





## IN BRIEF

## WEIGHTAGE TO BE GIVEN IN GOVT JOBS

FROM PAGE 1

Health staff is available round the clock with required medicines, they said. However, Rao said that remdesivir injections should be made available in private hospitals also. The Chief Minister asked the officials to invite applications from the 50,000-odd medical students who have completed MBBS and are qualified. Nurses, lab technicians, pharmacists and other para medical staff should also be immediately engaged and paid respectable salary, he said. Rao also announced that the temporary staff who came forward to serve should be given weightage marks when they apply for government jobs. He urged young doctors to come forward to serve the people, who are facing a difficult situation. Those interested can apply online by logging into <https://odls.telenagna.gov.in/medicalrecruitment/home.aspx>, he said. The Chief Minister also decided that five kgs of rice per person for two months would be distributed free to all white ration card holders in the state and the number of private teachers being extended state help of ₹2,000 per month and 25 kgs of rice would be enhanced from 1.2 lakh to two lakh.

## 51% PATIENTS CURED IN 3 DAYS: DRDO CHIEF

FROM PAGE 1

He said 51 per cent of the patients were cured within three days during the third phase of clinical trials and others within 5 to 7 days after administering the drug, which can be used for moderate to severe Covid patients.

It is a generic molecule and it can be produced in any country, he informed. On production plans, he said they have been discussing bulk production and they would come out with an action plan within the next two or three days.

He praised the DRDO scientists for their concern towards the people and country and their outstanding contribution through scientific solutions for Covid infected.

Dr Sateesh Reddy said they were coming out with light-weight oxygen gas cylinders with regulator and non-returnable valve with features to save oxygen and it would be very useful to those using it at home.

He added that they were also developing software to detect Covid infection using artificial intelligence with the help of a Chest X-Ray.

## ATTENDANTS RUSHED TO GET CYLINDERS FOR PATIENTS

From page 1

The parents of one such deceased patient, who managed to procure an oxygen cylinder, desperately implored the hospital staff to use the cylinder to provide oxygen to the patient, despite the hospital staff saying the person had passed away.

Attendants of several patients rushed to get oxygen cylinders in autorickshaws and on two wheelers to save the lives of their loved ones being treated at the hospital.

The search for cylinders in the last minute meant that some of them reached the hospital with one only late in the night.

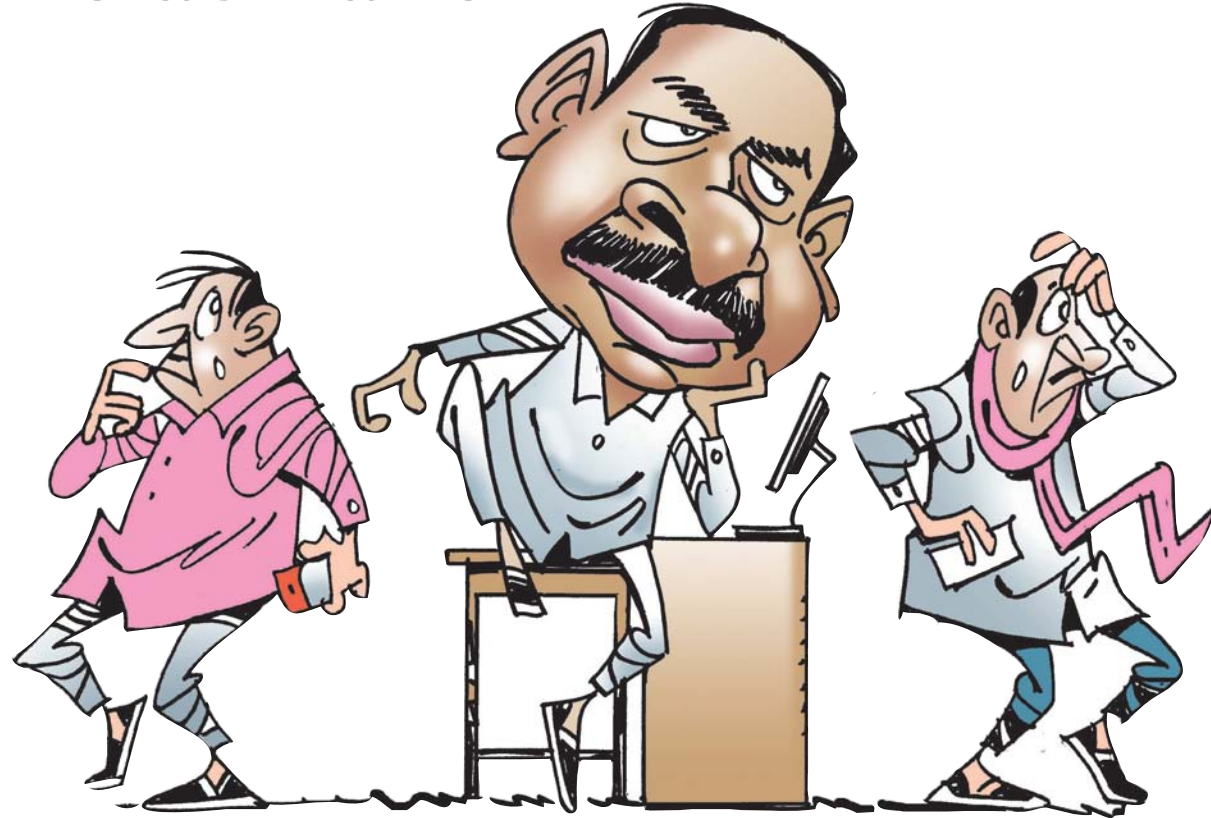
The Government District Hospital at King Koti dedicated to treating Covid-19 patients, has 300 oxygen and 50 ICU beds. Oxygen tankers going missing, or losing their way, has been a recurring issue in different places.

Officials in Andhra Pradesh launched a frantic search for an oxygen tanker that ostensibly went missing. It was later traced to a dhaba, where the driver had taken a break after a long journey to Guntur.

The tanker was to provide oxygen to 440 patients at the Guntur General Hospital.

● **THE SEARCH** for cylinders in the last minute meant that some of them reached the hospital with one only late in the night.

## Neta's Natter



## It was Goud then, it's Etala now

There are a lot of commonalities between former minister Etala Rajendar, who was ousted from the Telangana state Cabinet as health minister and T. Devender Goud, the once strong Telugu Desam leader and former home minister of combined Andhra Pradesh. Both are intelligent, articulate, super-rich and even have an almost similar physique reflective of their fitness and discipline. Both hail from politically-strong backward communities. Goud was considered a

● **WHEN THE moment came, he was all alone as he walked out of the TD. After a brief brush with a political outfit of his own that joined the bogey of the separate Telangana state forces, he merged the party with Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam.**

powerful leader in the N. Chandrababu Naidu Cabinet and had enormous influence on his boss. He

faced difficult times while in the Opposition. There was an aura around him that he would be a formidable force in the region and could cause irreparable damage to the Telugu Desam if ever he decided to quit the party. Finally, when the moment came, he was all alone as he walked out of the TD. After a brief brush with a political outfit of his own that joined the bogey of the separate Telangana state forces, he merged the party with Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam. Finally, after the

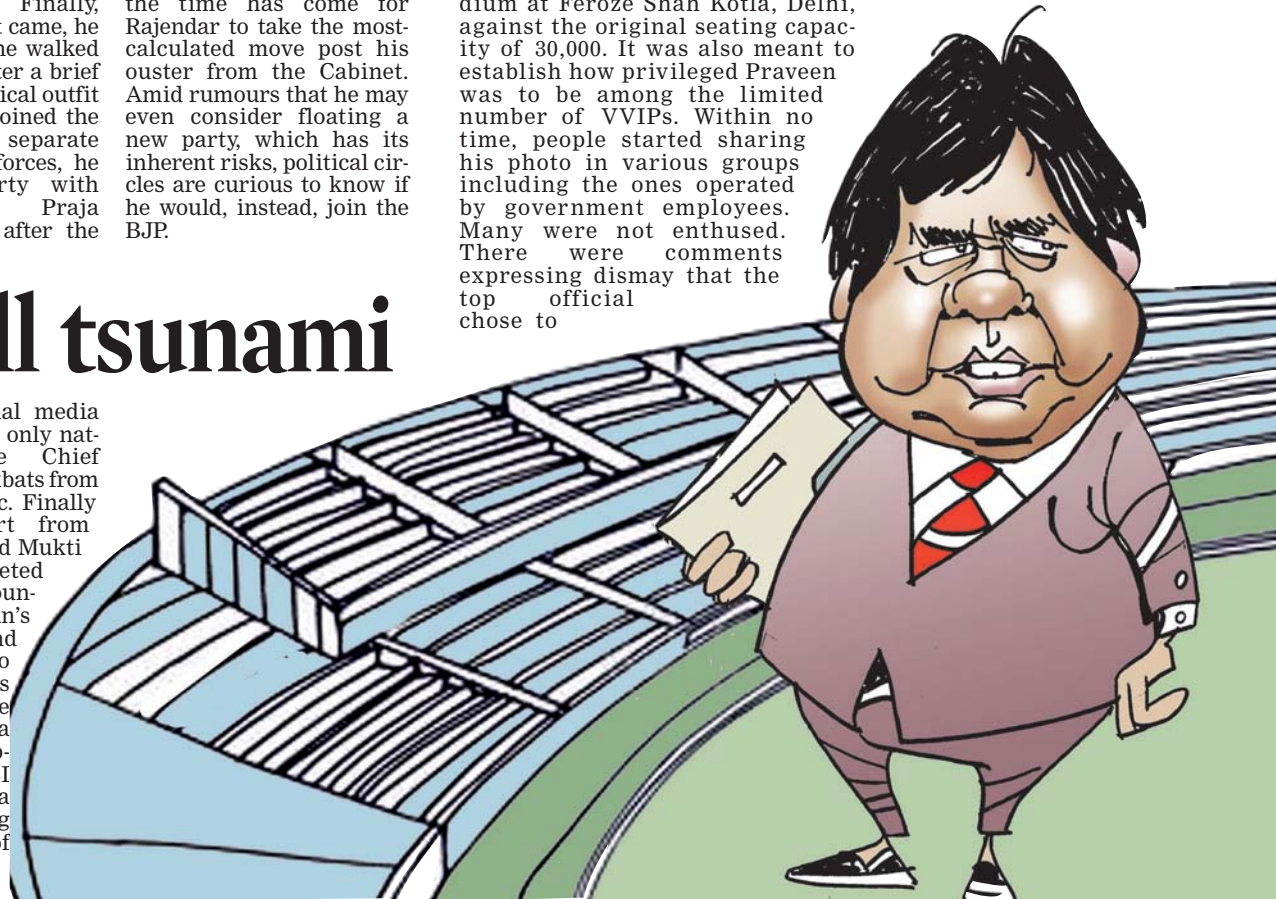
misadventure, he went back to the TD fold and "managed" to become a Rajya Sabha member. He later went into political oblivion and his health did not permit him to play an active role in politics. Now, the time has come for Rajendar to take the most-calculated move post his ouster from the Cabinet. Amid rumours that he may even consider floating a new party, which has its inherent risks, political circles are curious to know if he would, instead, join the BJP.

## Jagan lands in a troll tsunami

It could be out of conviction or compulsion. But Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has landed himself in a troll tsunami after he tweeted in support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It all started with the Prime Minister started calling up Chief Ministers of states where the "second wave" was severe and reviewing the preparedness. Immediately after the tele-talk, Jharkhand's Hemant Soren took a dig at Modi, saying the Prime Minister instead of listening to the Chief Ministers and trying to understand the ground

realities, turned the tele-talk mostly into a soliloquy, a la the *Mann ki Baat*. Soren tweeted this at 9 pm on May 6, to which Jagan reacted at around 3 pm the next day and went on to give sermons to "brother" Soren to not indulge in "such types of politics". Such criticism would weaken the country, Jagan ruled and called for unconditional support to the Prime Minister. Hell was let loose and twitter was flooded with trolls against Jagan. Many taunts were not from the usual Telugu Desam brigade. Given the anger being directed at the Prime

Minister on social media these days, it was only natural that the Chief Minister got brickbats from the general public. Finally came the retort from Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha. It tweeted that the entire country knew of Jagan's compulsions and that they too prayed for his "well-being". The JMM attached a newspaper clipping of the CBI court adjourning a petition seeking cancellation of Jagan's bail.



## STORIES OF HOPE

## Helping patients breathe

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 9

If food was the major concern for the Covid-19 affected persons during the first wave of pandemic last year, during its second wave, availability of oxygen seems to be the cause of big worry.

Seetha Anand Vaidyam, who has been busy trying to arrange oxygen concentrators for those in need, says, "We started with three, and are awaiting the arrival of 30 more from the United States, bought with funds raised by our volunteers."

"The first three we bought were six litre concentrators, probably not the best in terms of capacity but still of great help for those who need oxygen support at home after discharge from hospitals," she says. While three are making rounds in the Old City of Hyderabad, two others are being lent to anyone in need as soon as they become available.

"After seeing a message on social media on the need to



Seetha Anand Vaidyam is busy trying to arrange oxygen concentrators.

have oxygen, a woman immediately spread the word among her colleagues in an IT company, and raised enough money to buy 30 concentrators which are on their way to Hyderabad," Seetha Anand says. Of these, 20 will be used in Hyderabad, while 10 will be used in Bengaluru, "where the situation is even worse," she adds.

"Refilling a 10-litre cylinder is now costing ₹1,500 to ₹2,000. A new cylinder costs anywhere between ₹25,000

and ₹30,000 now. It takes about six hours for an attendant to stand in line these days to get a refill, imagine what that person might be going through during this period. Concentrators are a better option if we can have them," she says.

"We have received some funds from individuals to an account in the US from which will be used to buy more concentrators," she says. Thanks to an interview in TAL (Touch A Life foundation) radio, a second fund raiser is on in the US for which money is being pooled for buying more oxygen concentrators, she says.

While ensuring that Covid-19 hit people can breathe easy, Ananda Foundation set up by Seetha Anand is also in the process of providing dry rations for a month to priests, nearly 100 of them at Veda Bhavan in the city. "We do not have any employees and everyone who joins hands is a volunteer," Seetha says.



## Rajendar made to eat humble pie

Telangana state minister and IT minister K.T. Rama Rao had the last laugh in the infamous ouster of health minister and senior TRS leader Etala Rajendar from the KCR Cabinet. First, the party has given clear signals that leaders, no matter how big and powerful, will not be spared if they covertly or overtly opposed the eventual anointment of Rama Rao as Chief Minister. Rajendar, known for his

proximity to finance minister and Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao's nephew T. Harish Rao, was clearly ill at ease ever since the Rama Rao camp stepped up the 'KTR as CM' campaign. Rajendar made his discomfort known to the public with several terse statements in the past. However, pushed to the wall, Rajendar came out openly in support of dynastic politics in regional parties. Referring to

regional parties across the country, he said the son or daughter of the regional party founder is the natural heir. In the case of the TRS also, he had never objected to Rama Rao taking over as Chief Minister, Rajendar said. The explanation was so convincing among the rank and file of the TRS that the others who are murmuring in private about Rama Rao's meteoric rise are also likely to squirm in their chairs and fall in line.

## Cricket pitches AP babu into trouble

The new-found love of Praveen T. Prakash, principal secretary to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, for the "status" feature in WhatsApp landed him in an embarrassing situation the other day. Praveen has of late been sharing his photos with comments on WhatsApp. On Sunday last week, he put two pictures of him watching the Indian Premier League match between Mumbai and Chennai the previous day. He commented that it was a memorable moment because there were just 150 people at the Arun Jaitley stadium at Feroze Shah Kotla, Delhi, against the original seating capacity of 30,000. It was also meant to establish how privileged Praveen was to be among the limited number of VVIPs. Within no time, people started sharing his photo in various groups including the ones operated by government employees. Many were not enthused. There were comments expressing dismay that the top official chose to

enjoy a cricket match when the state reeled under the worst-ever pandemic spread. Some even objected to the government treating his weekend stay in Delhi as "on duty" and paying him travel expenses. Apparently having taken a hit, the senior babu changed his status. This time too, he could however not avoid exhibiting his love for the sport. The new photos showed him bowling to his son in the sprawling backyard of his official residence in AP Bhavan, New Delhi.

## Speculations rife about intention of the MPs

FROM PAGE 1

This immediately fuelled speculation about their intentions. Sources said the two have requested the party's leadership to allow them to continue as Lok Sabha MPs than as MLAs.

The party has not taken a final decision on them yet, as both have six months' time to choose one of the two posts. If Pramanik and Sarkar opt to stay as MPs, the BJP's tally of MLAs will go down to 75 from 77, with byelections being held for their Assembly seats. Similarly, if they choose to take the oath as MLAs later, the BJP's tally of MPs will decrease from 18 to 16, with their Lok Sabha seats up for byelections too.

Known for his fierce speech, Adhikari also has been credited with more years of experience in serving as an MLA, at least twice, than Mr Roy, who has become an MLA for the first time

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Suvendu Adhikari, meanwhile, appears to be the BJP's favourite face as Leader of the Opposition to take on the Trinamul supremo in the Assembly. The biggest advantage that has put Adhikari ahead of Roy.

Known for his fierce speech, Adhikari also has been credited with more years of experience in serving as an MLA, at least twice, than Mr Roy, who has become an MLA for the first time

in his life by winning from Krishnanagar North in Nadia. Besides, his past links with the RSS in school life and the support of at least 50 BJP MLAs for him are seen as his plus points, according to sources. On the other hand, Roy, who was initially considered a suitable face for the post with the support of a section of BJP central leaders, met a senior TMC leader in the Assembly on May 7 but

skipped the first meeting of the newly elected MLAs and claimed that he would make his stand clear later. This instantly triggered speculation about his possible return to the TMC. Roy however tweeted on Saturday: "My fight would continue as a soldier of the BJP to restore democracy in our state."

I would request everyone to put the concoctions and conjectures to rest. I am resolute in my political path."

Judging the situation, the BJP parliamentary board has appointed two central observers - Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and BJP general secretary Bhupendra Yadav - for the election of Leader of the Opposition in the state.

## 16 new faces in W. Bengal Cabinet

FROM PAGE 1

There will also be 16 new faces like Manas Bhuniya, cricketer Manoj Tiwari, retired IPS officer Humayun Kabir and Seuli Saha. In 2011, Mr Bhuniya became a minister when he was in the Congress, which was an ally of the TMC then. Ten MLAs will be ministers of state (independent charge) while nine others will be ministers of state working under a Cabinet minister. On Sunday afternoon Raj Bhavan said: "Hon'ble Governor of the State of West Bengal Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar accorded sanction for prosecution in respect of (1)

Shri Firhad Hakim, (2) Shri Subrata Mukherjee, (3) Shri Madan Mitra and (4) Shri Sovan Chatterjee, for the reason that all of them at the relevant time of commission of crime were holding the position of Ministers."

It said: "Governor is the competent authority to accord sanction in terms of law as he happens to be the appointing authority for such Ministers in terms of Article 164 of the Constitution. The sanction came to be accorded by the Hon'ble Governor after CBI had made a request and made available entire documentation relevant to the case to the Hon'ble Governor and

he invoked his powers under Articles 163 and 164 of the Constitution, being the competent authority to accord such sanction."

According to Raj Bhavan: "The impression generated in some quarters of the media that sanction has come to be accorded because these persons at the relevant time were Members of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly is factually untenable. The premise of the sanction as indicated is that these persons at the relevant point of time of commission of crime were holding the position of Ministers in the Government of West Bengal."

## NO PRAYERS AT IDGAH: WAKF CHIEF

FROM PAGE 1

The home minister urged sermons to accommodate separate congregations in masjids due to Coronavirus restrictions and ensure prevention of spread of the virus. Wakf Board chairman Mohammed Saleem said there will be no prayers in idgahs. He said following guidelines issued by the government, Wakf Board had not made arrangements in Idgah Mir Alam, Idgah Madannapet and others. He appealed to the public to maintain physical distance and other safety precautions on the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr.



## OTHER STORIES

## MANY VIOLATING COVID-19 NORMS IN ADILABAD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, MAY 9

Many people are moving by violating the Covid norms even in this critical time of the second wave of Covid pandemic in the towns and mandal headquarters in the Adilabad district. Covid positive cases and deaths are continuing in the old Adilabad district despite the efforts to bring the situation under control. Meanwhile, night curfew is being enforced to control the spread of Coronavirus.

People are not maintaining physical distance at the mass gatherings, shopping, vegetable markets in the towns.

## GANG OF 3 HELD FOR SELLING REMDESVIR IN BLACK MARKET

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 9

A gang of three, including a worker at a medical store, have been nabbed by Central Zone Task Force team on Sunday for possessing illegally procured remdesivir injection vials. Officials seized two vials and three smartphones from their possession.

The accused have been identified as Y. Praveen Kumar, 30, G. Raju, 22, an employee of Jyothi Medical Hall, and M. Rajender, 24.

Police said Praveen and Rajender had lost their jobs during the lockdown period. Noticing the demand for remdesivir (Covifor) injections, they hatched a plan and sought Raju's help in illegally procuring these vials. They then sold Covifor to known customers for ₹35,000 per vial. "Accused Praveen and Rajender had been waiting for a customer to come and collect injections.

## PUVVADA GREETS WOMEN ON MOTHER'S DAY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MAY 9

"One cannot define a mother's personality as it is a reflection of thousands of crores of feelings. Mother gives not only vitality but also a life". It is the message of the minister for transport, Puvvada Ajay Kumar on the occasion of Mother's Day on Sunday while greeting the women.

He said that there is no other person on the earth who gives love and affection as mothers give. He said that the TRS government is implementing various schemes to the women keeping their vital role in the society.

"KCR kit is one of such programmes and the government is giving ₹13,000 to the mothers who give birth to a female baby", he said.

The government established 53 residential schools in Telangana for girls and paved a way for the higher education of the girls. Kalyana Laxmi and Shadi Mubarak are being praised by everyone in the Telangana state and the government is giving ₹1,00,116 to women on the occasion of the her marriage.

## Adivasis safer in Covid 2nd wave with self-lockdown

Only a few tribals succumbed to Coronavirus during the current wave of pandemic in old Adilabad district

DC CORRESPONDENT  
ADILABAD, MAY 9

Adivasis seem to be on the safer side during the ongoing second wave of Coronavirus in old Adilabad district. Very few among the scheduled tribes (STs) have been affected in the current wave compared to non-tribals. Covid deaths too are minimal among them.

Almost all tribal hamlets wear a deserted look since most people remain indoors. Some of them can be seen engaged in agricultural operations in fields while ensuring social distancing. Such self-lockdown ordered by village elders has helped most STs in keeping the virus at bay. They are also avoiding visits to towns or cities in view of the pandemic.

Certain Adivasis are, however, living with non-tribals in places like Dhanthapalli in Utnoor mandal and in villages sharing borders with Maharashtra.

Some tribal people are also taking part in get-togethers, particularly in marriages, as summer is the wedding season for them. They are, however, wearing masks and adhering to Covid-19 norms.

Just about 4-5 Adivasis have died of Coronavirus in the second wave of pandemic in old Adilabad district. Tribal heads are ensuring special pujas to their traditional gods and goddess, seeking protection from the deadly disease. It may be recalled that tribes have not been affected much even during the first wave of Coronavirus in old Adilabad district.

This is being attributed to their hereditary high immunity levels, self-lockdown and confining themselves to their villages. Dr. Sumalatha Naitham, who is an Adivasi doctor working at RMS, Adilabad, has contributed a lot in this direction by shooting



Kaleshwaram streets look deserted as villages have voluntarily imposed lockdown to curb the spread of Coronavirus. —BY ARRANGEMENT

## Temple town wears deserted look amidst self-lockdown

ANUDEEP CEREMILLA | DC  
WARANGAL, MAY 9

The Kaleshwara Mukteshwara Swamy Temple in Jayashankar Bhupalpally district, which is regularly visited by thousands of devotees and crowded with many vehicles on norms days, has become a desolate place because of the Coronavirus pandemic and curfew restrictions.

The village is following a voluntary lockdown to stop the spread of virus. Sarpanch Vennapureddy Vasantha said that on Saturday, 17 positive cases were identified and of these, 13 were from SP Colony alone. "Being a

Shiva shrine, the place is frequented by devotees from Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, resulting in rapid spread of the virus. Hence, we decided that imposing lockdown is the best way to counter the situation," she said.

Temple priests Krishnamurthy and Phaneeder Sharma said, "Devotees visiting the Kaleshwaram temple, popularly known as Dakshina Kashi, first bathe in the river Godavari, the confluence of the three rivers - Godavari, Pranahitha and Saraswathi - and worship the holy waters. They walk to the main temple and perform anointment in the sanctum

sanctorum, and later conduct Kalasa pujas, Navagraha pujas and Kumkumarchana in the Parvati temple. Aksharabhyasam is conducted in the Saraswati temple."

The Kaleshwaram temple was earlier completely closed for a few days due to Coronavirus. Now, the temple is partially open and darshan is allowed from only 6 am to 1 pm, but devotees are not coming in large numbers for darshan. In addition to this, the Godavari river also looks deserted as the Brahmins who perform pujas, rituals and offerings in the Godavari river voluntarily declared lockdown till the 20th of this month.

noticing changes in the body is a better option as far as Covid treatment is concerned. This will reduce the risk to maximum extent.

Kanaka Venkatesh of Marlavai village in

## Panic among Adivasis over Covid vaccination

DC CORRESPONDENT  
DAMMAPET (KOTHAGUDEM), MAY 9

Lack of proper awareness among Adivasis on the Covid-19 vaccination is evident as very few of them turn up at vaccination centres. Aswaraopet MLA Mecha Nageswara Rao has expressed concern over this situation.

"The district medical and health department should concentrate on spreading awareness among the adivasis on the vaccination programme. I called the DMHO and urged him to do this. Registration on websites is a problem for them and the government should find other ways to enlist them for vaccination. Persons from other mandals are coming here for vaccination."

There are 34 hamlets under Patwarigudem revenue village in Dammamet mandal of Bhadrachalam district. Some 21,000 people live in these but only ten persons have turned up at the vaccination centres from the hamlets of Katkuru and Pusukunta. So far, first dose vaccine was administered to 4,450 persons in these villages. Meanwhile, the spread of a news that a vaccinated person died has caused worry among the adivasis.

Anganwadi worker Paddam Nagamani died in Aswaraopet area after vaccination. Doctors stated that the death was due to

Jainoor mandal of Komaram Bheem Asifabad district underlined that there are very few Covid positive cases in Adivasis villages, unlike towns and mandal headquarters. He said viral

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other ailments.

People from other mandals including Kothagudem and Chunchupalli under Parwarigudem primary health centre came to the vaccination centres in this area and got vaccinated. About 50 per cent vaccination has been done against a target of 4,450 persons of other mandals. The easy availability of slots in Patwarigudem PHC led more people from other mandals to come in.

Amarlapudi Ramu, leader of CPI(M)L New Democracy said, "The government is urged to bring the adivasis from their hamlets via tractors and administer the vaccination. Many politicians in Dammamet mandal are meanwhile inviting people of other mandals for vaccination. Surprisingly, officials from the enforcement directorate of Chennai started enquiring on the availability of Covaxin vaccine doses in Dammamet on Monday. Dammamet PHC doctor P. Harsha said, "About 100 Covaxin vials are coming to Dammamet PHC on Monday."

fevers are common in some tribal villages. But people are getting cured within two or three days, as they are isolating themselves and village heads are enforcing self-lockdown in their villages.

## DOOR-TO-DOOR SURVEYS ON IN KHAMMAM DIST

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KHAMMAM, MAY 9

Surveillance over Coronavirus has been speeded up in Khammam district with medical teams comprising Aasha and health workers conducting house-to-house surveys in Wyra on Sunday.

District collector R. V. Karnan made a surprise visit to Duddepudi in Khammam district with medical teams visiting houses. He asked team members to create confidence among people about Covid-19 not being as deadly as being imagined.

"Teams should categorise members of a family as completely healthy persons and those suffering from cold, fever, body pains or weakness when registering names. Team should then explain to sufferers what they can do to deal with their ailments", the collector underlined. Health teams will give medicine kits in case they suspect any mild Covid case. The collector too took part in some house surveys in Wyra and enquired about health of residents. He advised them to shun fear and anxiety apart from taking nutritious food and ensuring cleanliness. "If anyone has a health problem, they should approach a doctor immediately and use medicines as per doctors' advice, he said.

Karnan ordered that if health teams come across people with difficulties in breathing, they should be shifted to hospitals. He underlined that, as always, self-discipline is essential in following Covid guidelines. People must wear masks and maintain physical distance, he stated.

## Vinay Bhaskar distributes Ramzan gifts in Warangal

DC CORRESPONDENT  
WARANGAL, MAY 9

The TRS government is giving a big boost to the welfare of minorities under the leadership of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, said Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar, crediting him for the great thought of celebrating all festivals in Telangana officially.

Vinay Bhaskar, distributed the Ramzan gift packets and clothes to Muslims at Hanamkonda, on Sunday.

There are about 35 mosques in Warangal West constituency. 6500 gift packets have been allotted to Warangal West constituency at 150 gifts per mosque.

Speaking on the occasion, Vinay Bhaskar said 252 minority residential schools and 38 minority



Chief Whip Dasyam Vinay Bhaskar, distributes Ramzan gifts at Hanamkonda on Sunday. —BY ARRANGEMENT

colleges have been set up across the Telangana state.

"We have set up six Minority Residential Schools and three Minority Colleges in Warangal Urban district with the initiatives of Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and Municipal Minister

K.T. Rama Rao. The state government is providing Ramadan gifts to about one million people across the Telangana state," he said.

The Warangal West MLA urged Muslims to observe the Ramzan festival in accordance with the Covid-19 norms.

## TRS begins 'Mission Huzurabad, Manthani'

PULI SHARATH KUMAR | DC  
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 9

Having sacked former senior minister Etala Rajendar from the cabinet, Telangana Rashtra Samithi has launched "Mission Huzurabad and Manthani". Under it, officials brought in by Rajendar in the two respective constituencies of erstwhile Karimnagar district are now being transferred.

The process of transferring officials started from the police department in Manthani constituency from Saturday night. However, the maximum officials issued notices of transfer from various departments are from Huzurabad constituency.

Huzurabad RDO Ben Shalom has been shifted to Hyderabad and Ch. Ravinder Reddy to Narsapur in Medak district. Tahsildars working in various mandals of Huzurabad constituency, including Bhav Singh and Jyothi Varalakshmi, have been transferred to Rajanna Sircilla district; and Narayana and Kanakaiah to Peddapalli district.

Earlier, when an official was transferred, the government clearly mentioned the place of new posting. But in the present transfers, only the names of districts have been given.

Government has also transferred MPDOs (mandal parishad development officers) in Huzurabad constituency. Kodimyal MPDO Ramesh has been brought into Huzurabad, Metpally MPDO Kalpana to Jammikunta, Korutla MPDO Srinivas to Veenavanka, and Warangal Rural MPDO Pallavi to Kamalapur mandal.

Police officials too transferred. Transfers have also been affected in police department. ACP Sundaragiri Srinivas Rao has been moved to DGP headquarters. Circle inspectors of Jammikunta Rural and Jammikunta town Sadan

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Kumar and Ch. Vidyasagar; and their Huzurabad counterpart Ramesh has been attached to Karimnagar range DIG.

They have been replaced by J. Suresh, who was working at SSC in Karimnagar as CI of Jammikunta Rural. V. Srinivas of special branch has been brought in as Huzurabad CI. Dharmapuri CI Ramchander Rao has been transferred to Jammikunta town.

In Manthani, state government has prepared a list of police officials closely associated with Peddapalli zilla parishad chief Putta Madhukar, who is facing allegations of being involved in murder of the advocate couple. They too are being transferred to other places.

Manthani circle inspector Mahendar Reddy has been transferred to Warangal Commissionerate, Mutharam sub-inspector Narasimha Rao to task force in Ramagundam, Ramagiri SI Mahendar to Basanth Nagar in Ramagundam, and Manthani SI Omkar has been transferred to Mulugu district.

Transfer of officials from the two constituencies makes it clear that the TRS government is tightening its grip on Huzurabad and Manthani constituencies.

## 'Protect Dargah lands from encroachers'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KARIMNAGAR, MAY 9

A representative of Shair Ali Baba Dargah Parirakshana Committee, Khaja Basheeruddin Haji, has appealed to the state government to protect the dargah lands from land sharks.

Basheeruddin said in a statement that the dargah was established 70 years ago on the Manair river-side near cable bridge in 7th division under the Alganoor village panchayat limits in the district. In the survey number 79, there was about 5.26 acres of land registered in the name of Shair Ali Fakir in Shetwar, which was handed over to the Shair Ali Baba Dargah in 1965.

A committee was formed for the protection of lands by appointing late Hajiabi and Hassan as members and its activities are being looked after by their descendants.

Every year, the Dargah Urs celebrations are held with around 3,000 mem-



Khaja Basheeruddin Haji

bers and Sandaal is brought from the Shah Mohalla area. With funds sanctioned by the former MP, Ch. Vidyasagar Rao, a borewell, drinking water facility along with a water tank and guest rooms were established on the premises of the Dargah for the convenience of the devotees.

As the value of lands in the market has shot up, land sharks descended on them and occupied to some extent. Following a complaint lodged by the committee members of

● **SHAIR ALI BABA** Dargah originally had 5.26 acres, which is mentioned in records. Land sharks had occupied some portion in the past, leaving about only 1.2 acres in the possession of dargah. A case is being fought in court. Now, some people are trying to encroach even the leftover land.

● **THE RECORDS** of Alagnoor village panchayat also mention about the dargah lands. Despite this, the encroachers have started fixing boundaries.

Dargah, the officials of revenue department, with the help of by police, conducted a survey and confirmed that about 5.26 acres of land was in the name of Shair Ali Fakir in 1965 Shetwar of the government records.

Since with the major part of the lands being encroached by land mafia, at present only about 1.2 acres of land was left in the possession of the dargah. So, the committee members approached court in 2019 against encroachment of the remaining 4 acres and a case has since been pending in the court.

But some persons are trying to grab the remaining

land too. The records of Alagnoor village panchayat also mention about the dargah lands. Despite this, the encroachers have started fixing boundaries.

Basheeruddin along with the other members of the committee urged the TRS working president, K.T. Rama Rao, the Vice-Chairman of the State Planning Board, B.Vinod Kumar, Minister Gangula Kamalakar, city Mayor Y.Sunil Rao, District Collector K. Shashanka and Police Commissioner V.B. Kamalasan Reddy to protect the lands from land mafia. They demanded that the state government take immediate action against the encroachers.

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## SHORT TAKES

## U.P.: 67 NEW VENTILATORS LYING UNUSED

Firozabad (UP), May 9: A total of 67 new ventilators are lying unused at the 100-bedded Covid-19 isolation ward set up at a medical college here, a senior doctor has said.

When contacted, Chief Medical Superintendent Dr Alok Kumar Sharma said that last year, the medical college had got 96 ventilators under the PM-CARES Fund, and in all there are 114 ventilators available at the medical college. Of these, 25-30 ventilators are being used to provide treatment to patients.

He added that of the 67 ventilators, which are kept in a store room of the hospital, around 60-62 are in working condition.

Kumar, however, did not elaborate on the rest of the ventilators.

Principal of the medical college, Dr Sangeeta Aneja said, that the state medical department has been informed that 67 ventilators are there in the hospital.

In a letter to the state health department, it was also requested that if there is a need of a ventilator in any nearby district, then it could be sent there.

"Currently, we have ventilators, and they will be used when required. For operation of ventilators, technicians are needed, which we do not have in adequate numbers," she said.

## KOTA COPS GET 75 WEDDINGS PUT OFF IN A DAY

Kota, May 9: Over 75 weddings were postponed in a day in Kota Rural district after police reached out to families as part of a campaign to comply with the lockdown which has been enforced in the state to contain rising Covid cases.

During a field visit of DIG Ravindut Gaur, two beat constables of Kota Rural Police, Asharam of Digod police station and Navneet of Kaithun police station, informed him that they had persuaded three families to call off weddings scheduled for this month, DSP and CO (Itawa) Vijayshankar Sharma said.

The beat constables were given a reward of Rs 1,100 each, he said.

The DIG then directed officials to conduct meetings at gram panchayat level in presence of influential locals and public representatives to persuade families to cancel upcoming weddings, Sharma said.

Under the supervision of Kota Rural SP Sharad Choudhary, the campaign was launched at gram panchayat level on Saturday morning with beat constables and SHOs interacting with families, resulting in postponement of more than 75 weddings in a single day, the DSP said.

"My sister Manisha was supposed to get married on Friday but a beat constable came early morning and convinced us to call off the wedding. It has now been postponed to after the coronavirus pandemic," said Rinkesh Kumar.

## TEN STATES ACCOUNT FOR OVER 71% OF CASES

New Delhi: Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi are among 10 states that account for 71.75 per cent of the 4,03,738 new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday.

The other states in the list of 10 are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Haryana.

Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 56,578. It is followed by Karnataka with 47,563 while Kerala reported 41,971 new cases.

A total of more than 30.22 crore tests have been conducted so far across the country while the daily Covid-19 positivity rate stands at 21.64 per cent, the ministry said.

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Haryana, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh cumulatively account for 82.94 per cent of India's total active cases, the ministry stated. "The National Mortality Rate has been falling and currently stands at 1.09 per cent," the ministry said.

Besides, 4,092 deaths were reported in a span of 24 hours.

Ten states account for 74.93 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (864). Karnataka follows with 482 daily deaths.

## Delhi extends lockdown by another week, tightens curbs

Kejriwal says extension is to ensure that Capital does not let guard down

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 9

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has extended the lockdown in the national capital by another week, making the restrictions stricter. Even Delhi Metro services have been suspended this time. The lockdown will be on till 5 am on Monday, May 17. Mr Kejriwal said the extension was meant to ensure that the city does not let its guard down even though the Covid-19 numbers have dropped marginally. "The positivity rate has gone down but still we can't afford leniency. We need to extend to lockdown," the CM said.

There will be a total prohibition of wedding ceremonies at public places. Marriages can be held at homes or in the courts with not more than 20 people, under an order issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). "There will be a complete prohibition on marriage ceremonies at public places, banquet halls, hotels and similar places during this period," it said.

The service providers or owners of hotels, banquets, marriage halls, sound systems, DJs, and catering services will have to return the advance payments for marriages during the lockdown or have to mutually agree on a later date for the ceremonies, the order said.

Mr Kejriwal had also written to the Union health minister, urging him to direct the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to increase their monthly supplies to Delhi to 60 lakh doses from May to July.

While the positivity rate, which stood at 35 per cent in mid-April, has dropped to 23 per cent, doctors say even this is very high and there is a need to completely break the chain of transmission.

Delhi's cumulative Covid-19 vaccination coverage exceeded 38 lakh doses, the Delhi government said on Sunday.

The Delhi health department says it has vaccinated 2,75,540 people of the 18-44 age group so far and has a stock of 2,74,460 vaccine doses for this age group.

Deputy CM Manish Sisodia has, meanwhile, ordered an inquiry into reports that 23 Covid-19 patients had gone missing from Hindu Rao Hospital; and has instructed the health department to submit its report by Monday.

AAP MLA Atishi said, meanwhile, that Delhi has so far received 5.5 lakh doses for 1th 8-44 category, over 43 lakh for the 45-plus, and healthcare and frontline workers. "We have now 4.65 lakh doses available for 45-plus people, and healthcare and frontline workers; and 2.74 lakh doses for the 18-44 group," she said. The total number of cases in Delhi has reached 13,10,231 — of which 87,907 are active cases. The total number of fatalities is 19,071. The city recorded a positivity rate of 23.34 per cent and a case fatality rate of 1.46 per cent. This will be the fourth week of the lockdown imposed as the Covid-19 numbers in the national capital skyrocketed.

## PM speaks to CMs of 4 states on Covid

New Delhi, May 9: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday spoke to the chief ministers of Punjab, Karnataka, Bihar and Uttarakhand on the Covid-19 situation in their states, official sources said.

Modi has been speaking to state chief ministers and lieutenant governors of union territories for the last few days to assess the pandemic situation there and offer suggestions.

Chief ministers have also briefed him on the measures being taken by them to deal with the raging second wave of the pandemic.



Patients on oxygen support wait outside the Covid-19 facility of the Chest Disease Hospital in Jammu, on Sunday. — PTI



Relatives mourns after the death of family member due to Covid-19, as Coronavirus cases surge in the national capital, at LNJP Hospital in New Delhi. — PTI



Family members along with medical workers shift a COVID19 patient to Level-3 ward of Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital in Prayagraj, on Sunday. — PTI

## India gets 6.7K O2 concentrators, 16 generation plants as aid from abroad

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 9

The Union Government on Sunday said a whopping 6,738 Oxygen Concentrators, 3,856 Oxygen Cylinders, 16 Oxygen Generation Plants, 4,668 ventilators and about three lakh vials of anti-Covid drug Remdesivir have been delivered to the country so far from abroad, adding that it was promptly allocating and distributing the supplies. This comes even as foreign aid continued to pour in from Britain, Japan, Canada, South Korea, Kuwait, China and other nations.

Chinese Ambassador Sun Weidong tweeted on Sunday evening, "The first batch of 100 Oxygen concentrators, 40 ventilators, and other anti-epidemic supplies donated by the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) arrived in India today by a Chinese cargo flight from Chengdu. RCSC also decided to provide US\$ one million in cash assistance to the Indian Red Cross Society through the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help India fight against Covid-19."



A consignment of three oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators arrives from the UK. Each generator can produce 500 litres of oxygen per minute, enough to treat 50 people at a time. — PTI

19." The Chinese envoy added, "Nothing in the world is more precious than people's lives. Actions of RCSC shine the humanitarian spirit ...". Meanwhile, SpiceXpress, the air cargo arm of airline SpiceJet, said it had airlifted 9,600 oxygen concentrators from Beijing, Wuhan, Nanjing and Hong Kong to Kolkata and Delhi on Sunday. The airline said it has airlifted more than 27,000 oxygen concentrators from the USA, Hong Kong, Singapore and China so far.

On British support, MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted, "Taking forward our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Consignment of 3 O2 generators & 1,000 ventilators arrives from UK. Each generator has capacity to produce 500 litres of O2/min, enough to treat 50 people at a time. Deeply value the contribution from our close friend."

Earlier on Saturday, 100 oxygen concentrators were sent by Japan as a part of the first batch of the emergency assistance to India. Japan is providing India with 300 oxygen concentrators and 300 ventilators and announced it will continue to extend further support.

Canada also announced that it is sending up to 25,000 vials of the antiviral drug remdesivir

(brand name Veklury) and up to 350 ventilators from its National Emergency Strategic Stockpile to help respond to the critical situation across India. Canada is also providing support through UNICEF's response to the pandemic in India with the urgent provision of 1,450 oxygen concentrators. This support is in "addition to Canada's \$10-million support to the Canadian Red Cross Society, which is supporting the Indian Red Cross Society's procurement of essential supplies and medicines". The Canadian Armed Forces are airlifting these supplies to India.

On South Korean support, the MEA tweeted, "A valued partner in our extended neighbourhood. First consignment of 30 oxygen concentrators & 200 oxygen cylinders with regulators arrives from the Republic of Korea. Welcome this support from our Special Strategic Partner."

A total of 282 Oxygen cylinders and 60 Oxygen concentrators also reached India from Kuwait and another 60 MT of liquid oxygen, 800 oxygen cylinders and two concentrators is also on its way from the Gulf nation.

The revised adult vaccination policy set to be announced by Chhattisgarh government very soon has proposed to give a major share to members of below poverty line (BPL) families in the third phase of inoculation launched in the state on May one, sources said on Sunday.

The proposed policy has divided people in the age group of 18-44 to be inoculated in the third phase of vaccination into four categories and quotas for each category of these people have been fixed, a senior officer in the Chhattisgarh health department told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted since he was not authorised to speak to media.

The four categories of people created in the proposed revised vaccination policy are BPL, above poverty line (APL), Antyodaya and frontline workforce, sources said. Sources revealed BPL has been given a share of 52 per cent in the vaccination drive, while APL,

## Centre advises on fungal infection management

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 9

India recorded 3,66,317 fresh cases on Sunday. The numbers have declined marginally over the past three days after hitting a peak of 4,14,554 on Thursday. Deaths continued to surge with 3,747 fatalities reported on Sunday. However there were early signs in the data that the second wave in the country could be reaching its peak. Several states too imposed lockdown or strict curbs as Coronavirus catastrophe continues.

Maharashtra reported 56,578 cases while Karnataka had 47,563. Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh were the other top contributors.

Rajasthan recorded 159 deaths and 17,921 coronavirus cases on Sunday, taking the death toll to 5,665 and the infection tally to 7,56,707.

Haryana reported 13,548 new coronavirus cases, taking the case tally to 6,15,897 while 12,639 recoveries brought the active number of cases in the state to 1,16,867. Haryana recorded 151 Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours, according to the health bulletin.

In Uttar Pradesh the number of new cases of Covid-19 continued to decline while recoveries went up in the state on Saturday, health officials said. At least 26,847 fresh cases were reported while 34,721 people were declared free of coronavirus infection in the last 24 hours. During

this period, total 2,23,656 Covid tests were conducted in the state.

In a first of its kind data released by the government, on Covid patients requiring critical care, shows that nearly 50,000 people are currently in ICUs while over 14,000 on ventilator support.

Meanwhile, Centre issues advisory on management of Mucormycosis fungal infection in Covid-19 patients.

Mucormycosis, a fungal infection being found in Covid-19 patients with uncontrolled diabetes and prolonged intensive care unit (ICU) stay, may turn fatal if uncared.

Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana extended their ongoing lockdowns till May 17 to curb the unprecedented surge of Covid-19 cases and deaths.

Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Puducherry will also have a two-week shutdown starting Monday, while in Karnataka's stringent lockdown will come into effect on Monday till May 24. On Saturday, Kerala came under a nine-day complete lockdown. This means that from Monday, a majority of the country will be under either a strict lockdown or lockdown-like curbs.

M a h a r a s h t r a , Karnataka and Delhi are among 10 states that account for 71.75 per cent of new Covid-19 cases registered in a day, the Union health ministry said in its Sunday morning update.

## Major share for BPL in C'garh's new vax policy

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC RAIPUR, MAY 9

The revised adult vaccination policy set to be announced by Chhattisgarh government very soon has proposed to give a major share to members of below poverty line (BPL) families in the third phase of inoculation launched in the state on May one, sources said on Sunday.

The proposed policy has divided people in the age group of 18-44 to be inoculated in the third phase of vaccination into four categories and quotas for each category of these people have been fixed, a senior officer in the Chhattisgarh health department told this newspaper unwilling to be quoted since he was not authorised to speak to media.

The four categories of people created in the proposed revised vaccination policy are BPL, above poverty line (APL), Antyodaya and frontline workforce, sources said. Sources revealed BPL has been given a share of 52 per cent in the vaccination drive, while APL,

Antyodaya and frontline workforce have been given quotas of 12 per cent, 16 percent and 20 percent respectively.

Chhattisgarh is the first state to fix quotas for people in the third phase of vaccination in the state.

In a related development, Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel on Sunday announced to include journalists and lawyers in the frontline workforce.

"Journalists, lawyers and their families will also get priority in vaccination like frontline workers", Mr Baghel announced.

People with comorbidities, food providers, vegetable vendors, anganwadi workers, mitanis (health workers), panchayat secretaries, 'Kotwar-Patel' and public distribution system managers and vendors have also been included in the list of frontline workers.

The Chhattisgarh high court has earlier directed the state government to come out with a fresh adult vaccination policy after setting aside the existing policy which gave priority to Antyodaya card holders in the vaccination drive.

## COVID | BLUES

Experts say only Covid-appropriate behaviour can fight disease

## Vaccination a shield against virus

New Delhi, May 9: With the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic ravaging the country and concerns being raised about a possible third wave, experts caution that the next wave could be less severe if people keep following Covid-appropriate behaviour and a large portion of the population is vaccinated.

According to the Union Health Ministry data released on Sunday morning, India recorded 4,03,738 fresh Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours, pushing the country's cumulative tally to 2,22,96,414, while the death toll climbed to 2,42,362 with 4,092 daily deaths.

There has been a sharp surge in infections over the past couple of months, making the second wave much worse than the first one that began in early 2020 and peaked in the last quarter of that year before the tally hit a trough in the first quarter of 2021.

Several experts believe that a casual approach that followed the trough of the first wave could be a possible reason for the pandemic raising its head again, though others are also putting the blame on the new mutants and variants of the virus being more virulent.

K. VijayRaghavan, Principal Scientific Adviser,

had said on Wednesday last week that the third wave was inevitable and it was necessary to be prepared for new waves, but clarified two days later that the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if prescribed guidelines about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing are followed.

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

in a few months when the immunity people have developed naturally or with the help of vaccination fades, the virus strikes again and the only thing that can stop the virus from bouncing back is how people are guarding themselves.

"Early this year, as the new cases receded, people started interacting as if there was no virus. The immunity had already started declining. They organised mass gatherings, they stopped wearing masks, giving the opportunity to the virus to strike again," said Dr Anurag Agarwal, director, Institute of Genomics and Int-

egral Biology, New Delhi.

"While we anticipate a third wave, we cannot say when exactly it will come or how severe it will be. But if people keep following Covid-appropriate behaviour in coming months and we are able to vaccinate a large number of people, the third wave could be less severe," Dr Agarwal added.

While the sudden surge in the number of cases during the second wave has led to panic among people, what is adding to their fear is the constant threat of new mutants of the virus and how these mutants could potentially harm them. — PTI



## IN BRIEF

## SLAIN JUDGE GETS CLOSER TO SAINTHOOD

**Rome, May 9:** An Italian judge murdered by the mafia in Sicily takes a step towards sainthood Sunday, almost three decades after being declared a martyr by pope John Paul II. The beatification of Rosario Livatino will take place in the cathedral in Agrigento, the Sicilian town near where he was gunned down aged 38 on September 21, 1990.

In a preface to a new book about the judge, Pope Francis hailed him as a “righteous man who knew he did not deserve that unjust death”. Livatino, who prayed in church every day before going to court, had been involved in a mass trial against mafioso and was about to launch a new case when he died.

He was found in a ditch by the roadside a few miles from his home. He had refused armed protection.

Many of his notes were later found to be marked STD, for “sub tutela Dei”, a Latin invocation meaning “under the protection of God” which judges of the Middle Ages used before taking official decisions. The notes also showed he asked God’s forgiveness for the risks his work exposed his parents to, once he learned that the bosses of the Cosa Nostra had him in their sights. When John Paul II visited Livatino’s parents in 1993, he said the judge was “a martyr for justice and indirectly for the faith”.

## PAK POLICEMAN KILLED IN KP MILITANT ATTACK

**Peshawar:** A Pakistani police official was killed when some unidentified terrorists opened fire on a patrol vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday.

The terrorists attacked the police mobile van while it was doing a routine patrolling on Indus highway in Lakki Marwat district, Station House Officer of local police station Naveed Nawaz said.

While Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Muhammad Shah was killed in the attack, two terrorists were gunned down in the retaliatory firing, he said. In another incident, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) police arrested three wanted terrorists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bannu district. The members of the banned Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan outfit were wanted in several cases, including suicide attacks on police stations, extortions and target killings, police said.

Attacks on Pakistan government installations by militia in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province are quite common. In January, a police man was killed in Karak district for escorting a team of health care workers, who were supposed to administer polio vaccine to children in the highly-conservative and Pashtun-dominated area which borders Afghanistan. — *Agencies*

## FIRE AT SYRIAN OIL REFINERY EXTINGUISHED

**Damascus, May 9:** Firefighters extinguished a blaze Sunday in a distillation unit at one of Syria’s two oil refineries, Syrian state TV reported.

No one was hurt, but the fire caused some damage to the facility, a refinery official said. The TV named the cause of the fire as crude oil leakage from one of the pumping stations at the Homs Oil Refinery in the central province of Homs. The fire came amid a series of mysterious attacks on vessels and oil facilities in Syria over the past months. The war-torn country has been suffering from fuel shortage in recent months.

Head of Homs Oil Refinery Suleiman Mohammed told state TV that the distillation unit that caught fire is one of four at the refinery. In addition to the refinery in Homs, Syria has another one near the coastal town of Banias. Both are government-run and operating.

Syria’s oil resources are mostly outside of government controlled areas. Syria controls some small oil and gas fields but most of the large fields in the east are controlled by US-backed Kurdish-led fighters. This has made Damascus reliant on Iran for fuel.

The US sanctions have targeted a network that spanned Syria, Iran and Russia responsible for shipping oil to the Syrian government. — *AP*

## Death toll soars to 50 in Kabul school bombing

**Kabul, May 9:** The death toll in a horrific bombing at a girls’ school in the Afghan capital has soared to 50, many of them pupils between 11 and 15 years old, the Interior Ministry said on Sunday.

The number of wounded in Saturday’s attack has also climbed to more than 100, said Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian.

Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day, he said. The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The first explosion came from a vehicle packed with explosives, followed by two others, said Arian, adding that the casualty figures could still rise.

In the capital rattled by relentless bombings, Saturday’s attack was among the worst. Criticism has mounted over lack of security and growing fears of even more violence as the US and Nato complete their final military withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The attack targeted Afghanistan’s ethnic Hazaras who dominate the western Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood, where the bombings occurred. Most Hazaras are Shiite Muslims.

The area has been hit by violence against minority Shiites and most often claimed by the Islamic State affiliate operating in the country. No one has yet claimed Saturday’s bombings.

● Three explosions outside the school entrance struck as students were leaving for the day on Saturday.

● The blasts occurred in a mostly Shiite neighborhood in the west of the capital. The Taliban denied responsibility, condemning the attack.

The radical Sunni Muslim group has declared war on Afghanistan’s Shiites. Washington blamed IS for a vicious attack last year in a maternity hospital in the same area that killed pregnant women and newborn babies.

Soon after the bombing, angry crowds attacked ambulances and even beat health workers as they tried to evacuate the wounded, health ministry spokesman Ghulam Dastigar Nazari said.

He had implored residents to cooperate and allow ambulances free access to the site.

Bloodied backpacks and school books lay strewn outside the Syed Al-Shahda school. In the morning, boys attend classes in the sprawling school compound and in the afternoon, it’s girls’ turn. Residents in the area said the explosion was deafening.

Naser Rahimi said he heard three separate explosions, and immediately thought that the sheer power of the blasts meant the death toll would almost certainly climb. — *AP*

## 3 hurt in Times Square shooting

**New York, May 9:** A shooting in New York’s bustling Times Square on Saturday injured a four-year-old girl and two women, in the latest incident of gun violence in the city, police said.

The shooting took place just before 5 pm local time (9 pm GMT), at the intersection of 7th Avenue and 44th Street, a NYPD spokesperson told AFP.

The three victims were a four-year-old child in a stroller, who was hit in the leg while her family was buying toys, a 46-year-old woman hit in the foot, and a 23-year-old

tourist from Rhode Island hit in the leg.

They were hospitalized in Manhattan, and their lives were not in danger, said New York police commissioner Dermot Shea, at a press briefing.

Shea said the three bystanders — who did not appear to know each other — stumbled into an argument between two to four men, at least one of whom fired a gun. No arrests had been made by early evening. Police issued an appeal for witnesses and released surveillance camera footage of a wanted man. — *AFP*

## Variant fuelling Covid explosion: WHO

**Geneva, May 9:** A Covid-19 variant spreading in India is more contagious and may be dodging vaccine protections, contributing to the country’s explosive outbreak, the World Health Organisation’s chief scientist said Saturday.

In an interview, Soumya Swaminathan warned that “the epidemiological features that we see in India today do indicate that it’s an extremely rapidly spreading variant”.

India on Saturday for the

first time registered more than 4,000 Covid-19 deaths in just 24 hours, and more than 4,00,000 new infections.

New Delhi has struggled to contain the outbreak, which has overwhelmed its healthcare system, and many experts suspect the official death and case numbers are a gross underestimate.

Swaminathan, an Indian paediatrician and clinical scientist, said the B.1.617 variant of Covid-19, which was first detected in India

## Scotland renews bid to part ways with England yet again

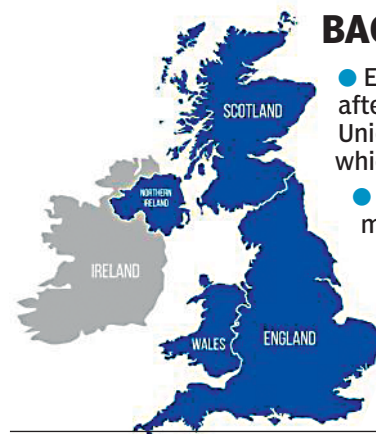
Scottish National Party wins polls, pushes for 2nd plebiscite for independence

**London, May 9:** The Scottish National Party won its fourth straight parliamentary election on Saturday and insisted it will push on with another referendum on Scotland’s independence from the United Kingdom even though it failed by one seat to secure a majority.

Final results of Thursday’s election showed the SNP winning 64 of the 129 seats in the Edinburgh-based Scottish Parliament. The result extends the party’s dominance of Scottish politics since it first won power in 2007.

Other results from Super Thursday’s array of elections across Britain emerged Saturday, including the Labour Party’s victory in the Welsh parliamentary election.

The election with the biggest implications was the Scottish election, as it could pave the way to the



break-up of the United Kingdom.

SNP leader and Scotland’s first minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said her immediate priority would be steering Scotland through the coronavirus pandemic and that the legitimacy of an independence referendum

## BACK STORY

● England and Scotland became one kingdom after Scottish Parliament ratified the Treaty of Union in 1706 to merge both the kingdoms, which were ruled by one king for 100 years.

● Scottish King James VI became the English monarch in 1603 as England’s Queen Elizabeth I died without any children.

● The East India Company, which colonised India, also played a role in the integration of Britain and Scotland by harming the interests of Scottish traders, who were opposing the union.

remains, SNP majority or not.

This is now a matter of fundamental democratic principle, Sturgeon said. It is the will of the country.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, the leader of the Conservative Party, would have the ultimate authority whether or not to per-

mit another referendum on Scotland gaining independence. Johnson appears intent on resisting another vote, setting up the possibility of renewed tensions between his government and Sturgeon’s devolved administration.

Johnson wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* newspa-

per published Saturday that another referendum would be irresponsible and reckless in the current context as Britain emerges from the pandemic.

He has consistently argued that the issue was settled in a September 2014 referendum, when 55 per cent of Scottish voters favoured remaining part of the UK.

Proponents of another vote say the situation has changed fundamentally because of Brexit, with Scotland taken out of the European Union against its will. In the 2016 Brexit referendum, 52 per cent of the UK voted to leave the European Union while 62 per cent of Scots voted to remain.

Sturgeon said it would be wrong for Johnson to stand in the way of a referendum and that the timing is a matter for the Scottish Parliament. — *AP*

## Sadiq wins London Mayor post again

**London, May 9:** Sadiq Khan has been re-elected as Mayor of London for a second term after beating his closest rival with a vote share of 55.2 per cent versus 44.8 per cent in an election that was closer than expected.

Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

The Pakistani-origin former Labour member of Parliament was the first Muslim mayor of a European capital city when he was first elected in 2016. The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

“I am deeply humbled by the trust Londoners have placed in me to continue leading the greatest city on earth,” said Khan.

“I promise to strain every sinew, help build a better and brighter future for London, after the dark days of the pandemic and to create a greener, fairer and safer city for all Londoners, to get the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. I am proud to have won an overwhelming mandate today,” he said, speaking at his City Hall office.

● Labour Party candidate Khan, 51, defeated his Conservative Party rival, Shaun Bailey, after winning a total of 1,206,034 votes as against 977,601 when both first and second preference votes from Thursday’s mayoral election were fully counted overnight on Saturday.

● The mayoral poll was due last year but was postponed by a year at the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Khan reiterated his previous pledge to be a mayor for all Londoners and work to improve the lives of every single person in this city.

Rival Bailey said he had been “written off” by pollsters, journalists and other politicians but Londoners didn’t write me off”.

His victory is one of the few positives for the Labour Party as the party held on to its dominance in the London Assembly as well.

However, overall the local election performance has been largely dismal for the Opposition party as it lost many of its strongholds. The Conservatives have gained control of around 12 councils. — *PTI*



Re-elected Mayor of London Sadiq Khan hugs his wife Saadiya after the result declaration at City Hall, in London, on Saturday. — *AP*

## Nirav Modi’s appeal against extradition stuck in UK HC

**London, May 9:** Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, whose extradition to India was ordered last month by UK Home Secretary Priti Patel in the estimated USD 2-billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, has filed an application for permission to appeal against the order in the High Court in London.

The Crown Prosecution

Service (CPS) confirmed an appeal has been lodged but a High Court judge who will make a decision on the matter is yet to be assigned.

The matter has not been sent to a judge for consideration on the papers, the Administrative Division of the Royal Courts of Justice in London said this week.

In the first instance, a

High Court judge will make a decision on the papers submitted for the appeal and determine if there are any grounds for an appeal against the Home Secretary’s decision or the Westminster Magistrates’ Court February ruling in favour of Modi’s extradition to India to face charges of fraud and money laundering. — *PTI*

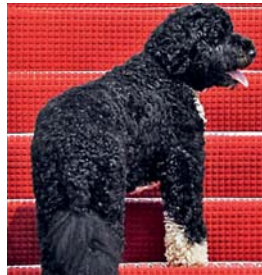
## Putin sees Nazi ideas in Europe

**Moscow, May 9:** Russian President Vladimir Putin marked the anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe with a speech warning that Nazi beliefs remain strong.

Speaking to the annual military parade here, Putin on Sunday decried attempts to rewrite history, to justify traitors and criminals, on whose hands lies the blood of

people. “Unfortunately, many of the ideologies of the Nazis, those who were obsessed with the delusional theory of their exclusiveness, are again trying to be put into service,” he said.

The anniversary of Nazi Germany’s defeat, which Russia calls Victory Day, is the country’s most significant secular holiday. — *AP*



A file photo shows former US President Barack Obama’s pet Bo climbing the stairs of Air Force One at Andrews Air Force Base, Md, for a flight to Chicago. — *AP*

## OBAMA DOG BO, ONCE WH STAR, DIES OF CANCER

**Washington, May 9:** Former US President Barack Obama’s dog Bo died Saturday after a battle with cancer, the Obamas said on social media.

Bo, a Portuguese water dog, was a gift to the Obamas from the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., a key supporter of Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign who became close to the family. Bo helped Obama keep a promise to daughters Malia and Sasha that they could get a dog after the election. A companion dog, Sunny, joined the family in August 2013. Both were constant presences around the White House and popular among visitors, often joining the Obamas for public events. — *AP*

## SPACE | ALERT

## Remnants of rocket burned up as they reentered atmosphere near the Maldives

## China’s rocket debris falls into Indian Ocean

**Beijing, May 9:** The remnants of an out of control and China’s biggest rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere with most of its parts burned up and disintegrated over the Indian Ocean near the Maldives, the country’s space agency said on Sunday, ending days of fevered speculation over where the debris would hit.

The remnants of China’s Long March 5B rocket re-entered the Earth’s atmosphere at 10.24 am Beijing time and fell into an open sea area at 72.47 degrees east longitude and 2.65 degrees north latitude, China’s Manned Space Engineering Office said. The coordinates put the

splash down in the Indian Ocean, close to the Maldives, Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported, adding that most of the remnants burned up during the re-entry.

US and European tracking sites had been monitoring the uncontrolled fall of the rocket.

Monitoring service Space-Track, which uses US military data, also confirmed the re-entry.

“Everyone else following the LongMarch5B re-entry can relax. The rocket is down,” it said.

“@18SPCS confirms that CZ-5B (LongMarch5B) (48275 / 2021-035B) reentered atmosphere 9 May at 0214Z and fell into the

## NASA DENOUNCES CHINA OVER ‘IRRESPONSIBLE STANDARDS’

**Washington, May 9:** US space agency Nasa on Sunday slammed China for failing to meet “responsible standards” regarding its space debris, hours after remnants of the country’s largest and an out of control rocket disintegrated over the Indian Ocean near the Maldives.

Reacting to China’s space programme, Nasa

administrator Bill Nelson said: “It is clear that China is failing to meet responsible standards regarding their space debris. “Space-faring nations must minimize the risks to people and property on Earth of re-entries of space objects and maximize transparency regarding those operations,” he said in a statement. — *AP*

Indian ocean north of the Maldives at lat 22.2, long 50.0. That’s all we have on

this re-entry; thanks for the wild ride,” it said. The US Space command

confirmed the re-entry into the atmosphere of the rocket over the Arabian peninsula, but said it was unknown if the debris had hit land or water.

“The exact location of the impact and the span of debris, both of which are unknown at this time, will not be released by US Space Command,” it said.

Harvard astrophysicist Jonathan McDowell, who tracked the tumbling rocket part, wrote on Twitter, “An ocean reentry was always statistically the most likely. It appears China won its gamble. But it was still reckless. The rocket, carrying the core module for China’s Tiangong Space Station, blasted

off from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site on the southern island province of Hainan on April 29.

The large rocket stage that deorbited was more than 33 metres (108 feet) tall and weighed more than 20 tonnes, making it the sixth largest object to re-enter the Earth’s atmosphere, according to the Aerospace Corporation, a federally funded research organisation based in California. Very little of the rocket stage’s mass survived re-entry, however, with the majority having burned up as it entered the Earth’s dense atmosphere at a speed of about 8 km per second, the *Post* report said. — *PTI*



## DECCAN Chronicle

10 MAY 2021

### No more bickering, enable new anti-Covid task force

The Supreme Court order constituting a National Task Force (NTF) for, among others, making an assessment and recommendations on the availability and distribution of medical oxygen and essential drugs and medicines for the entire country gives the Union government an opportunity to make quick amends to the lapses it committed in preparing the nation for the second wave of the pandemic Covid-19.

The cabinet secretary is the convenor of the NTF which has 12 members drawn from the bureaucracy, academics and the healthcare industry. The court would want the NTF to commence its work immediately and determine the modalities for oxygen supply within a week, reflecting the desperation of thousands of people suffering from the lack of healthcare facilities felt across the country. The court has also tasked them with anticipating the requirements of the nation to face a third wave of the pandemic, which the principal scientific adviser to the government has already warned is on its way. The Union and state governments and their agencies have been told to provide complete and real time data for facilitating the

**The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned...**

NTF's work while all private hospitals and other healthcare institutions have been asked to co-operate with it.

While repeatedly assuring all stakeholders that it has no plans to enter into the executive domain of the government, the apex court has said the constitution of the NTF will facilitate a public health response to the pandemic based on scientific and specialised domain knowledge and "enable the decision makers to have inputs which go beyond finding ad-hoc solutions to the present problems".

The ball is now in the government's court, contrary to a section of the cheerleaders of the NDA dispensation screaming themselves hoarse, saying the court's directive goes against the constitutional scheme of things. True, the court has stepped in to fill a vacuum people have felt but it has made it clear that it is for the government to take "appropriate decisions" on the task force's recommendations though it said the body shall submit its recommendations to the court also. True also that the Constitution vests all the executive power with the Union council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister, who also heads the National Disaster Management Authority, constituted under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

The court must, however, have been disappointed with the response of the government when it asked for a plan to address the pressing issues people face during the pandemic, and hence the decision. That several high courts were also forced to intervene to ensure supply of oxygen and life-saving drugs may have also prompted the Supreme Court into taking a pro-active position.

The government must take the court's intervention as a call to assume the power and responsibility in a decisive manner and act. It must ensure that the NTF gets the best help from all concerned so that it comes up with readily actionable plan which will help address the mess the nation finds itself in now. Quibbling over constitutional niceties can wait till the pandemic is over.

### Israel mars own peace gains

In a series of severe policing moves, Israel did not endear itself to its new allies in the region like the UAE and Bahrain, both signatories to normalisation agreements with Israel last year, besides old enemy Hamas, which rules in the Gaza Strip. Israeli police appeared to block the right to worship for Muslims in the Al Aqua mosque in Jerusalem, their religion's third holiest site. The Israel police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at stone-throwing Palestinian youth on Friday injuring about 205 Palestinians and 18 policemen and also clashed with protesters outside Jerusalem's Old City on Saturday which, as the "Night of Destiny", is also the holiest night in the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Weeks of unrest followed by two days of high tension from police action described as "security moves" by the police chief may be traced back not only to competing historic claims to east Jerusalem, which houses holy shrines of Judaism, Islam and Christianity but also to rising anger over the possible eviction of Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarra as their land is being claimed by Jewish settlers. This relates to an old phenomenon in Israel's planned demographic change of territories occupied since the 1967 war. Israel's supreme court is to hold a hearing on the case pertaining to East Jerusalem on Monday.

There were also claims of a rocket from Hamas falling in an open area on Sunday and a retaliatory aerial Israeli strike at a Hamas military post. The incidents does no credit to Israel even as Benjamin Netanyahu's government is still in place though Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid party has been asked to explore forming a new coalition government. The US, Europe and UN are calling for calm even as Israel's Arab allies are condemning the latest moves which, naturally enough, are seen as obstructing Muslims when they are going for Ramadan prayers. In oppressive policing action, Israel may be blithely blowing away the gains made in its peace moves that helped alleviate old enmities in the region.



Subhani

## India, world in middle of a 'Third World War'



Abhijit Bhattacharyya

It's now a "Third World War". In the nineteenth century, Prussia's Maj. Gen. Carl von Clausewitz had said: "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means". That is what the People's Republic of China is now engaged in - waging war in order to dominate the world.

We have now entered the third year of this epic campaign, which began in 2019 on a low key. The Chinese strategy was simple - to subdue without shooting - and to bring India to its knees. This has now turned into a conflagration. New Delhi was totally unprepared and last year, as the threat of the pandemic rose, it got caught up in health issues and couldn't put adequate infrastructure in place. This monumental misjudgment led to vast numbers of Indians shivering down their spine, failing as usual to read Chinese malice.

It's not just India. The world is in the midst of a long-drawn, protracted "Third World War", the first salvo of which was fired by Beijing's dictator-for-life Xi Jinping from Wuhan in 2019, to fulfil the Communist Party of China's twenty-first century ambition of becoming the planet's numero uno power.

The seeds were sown at Wuhan, President Xi's favourite venue to showcase his country's new global ambitions. Remember the "Wuhan spirit" of 2018 - when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Chinese strongman in the aftermath of the Dokalam standoff earlier that year? The prime target was, of the West, and specifically the United States; but Beijing then changed course towards the secondary target, India; decimating Delhi's health and resources through a second-wave warhead that pene-

trated through the fragile firewall of Lutyens' Delhi's diplomatic gullibility, political vulnerability and strategic inability to retaliate against the CPC's malice. This not only brought Delhi down, forcing it to kowtow to the world for aid and help, but now threatens the very existence of India's demography.

As fatalities rise across the land and corpses pile up, the killer epicentre of the war has ferociously revived across the whole of India, wreaking havoc of the kind not seen by Indians before. Without a bullet fire or a bomb dropped, the flames of war are about to send India's economy and its health systems into the ICU. India's defence and diplomacy are on a psychological ventilator, with the polity embarrassed and bruised for going into an avoidable and premature celebration to declare victory over the China-origin virus pandemic.

New Delhi's enormous misjudgment in assessing the incendiary punch of the conflagration has sunk a nation of 1.3 billion into an unprecedented state of pessimism and panic, dejection and depression. India also miscalculated the swift course change of the "Third World War", because unlike all belligerents in previous conflicts in human history, its mass killing spree without military mobilisation doesn't have any visible or definite contours.

The deadly blow of the Chinese-origin virus (Covid-19) is far worse than the physical devastation and destruction that India faced in either the First or the Second World War. The outreach of this virus has been more devastating than the poison gas in the First World War (used by Britain, Germany and Austria-Hungary in the trenches adjacent to the Franco-

German border and beyond) and the subsequent reduced use by combatants in the Second World War following the public revulsion caused after the 1914-1918 war.

In the twenty-first century, however, the Chinese-origin virus has already affected around 320 million people globally and is now on an uncontrollable overdrive. Having afflicted 20 million-plus Indians and killing over 200,000 of them, this silent chemical-biological killer is infecting around 400,000 people in India every single day, with around 3,500-4,000 succumbing every day. The funeral pyres are everywhere, not just in crematoria: ambulances, alleys, parks, car parks, riversides are seeing corpses lit before the last rites.

Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first "world war" in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds. Make no mistake. Even at the height of the bloodshed between the belligerents, the First World War was a European war, leading to 30 million deaths. It happened mostly on the European heartland, Russia, Turkey, Mesopotamia and East Asia, in which a maximum of 40 nations were directly involved or affected.

The 1939-1945 Second World War, however, killed 60 million people, double that of the First World War, with the devastation centred mostly in Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific islands. Mainland India survived a direct assault, along with most

**Compared to the two world wars of the twentieth century, which were largely fought in Europe and other parts of the planet, this is the first 'world war' in which India is one of the principal battlegrounds**

of the African continent, Australia, plus North and South America.

Compare these with the Chinese-virus killer of the Third World War! It has spared no one, except perhaps the country of its origin, as is being claimed by the CPC in its centenary year. Hence, of the 223 countries (sovereign, semi-independent, autonomous, dependents) in the world, all are under attack except one! Isn't it a World War of one (among 223) against 222?

In the midst of this calamity comes the "offer" of proposed assistance to India from Mr Xi, who is also the CPC's general secretary! Should India accept it? As far as Beijing is concerned, we can emulate what then PM Manmohan Singh had done in 2004, in the aftermath of the tsunami, to politely refuse any assistance, at least from the CPC. India can seek or accept aid or help from any of the remaining 222, but not from the one that is actively trying to turn this country into a vassal state at a time of its distress. China has already proved that it is an existential threat to a large number of countries. Now the "Third World War" looms large, with the threat of the airborne "Made in China" germ/virus hovering over the planet.

You don't have to look very far for evidence of the Hans' mischievous thought and intent. On Weibo, see the image of a Chinese rocket launch positioned next to a photo of Covid-19 victims being cremated in India. The text read: "Lighting a fire in China versus lighting a fire in India". This nasty, nefarious image was published by an account of the official Chinese law enforcement agency - CPC Central Political, Legal Affairs Commission - that has millions of Weibo followers. It shows the Chinese rejoicing at the sight of funeral pyres of Indian victims of the "Third World War". Will nemesis catch up one day?

*The writer is an alumnus of the National Defence College. The views expressed are personal.*

### LETTERS

#### VACCINATE FAST

I am a student who lost two years of academic life. Teachers must be treated as frontline warriors and be vaccinated first. Registration of patients for vaccination is time consuming for nurses. Why not use teachers for this work?

**Flora Mozes**  
Hyderabad

It is very clear by now that we need to vaccinate not less than 50 per cent to 60 per cent of our population to stop this pandemic. We are talking of over 120 crore jabs. We started with approximately 25 lakh vaccinations per day, which was to increase to 50 lakh a day by the end of April. As things stand, we are averaging about 20 lakh today.

**Shashi Karan**  
Hyderabad

#### VACCINATION CENTRE

The Telangana state government announced that all those eligible for the second dose of vaccine will be administered the same at all government vaccination centres. I am a senior citizen who visited a centre in Hafeezpet for the same. They told me there that only Covishield was available and for Covaxin I was directed to Kondapur government hospital. I urge the government to give proper directions so that at least senior citizens won't face such problems.

**Balakrishnan Vishwanathan**  
Hyderabad

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### Value of rare coins

HYDERABAD, MAY 9.

The City Crime Branch officials investigating the discovery of rare gold coins, dug out earth in the house of the waddar in Mubarakpur village, in Vikarabad, and found the vessel in which the remaining gold coins were preserved. On examining the gold coins, the officials realised the value and importance of their recovery.

The officials informed the State and Centre Archaeological departments about their findings. Mr. V.V. Krishna Sastry, Assistant Director, Archaeology and Museums, A.P. examined the coins and determined the period at 14th centre A.D. The coins in the denominations of 'pagodas' and 'half pagodas' bore the images Shiva-Parvathi, Gandabherunda (a bird with two necks) and some floral designs on one side and inscriptions in Devanagari script on the other.

Kishwar Desai  
London Diary



### Indian summer on UK's red list; royal duchesses in duel of creativity

April may be a cruel month but May heralds the beginning of the holiday season. For some reason, the English prefer to go abroad at the only time the weather is tolerable - in the summer months. It was in the late nineteenth century that Parliament decided to have a summer break. The issue was the pollution of Thames. It stank. Members wanted the windows open due to the heat but that brought in the stink. So they decided to abandon the Westminster Palace for the summer. That brought summer holidays all around.

And now the traffic lights are back again - to guide you whether you can travel to a particular country or not. Australia and New Zealand have made it to the "green" traffic lights, including others like Iceland, along with very few other countries. Which means that the Brits can travel there without having to quarantine for 10 days at a hotel chosen by the government when they return. But countries like India - and some of its neighbours like Nepal and Pakistan fall into the "red" list. Thus while we

know that right now there is a travel ban between the two countries - if any British citizen wants to travel to India they need to quarantine for ten days in a hotel upon their return, plus all the tests they have to undergo. Some people are deeply unhappy that these restrictions are still in place, despite the vaccine. But that is our "Brave New World" - perfect only for armchair travellers!

So we still have rules of how many others you can meet and how closely they must be related. For instance, six members of two families can meet, etc. But it is only around the third week of June that many of these restrictions are going to be removed - we hope that we can last that long! But of course getting back to "normal" will come with fresh caution as undoubtedly a life free of Covid and its many mutations is still far away. So while the "traffic lights" may turn green, many of us will still hang on to our masks.

Even so, it is not all pleasure and no work. May is also the month when local elections take place. Plus this year, vote to the Scottish Parliament. Municipal

elections in England were cancelled last year due to our first (of many but we did not know it then) lockdowns.

Mind you, despite all the difficulties the country has been through, the Prime Minister is still riding high. Perhaps it is the optimism that he exudes - with the tousled hair and Houdini-like escape mechanisms. Throughout his career, he has got away with much, much more than any one else, and he carries no guilt for any wrong or fault he has committed. He apologises and carries on, a formula that has worked wonderfully.

Normally, the government party does not do well in the four yearly local elections as they are out of sync with general elections. But "lucky" Boris is emerging triumphant all over the English regions. The Labour Party under its leader Sir Keir Starmer (a rare Knighted MP) was hoping to reverse their losses in the North where they were supposed to have a "Red Wall". It had crumbled in the last general election. Alas, it cannot be rebuilt by Sir Keir, and Boris has once again managed to convince voters that he is

their best good news guy.

In London though things are different, the mayor of London has a four-year term. Boris was twice the mayor of London. But in 2016, Sadiq Khan, the Labour candidate, captured London. He has already had a bonus extra year due to the postponement of the election. Now he has won, and extended his stay for three more years. Thus he becomes not only the first minority ethnic candidate to continue to head one of the biggest cities in the world but now will establish the enviable distinction of having been mayor for a eight years. So come 2025 - prepare for Sadiq to turn his mind to leadership of the Labour Party and take a gamble on becoming the first minority ethnic Prime Minister of UK. Of course he may be running against Rishi Sunak or Priti Patel as the Conservatives' prime ministerial candidate. Who could have thought even 10 years ago, such a thing could happen?

And meanwhile a quick note on the publicity outreach of the two duchesses. Both Kate and

Meghan are doing their best to stay in the limelight. Who would have thought the ever productive Meghan Markle even had a book in her, and this time it seems to be a cute little children's book. She has come up with one called *The Bench*, dedicated to her husband Harry - but written for her son. Undoubtedly a money spinner - good or bad - it means that now we all know what gift to buy a toddler.

One person who may not buy it will be the Duchess of Cambridge for reasons which are far too well known, especially after Oprah. But the competition is heating up - as William and Kate have their own "YouTube" channel now. While the two duchesses continue their duel at dawn, from safely across the pond... one wonders, what next?

*Kishwar Desai's latest book, The Longest Kiss: The Life And Times of Devika Rani, has just been published and she is the Chair of the Trust that set up the world's first Partition Museum in Amritsar*



## quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49206.47	0.52
Nifty 50	14823.20	0.67
S&P 500*	4,232.60	0.74
Dollar (₹)	73.51	0.36
Pound Sterling (₹)	102.30	0.33
Euro (₹)	88.76	0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,185▲474	1.00
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.29	0.29
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.015	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.545	-0.016

\* As of Friday/Saturday

## Hero MotoCorp extends plants' shutdown to 16th

Hero MotoCorp said it is extending the shutdown of its plants across India by another week till May 16 in view of the prevailing Covid-19 situation. The shutdown also includes the Global Parts Center in Neemrana and R&D facility the Centre of Innovation and Technology in Jaipur, Hero MotoCorp said. Last month, the company had announced temporary stopping of operations at all its six manufacturing units in India.

## Over 2,100 PSB branches closed or merged in FY21



As many as 2,118 branches of 10 public sector banks have either been closed or merged with other banks in the last fiscal, according to an RTI reply. The highest number of 1,283 branches of Bank of Baroda were either closed or merged, according to information provided to an RTI query filed by Neemuch-based activist Chandrashekhkar Gaud. No branch of Bank of India and Uco Bank was closed last fiscal.

## Amara Raja resumes ops at Andhra plants

Amara Raja Batteries Ltd said it has resumed operations at its plants at Nunegundlapalli and Karkambadi in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday. The resumption of production was done after the Andhra Pradesh High Court suspended the orders passed by the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board. The firm said the recent temporary disruption will not have any material impact on its operations or order book.

## FPIs pull out over ₹5,900 crore from equities last week

Foreign portfolio investors have pulled out Rs 5,936 crore from equities in the first week of May amid worries over the Covid second wave and its fall-out on the economy. FPIs had pulled out Rs 9,659 crore in April after infusing money in the preceding six months. If fears of Covid-19 persist among investors, then further redemptions cannot be ruled out, Himanshu Srivastava of Morningstar India, stated.



## NCLT starts proceedings on creditor plea Ahluwalia Contracts in insolvency soup

New Delhi, May 9: The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has initiated insolvency proceedings against construction firm Ahluwalia Contracts India Ltd for defaulting on payments to an operational creditor.

The New Delhi-based NCLT bench allowed the insolvency plea filed by A2 Interiors Products Pvt Ltd against Ahluwalia Contracts, claiming default of Rs 14.10 crore, and appointed an interim resolution professional.

Ahluwalia Contracts had engaged A2 Interiors Products for interior, furnishing and allied civil and electrical works at various project sites. It had supplied materials to Ahluwalia Contracts as part of various work orders issued for six projects at different locations in the country, according to the NCLT order.

It had raised invoices against each work order, which were duly received by Ahluwalia Contracts, however, it failed to release the full payment.

Later, in May 2019, A2 Interiors had issued a notice to Ahluwalia Contracts under the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) demanding Rs 12.54 crore along with interest, which was rejected by Ahluwalia Contracts in its reply and raised disputes.

Following this, A2 Interiors approached the NCLT under section 9 of IBC, which allows operational creditors to file an insolvency plea, claiming



a total outstanding debt of Rs 14.10 crore against Ahluwalia Contracts.

This was opposed by Ahluwalia Contracts, contending it as not maintainable, on the grounds that it is arising out of different work orders, which cannot be claimed under one single application and of different service in nature and each contract gives rise to separate alleged debt.

It also alleged that the applicant has concealed certain facts and documents and not disclosed all work orders executed between the parties.

However, the operational creditor said that though it was for work order for six different projects but the corporate debtor is a Principal Contractor. It also submitted that no notice of dispute was raised by Ahluwalia Contracts prior to the notice of demand issued by it.

An NCLT bench comprising members

Sumitpurkayastha and Deepti Mukesh said: "Considering the documents on records and submissions made, it is observed that there exists an operational debt which is due and payable by the corporate debtor."

It further observed that once the work is complete and the final bill is raised, the retention money becomes due and payable.

Though the corporate debtor has raised dispute prior to the issue of the demand notice with regards to non-completion of work on time, defective work and invoices raised but has itself admitted that retention money is payable.

While admitting A2 Interiors' plea, the NCLT observed that the corporate debtor had admitted to the debt and the said has become due as per their own statement in their email, leaving no scope for any further adjudication.

—PTI

## GOVT RELEASES ₹8,900 CR FOR PANCHAYATS

FC BUREAU  
NEW DELHI, MAY 9

Amid the rampant spread of Covid19, the finance ministry, on Sunday, released over Rs 8,900 crore as grants a month in advance for panchayats. Though the payment was scheduled for June, the ministry decided to release it in May in view of the prevailing Covid19 situation. The amount s will be distributed among 25 states, in which the highest share of over Rs 1,441 crore has been granted to Uttar Pradesh, followed by over Rs 861 crore to Maharashtra.

"The Department of Expenditure in finance ministry released an amount of Rs 8,923.8 crore to 25 states for providing grants to the Rural Local Bodies. The grants of Rs 8,923.8 crore are meant for all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions - village, block and district," a finance ministry statement said.

## Cadila eyes nod for Covid vaccine by June

RAHUL SATIJA  
MAY 9

Cadila Healthcare Ltd plans to submit trial data for its Covid-19 vaccine by end of May and is looking for an approval in June, a newspaper reported citing Sharvil Patel, managing director of Cadila.

The Phase-III clinical trials of the ZyCoV-D vaccine will be representative of its efficacy against

## Jewellers get HC reprieve on hallmarking

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MAY 9

The Bombay High Court has directed the government not to take any coercive action against jewellers till June 14, 2021 for storing or selling non-hallmarked gold jewellery. The government had made hallmarking mandatory from June 1.

The Nagpur bench of Bombay High Court was hearing the appeal filed by the All-India Gems and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) and others. The court stayed "coercive action" till it further heard the matter on June 14.

The GJC had contended that the new regulation with effect from June 1 is likely to result in great hardships to around 5 lakh jewellers in India. There are at least 488 districts which do not have hallmarking centres and the Covid restrictions prevent a person from travelling from one dis-



trict to another for hallmarking purposes.

Further, there are 6,000 crore jewellery pieces which need to be hallmarked. Within the time available it is not possible to get all these pieces hallmarked. Any breach of the regulation is punishable with maximum imprisonment of one year.

"The court has in the meanwhile, directed that no coercive action shall be taken against the jewellers under Section 29(2) of the BIS Act, 2016, till the next date of hearing on 14th June 2021. This is

a big relief to the jewellers who shall now be fully protected from any actions from BIS even though they may wish to still go ahead with mandatory hallmarking," said Saiyam Mehra, vice-chairman, GJC.

According to Ashish Pethe, chairman, GJC, court has seen the hardship of jewellers and has taken note of the contention that in proportion to the large number of jewellers in India, the percentage of hallmarking centres available in India is just about 34 per cent.

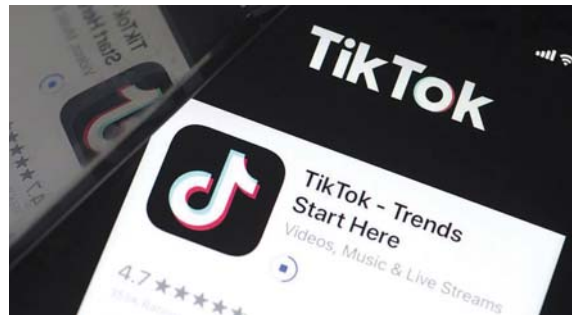
## ByteDance aims to challenge Alibaba

COCO LIU & ZHEPING HUANG  
MAY 9

Zhang Yiming built ByteDance Ltd into the world's most valuable private company via a string of blockbuster apps like TikTok that challenged Facebook and other incumbents on their own turf. His latest target: Alibaba.

The 38-year-old AI coding genius, searching for ByteDance's next big act, has set his sights on China's \$1.7 trillion e-commerce arena. The co-founder has hired thousands of staff and roped in big-name sponsors like Xiaomi Corp impresario Lei Jun to drive what he calls his next "major breakthrough" into global business-selling stuff to consumers via its addictive short videos and livestreams. That endeavor will test not just Zhang's magic touch with app creation and ByteDance's AI wizardry, but also investor reception ahead of one of the tech world's most hotly anticipated IPOs.

His startup is already starting to make waves in an industry long controlled by Jack Ma's



Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and JD.com Inc. It sold about \$26 billion worth of make-up, clothing and other merchandise in 2020, achieving in its maiden year what Alibaba's Taobao took six years to accomplish. It's shooting for more than \$185 billion by 2022. Douyin, TikTok's Chinese twin, is expected to contribute more than half of the firm's \$40 billion domestic ad sales this year, driven in part by e-commerce.

"Short video platforms have so much traffic that they can basically do any business," said Shawn Yang, managing director of Blue Lotus Capital Advisors. "Douyin is not only in ads, but also livestreaming, e-commerce, local life services and

search. This has a lot of room for imagination."

A burgeoning e-commerce business could help the firm surpass its \$250 billion valuation when it goes public, countering concerns around Beijing's crackdown on the country's internet behemoths. Preparations are said to be underway for a listing that would be one of the world's most anticipated debuts. While ByteDance won't handle sales or merchandise itself, it hopes to sell more ads to merchants, boost traffic and take a cut of business.

The internet giant is a late entrant to China's social commerce scene, where influencers tout products to fans like a Gen-Z version of the Home Shopping Network.

The format, pioneered by Alibaba as a marketing tool in 2016, developed a life of its own last year when Covid-19 spurred demand for at-home entertainment. Last year, Alibaba's Taobao Live generated over 400 billion yuan (\$62 billion) of gross merchandise value.

ByteDance is counting on its artificial intelligence-driven, interest-based recommendations to help its e-commerce business catch up.

ByteDance's ambitions aren't limited to Alibaba. The firm has also started to let users book hotels and restaurants through Douyin, offering lifestyle services similar to superapps like Meituan and Tencent's WeChat.

Douyin's e-commerce foray in China may offer a road map for TikTok, which has begun testing the waters in online shopping through tie-ups with Walmart Inc and Canadian e-commerce firm Shopify Inc. In December, Zhang told global employees that e-commerce, when combined with live-streaming and short videos, offers an even bigger opportunity outside China. —Bloomberg

## Industry backs up efforts to contain second wave

New Delhi, May 9: As India suffers the world's worst outbreak of Covid-19 cases, global and domestic corporate giants are pitching in resources, from airlifting medical equipment, making medical oxygen and setting up hospitals to supplement a public health system buckling under the weight of surging infections and deaths.

Amazon and Google as well as Indian firms Tata Sons, Reliance Industries Ltd and Adani Group have set up Covid hospitals, airlifted cryogenic tankers from abroad for transporting medical oxygen and contributed funds to aid the Covid battle, going by company announcements and industry sources.

While Google CEO Sundar Pichai last month announced \$18 million donation, Amazon said 1,000 Medtronic ventilators will be delivered to India. Microsoft said it would work to provide India with 1,000 ventilators and 25,000 oxygen concentration devices.

Mukesh Ambani-led

Reliance Industries tweaked manufacturing at its oil refineries to produce over 1,000 tonnes of medical grade liquid oxygen per day. It has also set up 1,875 hospital beds for free treatment of Covid patients in Jamnagar in Gujarat and in Mumbai.

India's largest steel maker JSW has stopped making some steel products to produce hundreds of tonnes of oxygen for hard-hit areas. It said it was building large Covid care centres around its plants, so that they can be serviced via a pipeline.

While Wipro and Azim Premji Foundation converted one IT facility in Pune into a 430-bed intermediary care Covid hospital, Infosys has set up a 100-room Covid hospital in Bangalore in association with Narayana Health, providing free care to the poor.

Cipla supported Maharashtra government in setting up Covid isolation ward, Vedanta is setting up a field hospital in Delhi NCR and Adani Foundation set up hospi-

tals in Gujarat and even converted the Adani Vidya Mandir school in Ahmedabad into an emergency Covid Care Centre with oxygen support and catered food.

Tata Group made about 5,000 beds available to Covid patients through its group companies and ITC set up a 200-bed makeshift hospital in Kishore Bharati Stadium for Covid patients in a record 72 hours.

State Bank of India set up 1,000-bed makeshift hospitals, 250-bed ICU facilities and 1,000-bed isolation facilities across the country, while Coal India Ltd set up the largest number of Covid beds totalling 2,000, including 750 oxygen and 70 ICU beds.

Tata Group also imported 1,000 cryogenic containers to transport liquid oxygen, supplying 900 tonnes of oxygen per day to state hospitals.

Tech Mahindra supplied medical equipment to over 20 hospitals and L&T Group committed 22 oxygen generators to needy hospitals. —PTI

## Copper just smashed past a record. Here's what you need to know

MARK BURTON  
MAY 9

Copper soared last week to an all-time high, continuing a sizzling rally that's seen prices double in the past year.

The previous copper record was set in 2011, around the peak of the commodities supercycle sparked by China's rise. This time, investors are betting that copper's vital role in the world's shift to green energy will mean surging demand and even higher prices. Copper futures rose as high as \$10,440 a tonne in London on Friday.

What's the big deal about copper?

Through human history, copper has played a critical role in many of civilization's greatest advances:

from early monetary systems to municipal plumbing, from the rise of trains, planes and cars to the devices and networks that underpin the information age.

The reddish brown metal is mostly unrivalled as an electrical and thermal conductor, while also being durable and easy to work with. Today, a vast array of uses in all corners of heavy industry, construction and manufacturing mean it's a famously reliable indicator for trends in the global economy.

The copper market was one of the first to react as the Covid-19 coronavirus emerged in Wuhan, with prices slumping by more than a quarter between January and March last year. Then as China's unprecedented steps to control the domestic

spread of the virus started to yield results, copper rapidly rebounded—and it hasn't looked back since.

But it's not just China driving the rally. While the country accounts for half of the world's copper consumption and has played an integral part in copper's surge, demand there has actually softened this year. Yet prices continue to drive higher.

Why is copper surging? It's partly due to evidence of recoveries in other major industrial economies, with manufacturing output surging in places like the US, Germany and Japan.

But investors have also been piling into copper on a bet that global efforts to cut carbon emissions are going to mean the world needs a lot more of the



## Explainer

metal, putting a strain on supply. New mine production may be slow to arrive, as mines are hard to find and expensive to develop.

Electric vehicles contain about four times as much copper as a conventional car, and vast amounts of copper wiring will be needed

in roadside chargers to keep them running. Bringing electricity from offshore wind farms to national power grids is also a copper-intensive exercise.

What does it mean for the economy?

There are mounting concerns that the broad rally in everything from lumber to steel will force central bankers to step in to stop inflation in raw-materials markets spiralling out of control.

In turn, the stellar economic rebound that's driving the commodities rally may start to stall as businesses are hit by higher interest rates, compressed margins, and waning demand from consumers.

Could the rally fizzle out?

In the case of copper, there are some signs that spot demand is starting to cool, particularly in China, and some analysts and traders say the record prices aren't justified by today's fundamentals.

The view among policymakers is that the rise in commodities prices will prove short-lived, as consumers will focus their spending on services and experiences as economies open up, easing the strain on demand for commodities-intensive items such as second homes, electronics and appliances seen during lockdown.

For copper though, it's not just about strong demand today. In fact, a lot of expected spending on renewables and electric-vehicle infrastructure is yet to really materialise. When it does, it could

transform the outlook for copper usage in developed countries.

How high could copper go?

Trafigura Group, the world's top copper trader, and Goldman Sachs Group both say prices could hit \$15,000 a tonne in the coming years, on the back of a global surge in demand due to the shift to green energy. Bank of America says \$20,000 could even be possible if drastic issues arise on the supply side.

The copper market itself may also be facing a big shift. Trafigura predicts that demand growth in China will be eclipsed by rising consumption in the rest of the world over the coming decade, in a dramatic reversal of the recent trend. That could help underpin a new



## SHORT TAKES

## Pakistan on verge of second victory

**Harare:** Pakistan were on the brink of a second successive innings win against Zimbabwe despite a fighting performance by Regis Chakabva on the third day of the of the second and final on Sunday.

Bad light ended play with Zimbabwe on 220/9 in their follow-on innings, 158 runs short of making Pakistan bat again.

Chakabva made 80 as Zimbabwe made their highest total of a series in which they have been outclassed. Chakabva followed up his top score of 33 in the first innings by making his team's only half-century in the two matches. Pakistan fast bowler Hasan Ali took a career-best 5/27 as the host nation were bowled out for 132 in the first innings. **Brief scores: Pakistan 510/8 decl. vs Zimbabwe 132** (Chakabva 33, Hasan Ali 5/27) & **220/9** (Chakabva 80, Shaheen 4-45, Nauman 5-86).

## Sakariya loses father to Covid

**Rajkot:** Young Saurashtra pacer Chetan Sakariya's father Kanjibhai Sakariya died due to Covid-19 at a hospital in Bhavnagar on Sunday. He was 42 and was battling the infection for the past few days. The Saurashtra Cricket Association condemned the demise, saying "Everyone at Saurashtra Cricket Association is deeply saddened on the sad demise of cricketer Chetan Sakariya's father. "...Saurashtra Cricket Association conveys heartfelt condolences to Chetan and prays to the Almighty to give enough strength to everyone in his family to bear the loss and grant eternal peace to the departed noble soul," the cricket body said in a statement. The 22-year-old Chetan played for the Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL. — PTI

## Maiden pro bout win for Manpreet

**New Delhi:** Commonwealth Games silver medal-winning Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra made a positive start in the professional circuit, beating Argentina's Luciano Ramos in his debut bout in Florida, USA. Jangra travelled to USA two months back for training. The boxer won his first professional bout against Ramos in a four round unanimous decision in the super welterweight category on Saturday. Jangra has signed up with Florida-based Pro Box Promotions. The 27-year-old, who is also a silver medalist from the 2013 Asian Championships, was supposed to fight on March 19 but that bout was put off. "I'm so excited for a great run in the pro ranks and hopefully win a world championship with my team," said the boxer, who is training with American coaches Asa Beard and Marc Farrait. — PTI

## Sabalenka wins Madrid Open title

**Madrid:** Aryna Sabalenka is glad she changed her mind about playing at the Madrid Open. Two weeks after nearly withdrawing from the tournament because of a muscle injury, Sabalenka was standing on center court with the winner's trophy in her hands on Saturday. Sabalenka defeated top-ranked Ash Barty 6-0, 3-6, 6-4 for her 10th WTA title and first on clay. In the men's final, 2018 champion Alexander Zverev will face eighth-seeded Matteo Berrettini. Sabalenka's victory, coming two weeks after she was hurt in a loss to Barty in the Stuttgart final. "To be honest, after the final in Stuttgart I was injured, I couldn't even move, I really wanted to withdraw from here," she said. — AP

## Westbrook does it for Wizards

**Los Angeles:** Another historic night from Russell Westbrook helped the Washington Wizards to a 133-132 overtime victory over the Indiana Pacers on Saturday. Westbrook notched the 181st triple-double of his career on Saturday, tying Oscar Robertson for the most in NBA history. He finished with 33 points, 19 rebounds and 15 assists, draining the go-ahead free-throws with one second left in overtime then blocking a potential game-winning shot from Indiana's Caris LeVert as time expired. "That's Russell, he's an incredible player and person," said Wizards coach Scott Brooks. — AFP

## Maldives mayhem

## Bengaluru FC told to leave Male for violating Covid protocols

**Male/New Delhi, May 9:** It was a chaotic Sunday for Indian football as Bengaluru FC's AFC Cup play-off against Eagles FC was postponed and the team asked to leave Male for violating Covid-19 protocols, while all Group D fixtures in the same event were also put off after ATK Mohun Bagan reported two positive cases.

The Asian Football Confederation did not give any reason for postponing the matches but it is understood that the deadly resurgence of Covid-19 in many Asian countries is behind the decision.

It all started with Bengaluru FC's play-off match against Eagles FC, scheduled here on May 11, being left in doubt after the host country's sports minister asked the ISL side to leave citing breach of Covid-19 protocols.

"Bengaluru FC's 2021 AFC Cup playoff stage clash against Eagles FC has been postponed until further notice, as confirmed by the Asian Football Confederation on Sunday. The club is making all arrangements to get all its players and staff home at the earliest," BFC said in a statement.

"Bengaluru FC would like to place on record an unconditional apology for a health and safety breach, involving one member of staff and two players, in the Maldives, on Saturday," it added.

The exact nature of the violation by BFC, which is captained by India skipper Sunil Chhetri, was not specified but



Bengaluru FC's Sunil Chhetri during a training session in Male. BFC are in the Maldives for the AFC Cup.

— BFC

sports minister Ahmed Mahloof termed it as "unacceptable".

The sentiment was echoed by BFC owner Parth Jindal, who apologised and promised strict action against the errant players and support staff. "Unacceptable behavior from @bengaluruFC breaching the strict guidelines from HPA (Health Protection Agency) & @theafcdotcom. The club should leave Flag of Maldives immediately as we can't entertain this act,"

Mahloof tweeted from his official handle.

"We have informed FAM that we cannot hold the match, and asked them to make arrangements for @bengaluruFC's departure. We will be in further correspondence with AFC through @MaldivesFA to postpone the group stage." The minister's tweets came after reports emerged that some players of the side were seen roaming Male's streets in violation of the quarantine protocol.

Also, two ATK Mohun Bagan players — Prabir Das and SK Sahil — tested positive for Covid-19, hours before their group matches in Maldives were postponed by the continental football governing body.

"Participating clubs who have travelled to Maldives will be required to arrange for their return home while adhering to the Covid-19 health and travel protocols put in place by the country," the AFC said in a statement. — PTI

## Red Devils delay City's title party

**London, May 9:** Manchester City's Premier League title celebrations were put on hold again as Manchester United fought back to win 3-1 at Aston Villa on Sunday.

Pep Guardiola's side missed a chance to seal the title when they lost 2-1 to Chelsea on Saturday. City could have started the party if second-placed United lost at Villa Park, but their arch-rivals kept the leaders' champagne on ice with a second-half escape act.

Trailing to Bertrand Traore's first half rocket, United equalised through Bruno Fernandes' penalty before Mason Greenwood and Edinson Cavani netted to leave City frustrated.

City, with three matches to play, are now 10 points clear of United, who have four games left.

United host Leicester on Tuesday and Liverpool on Thursday, with a defeat in either of those matches guaranteeing the title for City, who are next in action at Newcastle on Friday.

The Europa League finalists would love to keep City waiting as long as possible as they bid to



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani celebrates after scoring against Aston Villa in an EPL match at Villa Park in Birmingham on Sunday.

— AFP

earn a runners-up finish, which would be their highest end-of-season position since Ole Gunnar Solskjaer took charge in December 2018.

But treble-chasing City's blistering form has turned the title race into

a procession since the new year and it is only a matter of time before their coronation is confirmed.

They will have to wait another 48 hours at least due to the latest display of United's fortune.

Villa took the lead in the 24th minute through Traore, who turned sharply in the penalty area and shrugged off Victor Lindelof before smashing a superb strike into the top corner from an acute angle.

But Solskjaer's team have been experts at second-half comebacks this season and Paul Pogba won a 52nd minute penalty when Douglas Luiz needlessly bundled over the United midfielder.

City's Sergio Aguero had missed a penalty against Chelsea with a risky 'Panenka' chipped effort, but Fernandes was far more clinical as he sent Villa keeper Emiliano Martinez the wrong way from the spot.

Greenwood put United ahead four minutes later as he swivelled past Tyrone Mings on the edge of the area and drove a low finish past Martinez's weak attempted save.

United suffered a blow when their captain Harry Maguire limped off after colliding with Anwar El Ghazi.

But Cavani wrapped up the points with a glancing header from Marcus Rashford's cross in the 87th minute. — AFP

## Mercedes masterstroke helps Hami deny Max

**Barcelona, May 9:** Lewis Hamilton claimed his fifth successive Spanish Grand Prix on Sunday ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen after a Mercedes pit-stop masterstroke.

Hamilton moved on to 98 career wins after a surprise second change of tyres hoodwinked Red Bull to lift him 14 points clear of Verstappen in the drivers' standings.

Valtteri Bottas took third with Charles Leclerc's Ferrari in fourth.

Hamilton had set off from pole for the 100th time but was beaten to the first corner by Verstappen, with Leclerc dishing out the same treatment on Bottas on turn two.

On lap eight Yuki



Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the Spanish GP on Sunday.

— AP

Tsunoda's Sunday drive in Catalonia came to a premature end when his Alpha Tauri came to a grinding halt.

Verstappen held off

Hamilton comfortably on the restart on lap 11, with Leclerc continuing to split the two Mercedes.

With a third of the race completed the first round of pit stops began, with all eyes on which of the front two with less than a second between them would blink first.

Verstappen it was who came in on lap 25, but the pit stop was slow by a couple of seconds in another minor but potentially critical error by the Red Bull title pretenders.

The Mercedes pit wall pulled Hamilton in for a lightning stop a few laps later as they pinned their hopes on fresher medium tyres making the difference towards the finish. — AFP

## WRESTLER | MURDER CASE

## Police hunt on to trace Sushil

**New Delhi, May 9:** The Delhi Police recorded the statements of the victims of Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler here, officials said on Sunday.

The police said the clash took place over vacating a flat in Model Town area.

Two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar, who has been named in the FIR in this case, is absconding and efforts are on to trace him. Raids are being conducted in Delhi/NCR and neighbouring states, a police officer said.

The victims alleged that Kumar was present at the spot when the incident took place, he said.

A 23-year-old wrestler died and his two friends got injured after they were allegedly brutally assaulted by other wrestlers inside Chhatrasal Stadium of the city on the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday.

According to the police, the brawl took place between Kumar, Ajay, Prince, Sonu, Sagar, Amit and others in the parking area. Thereafter, police registered the case under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act at the Model Town Police Station.

"The crime scene and all the five vehicles were inspected. During the inspection, a double barrel loaded gun with five live



Sushil Kumar

cartridges was found in one Scorpio and two wooden sticks were also recovered from the spot.

"All the five vehicles and weapons of offense were seized. The crime scene was further inspected by forensic experts of FSL, Rohini,"

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (northwest) Gurigbal Singh Sidhu had said.

The police had apprehended one Prince Dalal (24), a resident of Jhajjar in Haryana, and seized one double barrel gun from his possession.

"It was not a case of trespassing. The accused took the victims inside the stadium where they assaulted them in the parking area. Kumar was present at the spot when the incident happened, however, police are investigating his role in the assault," an official source had said. — PTI

## NZ PLAYERS REACH HOME AFTER IPL'S SUSPENSION

**Auckland, May 9:** All New Zealand cricketers and coaches, who were involved in IPL 2021, have arrived home safely by private jets in two groups after the indefinite suspension of the T20 league midway into the season due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

They arrived on board a Bombardier Global Express private jet via Tokyo in the first of two chartered flights repatriating the Kiwis after the league was suspended.

On Sunday, former Black Caps captains Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming were among the second group of cricketers to touch down here.

Meanwhile, five-time champions Mumbai Indians on Sunday said that all foreign players and support staff of their team have reached their respective destinations safely.

A total of 14 foreign players and support of MI have left India after the cash-rich tournament had come to a halt on May 4.

## PBKS DOMESTIC PLAYERS ARE HOME

All the Indian members of the Punjab Kings team have reached home safely after the suspension of the IPL, the franchise said on Sunday.

"Following the suspension of the IPL 2021, all PBKS team members have reached home safely while a few are quarantining outside India before they head back to their respective countries," the club said in a statement on twitter. — PTI

## T20 Cup could be delayed: Chappell

**New Delhi, May 9:** Australian great Ian Chappell feels the suspension of IPL is a reminder of cricket's vulnerability and does not rule out the Covid-19 pandemic forcing a postponement or shifting of the upcoming T20 World Cup from India.

The 2021 edition of the lucrative T20 league was suspended earlier this week after four players — Sunrisers Hyderabad batsman Wriddhiman Saha, Delhi Capitals spinner Amit Mishra and KKR's Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier — tested positive for Covid-19 in the bio-bubble.

"The suspension of the 2021 IPL tournament because of surging Covid infections and deaths among the public, and a number of participants testing positive, was a reminder of the game's vulnerability," Chappell wrote in his column for *ESPNcricinfo*.

India, which is grappling with a devastating second wave of the pandemic with cases rising by over 4 lakh everyday, is scheduled to host the T20 World Cup in October-November.

"In the current disastrous climate, the suspension of the IPL could also produce a precedent. It

may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved.

— IAN CHAPPELL  
Australian legend

may lead to the World T20 event, programmed for India later in the year, either being postponed or moved.

Chappell recalled a few incidents that led to the disruption of the game in the past. "In the past, tours have been aborted and matches abandoned for a variety of reasons. Many of these involved back stories, some of which were tragic and others amusing."

The 77-year-old recollected how poor weather during the 1970-71 Boxing Day Test between Australian and England led to the first ever

One-Day International. "In 1970-71 the MCG Boxing Day Test between Australia and England was abandoned without a ball being bowled after heavy rain ruined any chance of a competitive match." — PTI