

Koodalkattukudy isolated themselves from the outside world from the beginning of this April.

Health and Forest department officials are constantly monitoring the situations and conducting periodic health checks in these settlements. Twenty-five-year old Rajesh, belonging to Oonjampara settlement of Koodalkattukudy, said everyone, cutting across all age groups, are diligently obeying the directives of the tribal council to follow self-isolation. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

VENEZUELA FLAYS 'KIDNAPPING' OF EIGHT SOLDIERS

Caracas, May 16: Venezuela on Saturday condemned what it said was the "kidnapping" of eight soldiers by armed groups operating on the Colombian border, where clashes have been ongoing for nearly two months. "During the fighting, eight professional soldiers were captured and on May 9 we received proof of life," Venezuelan Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said in a televised statement.

"We denounce before the international community... the appalling kidnapping of these soldiers," he said.

Venezuela's armed forces have engaged in clashes with Colombian armed groups along the border since March 21, displacing thousands of civilians who fled to Colombia.

Venezuela does not name the armed groups it blames for the unrest, apart from calling them "terrorists" or linking them to drug trafficking.

EXTENSION OF C.J. TENURE WRONG: ZIMBABWE COURT

Harare, May 16: Zimbabwe's High Court on Saturday ruled that President Emmerson Mnangagwa's controversial extension of tenure of the country's top judge is illegal.

Mnangagwa announced last week that he had extended Luke Malaba's term of office by five years, just hours before the Chief Justice was to due to retire, a move seen as aimed at consolidating the president's power. Three high court judges sat through Friday night as lawyers argued over the legality of the extension.

The court ruled on Saturday that "Malaba ceased being a judge and Chief Justice of Zimbabwe at 0000hrs on 15 May 2021." Malaba has been accused of favouring Mnangagwa's administration. He dismissed opposition leader Nelson Chamisa's presidential election petition following the 2018 vote.

Decrying the ruling as "baseless and meaningless", the government said the case was "a typical case of judicial overreach".

TWO KIDS FOUND DEAD IN ARIZONA, MOM DETAINED

Tempe (Arizona), May 16: Two children were found dead Saturday morning in a suburban Phoenix apartment after a woman flagged down a police officer and said she was hearing voices telling her to kill her children, police said.

Officers went to her apartment and found a nine-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy dead with "obvious signs of physical trauma," Tempe Police spokesman Sgt. Steven Carbajal said. The mother who flagged down a Tempe officer about 7 a.m. near a police station is Yui Inoue, 40, Carbajal said in a statement.

Inoue was arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder, he said. No other identities have been released. Police said they had been called to the same apartment earlier Saturday morning because of a domestic dispute involving a husband and wife. Carbajal said the couple was separated, and no one was arrested. The children were safe in bed at the time, and there was no apparent reason to call child welfare authorities.

EASING AFRICA'S ECONOMIC WOES AT VIRTUAL MEET

Paris, May 16: French President Emmanuel Macron will on Tuesday host a virtual summit of European and African leaders to seek solutions to the financial crisis in Africa, where governments hope to boost development while managing massive debts.

The "summit on financing African economies" was planned last year after the International Monetary Fund calculated that African economies risk running into a total "financial gap" of \$290 billion by 2023.

Economic growth on the continent, which experienced its first recession last year, is expected to rebound to 3.4 percent this year and 4.0 percent in 2022. A moratorium on debt servicing, put in place in April 2020 by the G20 and Paris Club group of creditor nations, has given Africa a bit of breathing space, suspending the repayment of 5.7 billion euros (\$6.9 billion) by 50 countries.

The G20 also convinced China, by far the biggest bilateral lender on the continent, and private creditors to take part in future debt negotiations.

Israel kills 42 as Bibi warns war will go on

Prime Minister says country wants to levy a heavy price on the militant Hamas rulers of Gaza City



People inspect the rubble of the Yazegi residential building that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike, in Gaza City, on Sunday.

BIDEN TALKS TO ABBAS ON GAZA ESCALATION

Ramallah, May 16: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has spoken on the phone with President Joe Biden and urged the US to intervene in the conflict and "put an end to Israeli attacks on Palestinians".

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa says Abbas on Saturday updated Biden on the escalations across the Palestinian territories and said he was working to halt "the Israeli aggression against our people and to reach a cease-fire". The report says Abbas also told Biden that "security and stability will be achieved when the Israeli occupation ends," adding that Palestinians are ready and willing to work toward peace with international mediators.

Biden stressed the need to achieve calm and reduce violence in the Mideast, noting intensive American diplomatic efforts to that end. That's according to the Wafa statement.

Biden told Abbas on Saturday that Hamas must stop rocket attacks on Israel, the White House said.

Biden "stressed the need for Hamas to cease firing rockets into Israel," a statement said.

Biden also "underscored his strong commitment to a negotiated two-state solution as the best path to reach a just and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

— AFP

CHINA ASKS UN COUNCIL TO ACT, SLAMS U.S.

Beijing, May 16: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has called on the UN Security Council to seek an early de-escalation of violence between Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers. He also blamed the US for the council's lack of action so far.

"Regrettably, the council has so far failed to reach an agreement, with the United States standing on the opposite side of international justice," the state-run Xinhua News Agency quoted Wang as saying in a phone conversation Saturday with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

He expressed support for a two-state solution, and said China, which holds the Security Council presidency this month, expects all parties to speak.

— AP

Why were news offices destroyed, asks media

Gaza City, May 16: News organisations demanded an explanation Saturday for an Israeli airstrike that targeted and destroyed a Gaza City building housing the offices of The Associated Press, broadcaster Al-Jazeera and other media outlets.

AP journalists and other tenants were safely evacuated from the 12-storey al-Jalaa tower after the Israeli military warned of an imminent strike.

Three heavy missiles hit the building within the hour, disrupting coverage of the ongoing conflict between Gaza's Hamas

rulers and Israel.

At least 145 people in Gaza and eight in Israel have been killed since the fighting erupted on Monday night.

"The world will know less about what is happening in Gaza because of what happened today," AP President and CEO Gary Pruitt said.

He said the American news agency was seeking information from the Israeli government and engaging with the US State Department to learn more.

Mostefa Souag, acting director-general of Al-Ja-

zeera Media Network, called the strike a "war crime" and a "clear act" to stop journalists from reporting on the conflict. Kuwait state television also had office space in the now-collapsed Gaza City building.

"The targeting of news organisations is completely unacceptable, even during an armed conflict. It represents a gross violation of human rights and internationally agreed norms," Barbara Trionfi, the executive director of the International Press Institute, said.

— AP

Israel faces highest ever rate of rocket attacks

Jerusalem, May 16: Israel has faced the highest ever rate of rocket attacks on its territory during its latest confrontation with the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas that controls Gaza, the army said Sunday.

Since Monday, armed groups in Gaza have fired about 3,000 rockets towards Israel, surpassing the pace during an escalation in 2019 and during the 2006 war with Lebanon's Hezbollah, said Major General Ori Gordin.

Gordin, commander of Israel's home front, presented a graphic to reporters with data of rockets fired toward Israel in past years and now.

During an escalation in November 2019 between the army and the Islamic Jihad group, 570 rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel over three days. And in the 2006 war with the Iran-backed Hezbollah, a total of 4,500 rockets were fired at Israel over 19 days, according to the data Gordin shared with reporters.

Asked if the pace since Monday was the highest ever rate of rocket attacks on Israeli territory, Gordin said: "Not only do I agree, this is what I present."

— AFP

03 days: 570 rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel during escalation between army and Islamic Jihad group in Nov. 2019.

19 days: A total of 4,500 rockets fired at Israel during 2006 war with the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Protesters in US cities decry airstrikes

Los Angeles, May 16: Pro-Palestinian protesters took to the streets of Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and other US cities to demand an end to Israeli airstrikes over the Gaza Strip.

Thousands of people shut down traffic on a major thoroughfare in west Los Angeles on Saturday as they marched two miles from outside the federal building to the Israeli consulate. The protesters

waved signs that said "free Palestine" and shouted "long live intifada," or uprising. In San Francisco, a raucous crowd banged drums and yelled "Palestine will be free" as they marched across the Mission district to Dolores Park. A similar scene played out in Boston as protesters walked a short distance from Copley Square to the Israeli Consulate for New England, blocking traffic.

Footage on social media shows protesters unfurl a banner in the colours of the Palestinian flag with the words "Free Palestine" while standing on top of the awning of the building where the consulate is located. In Washington, thousands of protesters streamed from the Washington Monument and to the National Archives.

In Philadelphia, demonstrators filled Rittenhouse Square to decry US support for Israel. At a protest in Pittsburgh, one speaker called on lawmakers to put restrictions on how Israel can spend aid from the United States.

The protests were stoked by five days of mayhem that left at least 145 Palestinians dead in Gaza and eight dead on the Israeli side. The violence, set off by Hamas firing a rocket into Israel on Monday, came after weeks of mounting tensions and

heavy-handed Israeli measures in contested Jerusalem. Israel stepped up its assault and slammed the Gaza Strip with airstrikes Saturday, in a dramatic escalation that included bombing the home of a senior Hamas leader, killing a family of 10 in a refugee camp and destroying a building that house the offices of The Associated Press and other media.

— AP

Qatar FM wants attacks to stop

Doha, May 16: Qatar's foreign minister on Saturday met with the political chief of Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas and called for an end to Israel's bombardment of Gaza, state media said.

"The international community must act urgently to put an end to Israel's brutal and repeated attacks against civilians in Gaza and (Jerusalem's) Al-Aqsa mosque," Qatar's Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said in a statement carried by the official QNA news agency.

He also assured Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh of Qatar's support for its "Palestinian brothers".

Their meeting came amid days of Israeli air strikes on Gaza, the group's stronghold, in response to rocket fire by Palestinian militants in the coastal strip.

The violence was sparked by clashes between Palestinian

demonstrators and Israeli forces at the flashpoint Al-Aqsa mosque compound, one of the holiest sites in Islam.

Hamas issued an ultimatum for Israel to remove its forces, then started firing rockets into the Jewish state.

"We warned that the blessed Al-Aqsa mosque was a red line and we told Netanyahu: 'Don't play with fire'," Haniyeh, who lives in exile, told hundreds of supporters at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Doha.

He was speaking hours after an Israeli air strike flattened a building housing international media outlets, including The Associated Press and Qatar-based Al Jazeera.

Qatar, a key Hamas backer, has used its vast natural gas riches to provide aid and loans to Israeli-blockaded Gaza as well as mediating with Israel.

— AFP



Antonio Guterres

ISRAEL STRIKES ON GAZA 'DISTURB', 'DISMAY' UN CHIEF

United Nations, May 16: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "dismayed" by civilian casualties in Gaza and "deeply disturbed" by Israel's strike on a building containing international media outlets, a spokesman said.

Guterres spoke as Israel pummeled the Gaza Strip with air strikes, killing 10 members of an extended family and demolishing the 13-floor Gaza building housing Qatar-based Al Jazeera and the Associated Press news agency, with Palestinian militants firing back barrages of rockets. "The Secretary-General is dismayed by the increasing number of civilian casualties, including the death of 10 members of the same family."

— AFP

EGYPT SENDS AMBULANCES TO BRING WOUNDED

Cairo, May 16: Egypt opened its Rafah border crossing with Gaza Saturday to allow 10 ambulances to transport Palestinians seriously wounded in Israeli air strikes to Egyptian hospitals, medical officials said.

Egypt "exceptionally opened the Rafah crossing to allow 10 Egyptian ambulances into the Gaza Strip to transport wounded Palestinians... to be treated in Egypt," a medical official said.

An official at the Gaza border said the opening was "exceptional" because it is usually closed during public holidays including Eid al-Fitr.

The Egyptian public health authority said that the holiday was being suspended for some Egyptian doctors and nurses.

— AFP

BIG | CAT

Animal owner maintains 2017 murder charge against him for fatal shooting was in self-defence

Police: Missing Texas tiger has been found safe, healthy

Houston, May 16: A tiger that frightened residents after it was last seen briefly wandering around a Houston neighbourhood has been found after a nearly week-long search and appears to be unharmed, police announced Saturday evening.

In a short video tweeted by Houston police, Cmdr. Ron Borza can be seen sitting next to the tiger, petting the animal and saying it has been a long week searching for it. "But we got him, and he's healthy," Borza said as the wife of the man police allege is

the animal's owner sat next to him and fed the tiger with a baby bottle.

The tiger was being held at BARC, the city of Houston's animal shelter, but was expected to be taken Sunday morning to the Cleveland Amory Black Beauty Ranch, an animal sanctuary in Murchison, Texas, located south-east of Dallas. Authorities had been searching for the tiger, a nine-month-old male named India, since it was spotted May 9 in a west Houston neighbourhood. At the time, it was nearly shot by an off-duty

deputy before being whisked away in a car by Victor Hugo Cuevas, who police allege is the owner.

At a news conference later Saturday evening, Borza said that Cuevas' wife, Giorgiana, turned over the tiger to police on Saturday after a friend of hers reached out to officials at BARC. "It is Victor's tiger. That's what I was told by (Giorgiana Cuevas) ... She says they've had that animal for nine months," Borza said. He alleged that the tiger was passed around to different people but that Cuevas'

wife knew where the tiger was at all times this week as authorities searched for it. Police are still trying to determine where exactly the tiger was held this week and if any charges related to having the tiger will be filed.

Tigers are not allowed within Houston city limits under a city ordinance unless the handler, such as a zoo, is licensed to have exotic animals. But Cuevas' attorney, Michael W. Elliott, on Saturday night continued to insist his client doesn't own the tiger, saying, "I am not sure it

makes any difference who technically owns India as he does not have a birth certificate or title."

"Victor was not the primary owner of India nor did India stay with him the majority of the time," Elliott told The Associated Press. "Victor was however involved in the caretaking of India often. Victor loves India as anyone else would love a favorite pet ... He treated India with love and fantastic treatment in all respects." Cuevas was arrested Monday by Houston police and charged with evading arrest for

allegedly fleeing his home with the tiger after officers had responded to a call about a dangerous animal.

At the time of his arrest by Houston police, Cuevas was already out on bond for a murder charge in a 2017 fatal shooting in neighbouring Fort Bend County. Cuevas has maintained the shooting was self-defence, Elliott said. Cuevas was released on a separate bond for the evading arrest charge on Wednesday. But prosecutors in Fort Bend County then sought to have him held with no bond on the

murder charge.

After an all-day hearing on Friday, a judge revoked Cuevas' current \$125,000 bond on the murder charge and issued a new bond for \$300,000.

He remains jailed. During Friday's court hearing, Waller County Sheriff's Office Deputy Wes Manion, who lives in the Houston neighbourhood where the tiger was seen, testified he interacted with the animal for about 10 minutes to make sure it didn't go after someone else.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

17 MAY 2021

Covid-19 in India is more than a crisis of numbers

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's exhortation to states to be transparent with the Covid-19 numbers — mainly about the number of people who test positive and those who fall victim to the virus — could not have come at a more opportune time than now as there have been reports of numbers being fudged by several states, including Gujarat and Delhi. Worse, the officials have still not yet completed counting the bodies of Covid victims floating in the river Ganga even as those bizarre images have created consternation among Indians living in India and abroad.

The world has lived with the virus for one-and-a-half years. Medical science and responsible administrations all over the world have come out of their initial confusion on the ways to deal with the micro-organism, and have developed fairly elaborate treatment protocols. There are also proper guidelines on ways to count a death as a Covid-related one. However, the reports coming from Gujarat inspire little confidence as the number of death certificates issued in the state far outnumber the recorded Covid deaths; it also bears little comparison with the number of total deaths in the previous years, giving room for suspicion that the government has discounted some. Such allegations are not limited to Gujarat; there are states which refuse to list a death under the Covid head once the patient tested negative and then succumbed to medical conditions triggered or exacerbated by the viral infection. Accurate data is critical to the proper analysis of the impact of the pandemic that would guide policymakers and scientists into taking proper decisions. Hence the Prime Minister is right in telling the states that they should be transparent with numbers "without pressure of high numbers showing adversely on their efforts".

The bodies floating in the holy river points to a deeper malaise. Governmental apathy last year had lakhs of guest workers, women and children included, walking hundreds of kilometres to their homes after losing their livelihoods in the cities in the aftermath of the national lockdown. There was no government to help them out, and hundreds of Indians died on the road. The government, in fact, has no data on them. They presented this nation with images that generations will remember with a sense of shame and guilt.

A repeat of what Indian roads saw last year is happening on its rivers now. Villagers with infected lungs that disallowed them to breathe could not get oxygen, a hospital bed, a shot of life-saving drug and die helpless deaths. Their bodies are flung in the waters, as relatives have no wherewithal, financial and otherwise, to attend to the dead and accord them a decent farewell. The bodies of Indians float, or caught in the current, or stuck in the rocks or nibbled by crows and vultures. What we miss is the presence of a government, central and state, mandated to protect the right to life, guaranteed by the Constitution. All we need is a government that is willing to do a minimum job.

The Prime Minister is right: we should have accurate numbers. Yes, we miss the numbers. But we miss a government more. And it shows.

Bengal gov must follow norms

West Bengal governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's public observations in the context of post-poll violence in the state appear to be a bundle of contradictions. Last Friday, visiting Dhubri district in Assam, where according to him 175 people from his state died to be safe from post-poll violence, Mr Dhankhar expressed "concern" that chief minister Mamata Banerjee had maintained "silence" on this issue and on the subject of post-poll violence as such. He noted at the same time, "I should not say much as the cases are under investigation."

Well, if the cases are being investigated, then the CM has clearly not been silent. So, where is the misdemeanour on her part that the governor darkly hints at? Without a shred of evidence, and when investigation is on, the governor seems to have done his best to give a communal touch to the violence. This is a matter of record and deserves to be discussed in the state legislature.

If the governor's numerous observations were to be placed before a commission of inquiry, it might become amply clear that the burden of his song is that law and order does not exist in the state and that the constitutional machinery has broken down. If such is indeed his extraordinary reading, it is not clear what prevents him from reporting exactly this to the Centre, and recommending President's rule.

It is noteworthy that Mr Dhankhar, although a Constitutional head with severely circumscribed authority except the discretionary powers to appoint a CM, has been touring various parts of the state to study first-hand the post-poll violence situation. He has visited Cooch Behar and Nandigram. His most unusual Assam visit was also in the same context.

The state government frowned on these trips (when an inquiry is on). These did not deter him. For a governor, to make repeated forays into the countryside is unconventional, to say the least. It is akin to the role that Opposition parties, journalists, and NGOs play. In a formal communication, the chief secretary has now urged Mr Dhankhar to desist from further trips since the state has just been placed under a lockdown to deal with Covid. It is to be seen if the governor's wanderlust gets the better of constitutional propriety.

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Sanjaya Baru
Sanjayovacha



The mango as a metaphor: The pluralism of our palate & politics

For the second year in a row Covid-19 has disrupted India's mango exports to the United States because the two governments have not been able to devise a solution to the problem of securing US government clearance of export consignments. India's mango exports to the US were the fruit of prolonged negotiations that finally came to fruition as part of the new strategic partnership inaugurated by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

In June 2007 I was presented with the opportunity of handing over the first basket of mangoes legally imported into the United States to then US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice at the annual meeting of the US-India Business Council (USIBC) in Washington D.C. I insisted that the USIBC include in the basket that I was to hand over to Ms Rice at least ten different varieties of mangoes, and not just the most popular export variety — Alphonso or Hapus.

While presenting the basket I said to Ms Rice that it represented India's national motto — unity in diversity. Every Indian regards the mango as the "king of fruits", I told her, but each In-

dian has his/her own favourite variety, and most of us can get very argumentative about which is the best variety.

The diversity in the subcontinent's preference for its favourite fruit is a metaphor for an India that is home to around 1,500 varieties of mangoes. While Maharashtra's Alphonso and Gujarat's Kesar dominate the export basket, other varieties like Andhra Pradesh's Banganapalli and Uttar Pradesh's Langra are also being increasingly marketed around the country and exported overseas.

But the immensely popular mango is not the only edible symbol of unity in diversity. Consider the case of the biryani. The social media has seen from time to time animated arguments about which is the best biryani among biryani aficionados and the authority of food columnists has often been summoned to pass judgement. Yet, between the biryani of Malabar, Bengal, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Chettinad and a dozen other places, it is difficult to select the best.

In the larger discussion on India's plurality and diversity, the culinary preferences of over a billion and a quarter people does not get the attention it deserves.

Just as most Indians who agree that democracy is the best form of governance would have sharp differences on which political party they would support in the interests of preserving that democracy, most of us would be united in our view that Indian food is the tastiest in the world, and yet argue about which part of India offers the most scrumptious cuisine. Unity in diversity is written into our social and cultural DNA.

Foreigners used to imagining that Indian food is tandoori chicken and mattar paneer or dosa and sambar are always surprised by the diversity of what Indian kitchens can conjure up. From imagining that there is something called Indian cuisine, they slowly get used to the idea that there may well be a north, east and south Indian cuisine. But when they discover that "Rayalaseema ruchulu" can be very different from "Telangana vantakalu", they give up looking for a common thread.

I have so far made a series of fairly obvious observations. Who would disagree with any of these statements? If we are a land of 1,500 mangoes, we are also the land of 15,000 gods and goddesses and 150,000 local deities. While

the Constitution recognises 22 official languages, close to 20,000 languages and dialects are spoken as the mother tongue across the subcontinent.

The miracle of Indian democracy and development is that despite this diversity the country has remained united and the roots of national unity now run deep into the soil of Mother India. Against this background, the desperate attempts by certain political elements to impose one religion, one language, one election on this diversity is an insult to the national imagination and an affront to our national personality.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the resistance to the "Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan" project has most recently been asserted by a clutch of regional political parties in the non-Hindi-speaking states. The electoral victory of the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal and the DMK in Tamil Nadu are only recent examples. They remind those who need reminding that diversity has never been India's weakness. Rather, it is its strength since it prevents the emergence of majoritarian authoritarianism.

If there is one lesson that the present political leadership in New Delhi should re-learn, it is that India cannot

be governed as if it was a land of homogeneity. Unity is rarely imposed on a nation from the outside. It is the product of shared values, interests, culture and experience.

No Indian has to be commanded to love the mango. That love is second nature to us. No Indian can be commanded to love just one variety of the mango. That assertion of independent thinking too is second nature to us.

There is much that political and religious leaders can learn from the preferences of the Indian palate. The national popularity of a dosa and a tandoori naan has not been imposed on us by any overbearing political philosophy of national unity. They have become popular across the length and breadth of the subcontinent because, like the majestic mango, we have all come to like their taste. We have our own favourite biryani and we love our own language, but we recognise that we belong to one nation.

The writer is an economist, a best-selling author and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His latest book is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution.

Subhani



Israel's brutality in Gaza has dented heroic image



Mohan Guruswamy

The ongoing Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip is horrific in its ferocity and far exceeds any limits of justifiable and even acceptable retribution. There was once an image of the Israelis being a people of heroic dimensions and sterling character forged by the many tyrannies that the Jewish diaspora have suffered, including the industrial scale programme of extermination by Nazi Germany.

The founding of the State of Israel held out the promise of a new nation that, being tempered by their experiences and motivated by the high idealism of its founders, would give the world something to look up to. It was this idealism that inspired India to be among the first three nations to recognise Israel.

The first generations of Israeli leadership, drawn from the European Jewry known as the "Ashkenazim", were generally liberal and progressive. This was seen in early Israel when most agriculture was under cooperative farming organised around the kibbutz, which also entailed a communal (sharing) lifestyle.

The Histadrut, the labour union, which was the bedrock of the Labour Party and political movement led by Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, was also Israel's biggest employer and owned much of its transportation, dairy, construction and services sectors. Israel was intended as a progressive, socialist and democratic state. It has moved along quite a bit away from that now.

During the initial years of its existence, Israel heroically defied the odds and many writers like the late Leon Uris captured this new promised spirit of the Israeli people. His 600-page masterpiece *Exodus* created a sensation in 1957 and

propelled him to the highest literary fame. It was a detailed and heroic chronicle of European Jewry from the turn of the last century to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

Exodus, while being the epic story of a nation seeking a state, was also the touching love story of Ari Ben Canaan, an Israeli freedom fighter, and Kitty Fremont, an American nurse who joins Canaan's fight for a Jewish state.

In 1958, after it became one of the most popular novels of the century, *Exodus* was made into a film by Otto Preminger and featured Paul Newman as Canaan. It was probably the first time that Hollywood had portrayed a Jewish man in such heroic dimensions. The book and the movie contributed to the mythologising of the Israeli fighter as an indomitable and idealistic hero.

But it is not that Israel lacked such men those days. The founders of the Palmach, the elite strike force of the Haganah that was the forerunner of the Israeli Defence Forces, were men like Moshe Dayan, Haim Bar Lev, Ezer Weizmann, Yigael Yadin, Yitzhak Rabin and Yigal Allon, who were all men of heroic proportions and each one could have been a prototype for Canaan.

But it was Yigal Allon who came closest of all to it. Allon, who died in 1980, began life as a Haganah field commander in 1936 when he was just 18 years old. In 1941 he was one of the founders of the Palmach, the Haganah's commando-style strike unit. In 1948 he was made a lieutenant-general and commanded Israeli forces in the south that "liberated" the Negev in what became to be known as the War of Independence. He retired from the IDF in 1950, at the ripe old age of 32.

In 1960, Allon went to Oxford's St. Anthony's

College to study international relations. He later entered public life and became deputy prime minister in 1967 and devoted himself to seeking a durable peace with the Palestinians.

The Haganah was founded in 1920 as the underground military organisation of the Jewish *Yishuv*, or community, and was then a loose organisation of various local defence groups. The Palmach was its first mobilised unit, gained battle experience in the Second World War as the Jewish Brigade under British command. The Palmach consisted of many first generation "Sabra", or Palestine-born Israelis, who were also fluent Arabic speakers, which gave it the ability remain concealed among the Arab population and to wage a lethal unconventional war on them.

The British learned as much from this experience. Captain Orde Wingate, who later led the famous Chindits Brigade in Burma, learned his art of fighting from the Palmach. Wingate was a charismatic dreamer who, though a Christian, had joined the Jewish movement and led the joint British-Haganah's Special Night Squad which fought in Ethiopia. Wingate's African experience found expression in Burma and its successes led all traditional armies to establish special warfare forces to give them similar deep strike capabilities.

The combination of unconventional warfare by the British SAS and US Special Forces and deep and precision air strikes by modern fighter and bomber aircraft in Afghanistan has now given

The continued occupation of the West Bank since 1967 and the continued building of settlements in defiance of UN resolutions and in the face of world opinion are ugly and contemptuous manifestations of a narrow nationalism

modern warfare a new dimension. Of the three battalions who formed the original Chindits Brigade, the 2/4 Gurkha Rifles is still with the Indian Army and carries the Chindits tag with great pride. Wingate was born in Nainital in 1901 and died in Manipur in 1944.

The Israeli Defence Forces' heroic sheen has now largely dissipated with its emergence as a mighty army with the latest weapons and America's unstinted support. It is now no longer David with a slingshot facing mighty Goliath. In the four major wars that it has fought, the IDF had worsted numerically superior Arab armies with ease. It is difficult to remain a heroic David against such adversaries for long.

The Palestinian intifada is now the heroic struggle of a people seeking to find their identity and their freedom. Just like Israel was before 1948.

The atrocities during the War of Independence can even be justified by the fact that there was a war declared on the Jewish State by all its Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and supported by the entire Arab world. The moth-eaten Israel mandated by the UN was not tenable in terms of security, and addition of territory to gain security could have even been justified.

But the continued occupation of the West Bank since 1967 and the continued building of settlements in defiance of UN resolutions and in the face of world opinion are ugly and contemptuous manifestations of a narrow nationalism.

Israel is no longer the valiant and beleaguered underdog, but increasingly seen as an increasingly arrogant oppressor seeking to crush another old nation under its jackboots. The sad truth about Israel is that Benjamin Netanyahu is fact and Ari Ben Canaan is fiction.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

'SERVANT LEADERSHIP'

What Covid-19 has made a change to leadership in India is to bring about a new style called Servant Leadership in our country. Earlier our political leaders used to occupy positions of power but seldom they were asked questions and mostly they delegated any challenging issue to the authorities down the line. Now, Covid management is a test of their leadership skills and credit has to be given to our Prime Minister, Narendra Modi for delegating much of the management to the states. Today, many Chief Ministers, Corporation Commissioners, Health Ministers and Secretaries in various Departments are visible on public media, leading from the front and adopting a hands-on approach. Be it a task force, war rooms or helplines, they are coming out with innovative management practices and adopting a "Servant Leadership" style. This is a big change for the Indian political system. In a way, it has corporatised political leadership, which is a welcome change.

M. Srikanth,
Chennai

STICK TO NATURE

Covid-19 has affected the economies of developed as well as developing countries across the globe. The problem of allocation of scarce resources (money, medicine, oxygen, hospital beds and efficient doctors) for the health sector has assumed a bigger challenge now for the governments than in recent years. That thousands of people have lost their lives due to the deadly pandemic since March 2020 drives home the point that however much man does to grapple with nature successfully, the latter has the final say. Nevertheless, the viral disease has kept the governments on their toes, especially in this part of the world. People have learned a lesson that in no time things can go topsyturvy and jeopardise their lives. Let us adhere strictly to the principles of nature for a better tomorrow.

S. Ramakrishnasayee,
Chennai

SHORT TAKES

Shankar bags high jump gold in US

New Delhi: Indian high jumper Tejaswin Shankar has claimed a gold medal at the Big 12 Outdoor Track and Field Championships in Manhattan, USA. Representing Kanassas State University, Tejaswin cleared 2.28 metres on Saturday, making a facility record. It was also the season's finest performance for the Indian but a centimetre short of his personal best and the current national record of 2.29m which he created in 2018. University of Oklahoma's Vernon Turner (2.25m) and Texas Tech University's Jequan Hogan (2.11m) claimed the silver and bronze respectively. This was Tejaswin's second successive gold at the event. — *PTI*

Covid-free Hussey off to Australia

Chennai: Having recovered from Covid-19, Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey left for Australia on Sunday via Doha, a top official of the IPL franchise said. Following an RT-PCR test, the former Australia batsman had returned negative for Covid-19 on Friday, paving the way for his departure in the early hours of Sunday. "Yes, Hussey has left for Australia via Doha by a commercial flight. He left in the early hours of Sunday," CSK CEO K.S. Viswanathan said. Hussey, who had first tested positive for Covid-19 during the now-suspended Indian Premier League, is expected to reach home on Monday. — *PTI*

Bryant inducted into Hall of Fame

New York: Los Angeles Lakers icon Kobe Bryant was inducted posthumously into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on Saturday part of a star-studded group that also included Tim Duncan and Kevin Garnett. Bryant was inducted as part of the Class of 2020, almost 16 months after he and his 13-year-old daughter Gianna were killed in a helicopter crash along with seven others in southern California. Bryant's wife, Vanessa Bryant, took the podium Saturday to speak movingly about his love for basketball, his family, his teammates and his fans. "You did it. You are in the Hall of Fame now. You are a true champion, not just an MVP. You are an all-time great," Vanessa said. — *AFP*

Countdown begins for Paralympics

Tokyo: As Japan struggles to slow infections ahead of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, officials in Japan held an event marking 100 days to go to the start of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. The event was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building with strict corona counter-measures in place. Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike in her opening remarks paid tribute to all the medical professionals fighting against Covid-19 and also thanked all the businesses in Tokyo that have been cooperating with the latest state of emergency requirements. — *AP*

Indian women likely to tour Oz

New Delhi: The Indian women's cricket team is set to travel to Australia in September. India, who have played only one series amid the Covid-19 pandemic, tour England next month to play their first Test in seven years besides three ODIs and as many T20s. Australia pacer Megan Schutt dropped a hint that India will be visiting in September though Cricket Australia is yet to announce the schedule. The tour is expected to comprise ODIs and T20 Internationals. "We have got a tour against India in mid-September," Schutt said on No Balls: The Cricket Podcast. — *PTI*

Live on TV

FOOTBALL
Italian league: Verona vs Bologna from 12.15 am (Tuesday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

TIM AND AGAIN

Paine says Kohli will always be remembered as world's best

Melbourne, May 16: Virat Kohli seems to have left an indelible mark on Australian Test captain Tim Paine, who says he will "always remember" the Indian skipper for being the world's best batsman, capable of also getting under the opposition's skin with his competitiveness.

Kohli and Paine have had a fiery rivalry which goes back to India's 2018-19 tour of Australia. Their on-field spats were an interesting sub-plot during the historic show-down in which India became the first Asian country to win a Test series Down Under.

"For Virat Kohli, I've said many times, he seems like the type of player you would love to have on your team. He is competitive. He is the best batsman in the world," Paine said in the *'Gilly and Goss'* podcast.

"He (Kohli) is challenging to play against and he can get under your skin because he is so good and he is so competitive. But yeah, for me from where I came from, sharing a feud with him four years ago, He is certainly someone I will always remember," he added.

Interestingly, last year Paine had said that Kohli is "just another player" in the Indian team who "doesn't really bother me".

He had also stated that the Australian team "loves to hate" the superstar for his awe-inspiring abilities with the bat.

Paine, after the stunning loss in 2018-19, endured another debacle earlier this year when an injury-ravaged Indian team, which did not have Kohli after the opening Test, upstaged the Aussies in the Tests for a second successive tour.

He had recently caused a flutter by stating that his side was distracted by the Indian team's "nig-gling" during this year's series.

— *PTI*

Virat Kohli and Tim Paine in this file photo.

Sachin reveals he battled anxiety for 10 to 12 years

New Delhi, May 16: Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar on Sunday said he battled anxiety for a major part of his 24-year-old career before realising that his pre-game quirks were an important part of his preparation.

Talking about mental health, which has gained significance in the Covid times with players spending lot of time in bio-bubbles, Tendulkar said acceptability is the key.

"Over period of time I realised that besides preparing physically for a game, you have to prepare

yourself mentally also. In my mind the match started long before I entered the ground. The anxiety levels were very high," Tendulkar said in an interaction organised by Unacademy.

"I felt the anxiety for 10-12 years, had many sleepless nights before a game. Later on I started accepting that it was part of my preparation. Then I made peace with times I was not able to sleep in the night. I would start doing something to keep my mind comfortable."

That "something" included shadow batting,

watching TV and playing video games in the wee hours of the day. Even making his morning cup of tea helped him prepare for the game.

"Making tea, ironing my clothes also helped me prepare for the game. I would pack my bag the day before the game, my brother taught me all of it and it became a habit. I followed the same drill even in the last match I played for India," he said.

Tendulkar said a player is bound to go through ups and downs but it is important to accept when one is feeling low. — *PTI*

VIRAT VS KANE DEBATE TURNS UNSAVOURY

London, May 16: Former England skipper Michael Vaughan on Sunday launched a sarcasm-laden counter at Salman Butt, wishing that the ex-Pakistan skipper had shown such "clarity" of thought while "fixing matches", like the one that was on display while trashing his Kane Williamson greater than Virat Kohli viewpoint.

Vaughan told New Zealand's host broadcaster *Spark Sport* that had Black Caps captain Kane Williamson been an "Indian, he'd be the greatest player in the world".

"But he's not because you're not allowed to say that Virat Kohli is not the greatest, because you'd get an absolute pelting on social media. So, you all say Virat is the best purely to get a few more clicks and likes, few more numbers following here."

"Kane Williamson, across formats, is equally the best. I think the way he plays, the calm demeanour, his humbleness, the fact that he is silent about what he does," Vaughan said.

Speaking on his YouTube channel, Butt, who was banned from cricket for 10 years for the spot-fixing scandal in 2010, which was later reduced to five years, slammed Vaughan for stirring up an unnecessary controversy by drawing comparisons between Kohli and Williamson.

"Kohli is from a country that has a huge population. So, he will have a bigger fanbase. Moreover, no other batsman in the world has 70 international centuries. He has dominated the batting rankings for a long period because his performances have been outstanding. So, what is the need of this comparison," Butt said.

— *PTI*

OLYMPIC | PREPARATION

Sindhu sings Sang's praises

New Delhi, May 16: The lack of competitions before the Olympics is a major concern for Indian shuttlers but not so much for P.V. Sindhu, who trusts her Korean coach Park Tae Sang to create match situations for her in training itself.

Owing to the raging Covid-19 pandemic, the Badminton World Federation has been forced to cancel the remaining three Olympic qualifiers in India, Malaysia and Singapore. These were to be the last set of events before the Tokyo Games in July-August.

Asked if cancellations will affect her preparations, Sindhu said: "Well, we were thinking that Singapore will be the last event before Olympics but now we don't have another option, so I am playing matches against different players and my coach Park is trying to create match situations for me in training."

"Different players have different styles like Tai Tzu (Ying) or Ratchanok (Intanon) have different styles of play but Park is there to guide me, to prepare me for it."

"Obviously, we will be playing each other after a few months and there will be something new in our games, so I will have to pre-



P.V. Sindhu

pare for that," she added.

Sindhu doesn't train with the rest of the Indian Olympic-bound team. She has been training at the Gachibowli indoor stadium in Telangana and does her fitness training at Suchitra academy.

The 25-year-old endorsed BWF's decision to cancel the events, saying while it is sad that competitions could not take place but but life is more important than sports.

"It is sad that the whole world has come to a standstill but before sports-persons, we are human beings and life comes first."

"If tournaments happen, we don't know if we will be safe, we might think we will be but we can't be sure because we don't know from where this virus will come." — *PTI*

BHAKER TO WRITE BA EXAMS WHILE SHOOTING IN CROATIA

New Delhi, May 16: Inside her hotel room in Croatian capital Zagreb, India's Olympic medal hope Manu Bhaker is juggling shooting-related activities and studies.

However, a day before the Tokyo-bound Indian shooting contingent hits the range for its first training session in Croatia, Bhaker's pistol will give way to a pen and the shooting gear to her study materials, as she logs in for her BA fourth semester exam.

A student of political science in the Delhi University's prestigious Lady Shri Ram College for Women, the champion shooter's exams start on May 18 while the European Championship in Osijek, in which the Indian team will compete as a guest invitee, begins two days later, from May 20.

The continental tournament and Bhaker's exams will run almost concurrently but she is relieved that the dates of her events are not clashing with the papers.

"I will manage both, as I have done in the past. At least I don't have competition on days I have my papers, so it's manageable," Bhaker said. — *PTI*

FABULOUS WIN

■ Schmeichel hails Leicester's historic win

London, May 16: Kasper Schmeichel described leading Leicester to the club's first ever FA Cup as a dream come true after he played a huge role in beating Chelsea 1-0 on Saturday.

Youri Tielemans's stunning strike just after the hour mark separated the sides in front of the largest sports attendance in England since the coronavirus pandemic hit, with 22,000 fans at Wembley.

But Schmeichel had to rescue his side late on with brilliant saves from Ben Chilwell and Mason Mount.

"I've dreamt about this since I was child," said Schmeichel, whose dad Peter Schmeichel won three FA Cups with Manchester United.

"We have talked about wanting to win trophies. The performance today, the grit and determination, I'm so proud of everybody, everybody contributed to get to the final. Everyone has played and been sensational."

Even when Schmeichel was eventually beaten, Chilwell's late equaliser against his former club



Leicester goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel (right) and Wes Morgan hold the trophy aloft after winning the FA Cup in London on Saturday.

— *AP*

was ruled out for offside after a VAR review.

"Thank you VAR! What an amazing technology," said Tielemans.

SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIANS

Leicester players Hamza Choudhury and Wesley Fofana showed support for the Palestinians after winning the FA Cup final. English midfielder Choudhury and French defender Fofana were

seen holding a Palestinian flag.

Choudhury had the flagged draped over his shoulders as he collected his winner's medal after beating Chelsea 1-0.

A social media post from Arsenal midfielder Mohamed Elneny also showing his support for the Palestinian people has been hit by a backlash from Jewish fans.

— *AFP*

Spurs continue last-four quest

JUVENTUS PIP INTER TO KEEP ALIVE CL BID

London, May 16: Harry Kane scored his 22nd Premier League goal of the season as Tottenham Hotspur beat Wolves 2-0 on Sunday to maintain their hopes of a top-four finish.

England captain Kane fired Spurs ahead on the stroke of half-time before Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg doubled their lead in the 62nd minute.

Victory left Spurs in sixth place, five points behind fourth-placed Chelsea, with a maximum of six points available to them from their final two league games.

The top four in the Premier League are assured of a place in the 2021/22 Champions League. Already crowned Premier League title-winners Manchester City and Chelsea will contest this season's Champions League final in Porto on May 29.

Earlier, Crystal Palace twice came from behind to beat Aston Villa 3-2, with Tyrick Mitchell's first goal for the club sealing victory six minutes from time.

Victory lifted south London club Palace to 13th. — *AFP*

Milan, May 16: Juan Cuadrado scored twice, including a late penalty, as Juventus beat Inter Milan 3-2 to keep their Champions League hopes alive on Saturday in a game where three spot kicks were awarded and both teams finished a man down.

Juve moved up to fourth equal on points with third-placed AC Milan and two points ahead of Napoli who both play on Sunday.

The win ended the 20-match unbeaten run for Antonio Conte's Inter who had denied Juventus a 10th consecutive league title this season. "It was important for us to win so we can keep hoping," said coach Andrea Pirlo.

Cristiano Ronaldo missed a penalty after 24 minutes but turned in the rebound to bring his tally to a Serie A leading tally 29 goals this campaign. — *AFP*

Dravid as NCA head has excelled in making Indian cricket stronger



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

Former Australia captain Greg Chappell has credited Rahul Dravid for India's pre-eminent position in cricket in the past few years. Chappell says Dravid understood the Aussies system of excellence, picked his brains (and of others from

his country) and replicated it successfully as coach of the under-19 and India A teams and now as director of the National Cricket Academy.

The ICC Test rankings put out last week seem to support his contention. India are top of the pops at no.1, New Zealand no. 2

and England no. 3. Australians almost since the time cricket went Down Under. The West Indies too, till three decades back. And therein lies a message.

The West Indies faded away after a decade or so after the Packer Series, but the Australians continued to be strong, and in fact got better. What this showed was that it is not enough to just have a legacy of outstanding talent, also effective systems and structures for sustaining excellence.

Which brings me to why

India's cricket is flourishing currently.

Primarily, credit must go to the BCCI for spreading the footprint of cricket all over the country. The more youngsters play, the larger the talent pool, the greater the number of elite cricketers. The BCCI has ensured this. It has also put in place institutions like the National Cricket Academy that can make a big difference.

The NCA has been around for just over two decades. For the most period, it functioned as rehab centre-cum-sanatorium for

injured cricketers. While

putting cricketers back on their feet is obviously a big part of the academy, the NCA can't be limited to just that.

This is where Dravid has been of great value. As head of NCA he has gone beyond his job profile of being just administrator. He's proactively pursued the agenda of making Indian cricket stronger.

In this, he's drawn not just on his understanding of the Australian system, as Chappell highlights, but has brought his vast experience as player, and coach

of under-19 and India A teams to set up a more dynamic agenda to enrich Indian cricket.

This includes spotting and mentoring talent, mitigating fear of competition in young players and a desire for success.

Dravid's success is not an exhaustive formula or curriculum. It provides a kind of template of intent and practices. For India to keep excelling at the highest level depends on how this is assimilated, absorbed, improved upon at every nodal point in the cricket system.

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