


WEATHER



Max: 36.0°C  
Min: 25.0°C  
RH: 81%  
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Clear.  
Max/Min temp.  
36/25 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha  
Saptami till 12.45 pm  
Star: Ashlesha till 3.42 pm  
Varjyam: 3.46 am to 5.23 am  
(Friday)  
Durmuhurtam: 11.46 am to  
12.38 pm  
Rahukalam: 12 pm to 1.30 pm  
HIJRI CALENDAR  
Shawwal 5,1442 AH  
PRAYERS  
Fajar: 5.35 am  
Zohar: 1.30 pm  
Asar: 5.15 pm  
Maghrib: 6.25 pm  
Isha: 8.15 pm  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.35 AM  
SUNSET TODAY 6.32 PM  
MOONRISE TODAY 11.39 PM  
MOONSET TOMORROW 00.48 PM

COUNTER POINT



The positive sign is, no complaints from the people about beds, vaccine, oxygen...

SHORT TAKES

Dr Aggarwal dies of Covid

New Delhi: Padma Shri awardee and eminent cardiologist Dr K.K. Aggarwal, who gained more prominence in recent months by posting informative videos about Covid-19 on social media, has died of the same disease, a statement posted on his Twitter handle said. Aggarwal, 62, was admitted to AIIMS here and was on ventilator support since last week, died at 11.30 pm.

Report on Page 4

Black fungus cases in MP

Bhopal: Surge in black fungus infection cases in Madhya Pradesh has sent alarm bells ringing in the state administration forcing the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government to launch microbiological surveillance in the hospitals. State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang told reporters that the government has launched a drive to detect black fungus infection cases.

Report on Page 4

EFFORTS ON TO RAMP UP VAX SUPPLY: MODI


New Delhi, May 18: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that continuous efforts are being made to ramp up Covid-19 vaccine supply in a big way, asserting that attempts are on to provide states 15-day advance schedule of the inoculation programme as it will allow them to prepare accordingly. Interacting with state and district officials at a virtual meeting, he described them as "field commanders" in the fight against Covid-19 and said localised containment zones, aggressive testing and sharing correct and complete information with people are weapons to defeat it. The meeting was attended by district magistrates from 46 districts across nine states. People's convenience increases when information like bed availability for the sick or the vaccine availability are easily available, Modi said.

Report on Page 4

# Miller, official nexus: Govt may lose ₹150cr

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, MAY 18**

At a time when Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is struggling hard to mobilise every penny possible to fulfil his government's commitments to the poor, clandestine efforts are on to dole out undue financial benefits worth ₹150 crore to errant rice millers. Some rice millers have been avoiding payment of tax arrears over the last few years after they were caught manipulating procedures. Inquiries by *Deccan Chronicle* revealed that the errant rice millers from the East and the West Godavari districts had struck a deal with a ruling party leader who dominates these two districts. Fearing that the CM might come to know of his involvement, he is said to

  
Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

● **FEARING THAT** the CM might come to know of his involvement, a ruling party leader who dominates both the East and West Godavari districts is said to be operating through a senior tax official. Ironically, the note circulated by Peeyush Ku-

mar, the Chief Commissioner of State Tax, to Rajat Bhargav, the Special Chief Secretary, Revenue, is self-explanatory a section of rice millers committed fraud, did not avail of the tax waiver scheme earlier by following the prescribed norms and declined to pay arrears during a special drive. The Chief Commissioner also indicated that the government would lose heavily if the rice millers had their way. Yet, his department had been going soft on the rice millers instead of clamping down on them and collecting arrears, using the provisions of law. He mentioned in the letter that the government was the competent authority to waive off arrears from the rice millers.

■ **Pg 2: Tax waiver for 2014 and 2015 cost AP ₹60 crore**

# ₹120-cr Bharosa for 1.19L AP fishermen

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18**

The state government on Tuesday credited ₹119.88 crore to the accounts of 1,19,875 fishermen families, extending a financial assistance of ₹10,000 to each, for the consecutive third year under YSR Matsyakara Bharosa towards compensating the off-season ban on marine fishing. Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said that the programme, benefiting about 1,19,875 families, was taken up for the uplift of fishermen who were struggling for livelihood during the lean period from mid-April to mid-June. The scheme was initiated in 2019 increasing the financial assistance from ₹4,000 to ₹10,000, and the state government so far spent around ₹332 crore on this scheme. Giving top priority to the welfare of fishermen, the Chief Minister said

● **THE CM** lists various measures being taken up for their welfare.

● **BESIDES FUEL** and power subsidies and accidental death aid, efforts are apace for aqua university, aqua labs and hubs, new fishing harbours etc., said Jagan Mohan Reddy.

the government increased fuel subsidy from ₹6 to ₹9 per litre which can be redeemed instantly at 100 recognised petrol bunks and also providing power at a subsidised cost of ₹1.50 per unit to aqua farmers, though it puts a burden of ₹780 crore on the government annually. In case of accidental death, the government enhanced ex gratia from ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh to support the bereaved family and so far 67 fishermen families were provided with an assistance of ₹6.7 crore.

■ **Pg 2: ₹332.90cr earmarked to set up 100 aqua hubs**

# Tests held for Raju at Army hosp

**DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18**

A medical board comprising three doctors conducted medical examination on Narsapur MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju in the presence of judicial officer Dr D. Nagarjun at Army Hospital in Secunderabad on Monday night. According to a release from Army Hospital on Tuesday, the MP was taken to the hospital in the night on May 17 and was

● **THE MP** will be under medical care at the hospital in judicial custody till further orders by the SC.

admitted after procedural formalities. Later, a medical examination was done by the medical board on him in the presence of judicial officer nominated by the Chief Justice of Telangana High Court during the night and the entire procedure was videographed. The MP will be under

medical care at the hospital in judicial custody till further orders to be issued by the Supreme Court. All activities are being taken up under the strict Covid-19 protocol. Meanwhile, as the apex court directed to consider the presence of MP Raju in the Army Hospital as judicial custody, no visitor is being allowed to meet him. The medical board is to submit its report in a sealed cover to the apex court on May 21.

■ **Pg 2: Policy to be effective from April 15, 2021**

# LOCKDOWN | EFFECT With first dose not registered due to technical issues, many miss out on the 2nd

# Portal glitches hold up 2nd vax dose for many

**VADREVVU SRINIVAS | DC KAKINADA, MAY 18**

While vaccines continue to be in short supply, another issue is worrying people a lot: registration for their dose. Many people find it difficult to get registered and find a slot. Even though first dose was taken, in some cases, it was not registered due to technical problems. When these people try for the second dose, it is not being registered as the first dose is not shown as administered. "After waiting for hours in queues, many people are

returning home disappointed as their names were not registered in the first dose. My mother faced a lot of hurdles in getting the second dose of vaccine. At last, she got it as the first dose for the second time," said N. Ananda Rao of Ramanaiahpet. He said that there was also confusion where and how the registration should be done. The district administration has now introduced a token system for second dose exercise. Officials collected Aadhaar numbers of people through volunteers for the second dose. But, some people are



People wait for Covid test in East Godavari.

being denied the second dose even though they took the first jab, as it was not registered due to glitches. People are urging that the officials find alternatives to facilitate their vaccination.

# 390 missing from ONGC barges, search ops on

# 7 killed in Gujarat as Cyclone Tauktae batters parts of state

**DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs MUMBAI, MAY 18**

The Search and Rescue (SAR) operations to locate and bring to safety the 390 missing persons off Mumbai coast in the Arabian Sea was on till late night on Tuesday. Till Tuesday evening the Indian Navy and Coast Guard had rescued 317 people on board two barges that went adrift. At least seven people were killed in Gujarat as Cyclone Tauktae battered parts of the state. According to the Indian Navy, 180 persons were rescued from *Barge P-305* off Bombay High. This barge went adrift off Heera Oil Fields on Monday with 273 persons onboard due to the extremely severe Cyclone Tauktae. Naval Ships *Beas*, *Betwa* and *Teg* had joined *INS Kochi* and *Kolkata* in the search and rescue operations for *Barge P-305*, which sank 35 nautical miles from Mumbai (in the Mumbai Offshore Development Area). SAR has also been augmented with *P8I* and naval helicopters, who continue to undertake aerial search of the area. Since the commencement of the SAR on Monday, 180 survivors have been rescued. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) stated that all drifted vessels, except *P-305*, are taken in control, and their crew is safe. Indian Navy and ONGC were actively engaged in rescuing the crew of vessel

  
Rescued crew members of the barge *Gal Construction* being brought by an Indian Navy helicopter at *INS Shikra* in Mumbai, on Tuesday.

– PTI

*P-305*. Apart from *P-305*, cargo barge *GAL Constructor* with 137 personnel on board, accommodation barge *SS-3* with 196 personnel on board and the Sagar Bhushan oil rig with 101 personnel on board also went adrift in Cyclone Tauktae on Monday. While all the 137 people on board the cargo barge *GAL Constructor* have been rescued, there is no word yet on the progress of rescue operations for the accommodation barge *SS-3* and the Sagar Bhushan oil rig. The Indian Coast Guard

tweeted, #CycloneTauktae #NationFirst Update on grounded barge *GAL CONSTRUCTOR*. Effective coordinated rescue operations resulted in saving all the 137 precious lives from the distressed barge. Rescue mission accomplished. We Protect."

In a statement the ONGC said, "Due to severe cyclonic storm, unfortunate incidents have occurred involving three construction barges of Afcons working on a project of ONGC in Western Offshore fields in the Arabian Sea and one drilling rig of ONGC

deployed for exploration purpose. ONGC is taking all possible measures in coordination with ODAG (Offshore Defence Advisory Group) and MRCC (Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre) to ensure the safety of personnel and vessels."

Search and Rescue Operation efforts were also in progress off the coast of Gujarat for three vessels — *Support Station 3*, *Great Ship Aditi* and *Drill Ship Sagar Bhushan* — which are 15-20 nautical miles South East off the Gujarat coast (Pipavav), said the Indian Navy.

■ **Page 2: Harsh Vardhan had said no dearth of funds**

# AIIMS in state got ₹879 cr, TS hosp given only ₹24cr

**N. VAMSI SRINIVAS | DC HYDERABAD, MAY 18**

It is official. The Centre has made a meagre financial allocation to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bibinagar, located on the city outskirts, proving right the allegations of neglect of the state by the Narendra Modi-led government levelled by the Telangana Rashtira Samiti (TRS) and the Congress against their political rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Ever since the Centre announced AIIMS for several states after 2014, the facility in Telangana state has got just ₹23.85 crore. This is against the allocation of ₹1,028 crore and the Centre wanted to make the facility fully operational by 2022. According to details of 15 new AIIMS under construction approved for establishment after 2014, obtained under Right To Information Act by Inaganti Ravi Kumar, an RTI activist, AIIMS, West Bengal, received the highest funding of ₹967 crore against ₹1,754 crore for obvious reasons. The AIIMS, Mangalagiri, in Andhra Pradesh, received ₹879 crore out of the allocated ₹1,618 crore. The AIIMS established in other states which

received considerable allocations were Maharashtra (₹945 crore), Uttar Pradesh (₹755 crore), Punjab (₹668 crore), Himachal Pradesh (₹858 crore), Assam (₹435 crore), Jharkhand (₹380 crore) and Jammu (₹370 crore). The BJP leaders from Telangana state sought to defend the record, saying that higher allocations in other states were due to the requirement of construction of buildings whereas in Telangana state the AIIMS was located in buildings already constructed for the Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences by the Congress government in combined Andhra Pradesh.

■ **Page 2: Harsh Vardhan had said no dearth of funds**

# PINARAYI S-I-L AMONG 11 NEW FACES IN KERALA

**Thiruvananthapuram, May 18:** CPM veteran Pinarayi Vijayan was on Tuesday elected its Parliamentary Party Leader for a second term as Kerala Chief Minister but the omission of health minister K.K. Shailaja, who played a leading role in the state's fight against Covid-19, from the new Cabinet created a flutter. Vijayan's coalition government will have a fresh look with 11 new CPM members, including his son-in-law P.A. Mohammed Riyas, national president of DYFI, in a reflection of the party's attempt to infuse fresh blood in the ministry. The CPM will have 12 members including Vijayan. CPI and Kerala Congress (M), who are among the other constituents of the Left Democratic Front (LDF), also named new faces-four and one, respectively, to represent their parties in the Cabinet. The 77-year-old Vijayan's election comes days after he led the ruling LDF to a stupendous victory in the April 6 Assembly polls, where the alliance won 99 of the 140 seats. However, Shailaja's non-inclusion led to a debate and many eyebrows were raised over the matter. Having won global accolades for her deft handling of the first wave of Covid-19 in Kerala which saw the country's first case in 2020, Shailaja's surprise omission drew instant comparisons with the late K.R. Gowri Amma, the firebrand Marxist once tipped to head Kerala but never did. She was, however, made party whip. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## TD NO TO BUDGET MEET, TO HOLD MOCK ASSEMBLY

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA/VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 18

Telugu Desam has decided to boycott the single-day budget session of Assembly on May 20 in protest against the unilateral, undemocratic and illogical decisions of the Jagan Mohan Reddy government.

The decision to boycott the budget session was taken at the Telugu Desam Legislature Party (TDLP) meeting presided over by TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu.

Disclosing this at a press conference, TD state president K. Atchannaidu and former Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishnudu said the TDLP would run a parallel mock assembly simultaneously with the AP Assembly session in order to expose the failures and misdeeds of the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime all through.

Atchannaidu said the central government and most other state governments were taking opposition parties along with them in the fight against the epidemic. But, the AP CM did not care to respect the opposition and did not hold an all-party meeting even once. The Tamil Nadu regime took the opinions of the opposition leaders to confront the flood situation, whereas, the AP CM only remained adamant and proved his inefficiency repeatedly by failing to save the people's lives.

He deplored that the failure of the government resulted in the deaths of over 109 Covid patients due to lack of oxygen supply at a critical time.

Ramakrishnudu said that the YSRC government came out with the one-day session only out of a constitutional obligation but not to consult and hold a meaningful discussion with the Opposition party. He opined that the ruling party would use the Governor's address in the Assembly to sing paeans of the Chief Minister and his shallow decisions but not to present facts about the state economy. He said that even if the TD attended the session, the CM and his Ministers would not give any chance to them to speak in the House.

To a query, he said that in the past, the YSRC boycotted the Assembly as a whole but now the TD was just boycotting the Chief Minister and his illogical decisions on the budget session.

● **ATCHANNAIDU SAID** the central govt and most other state govt were taking opposition parties along with them in the fight against the epidemic. But, the AP CM did not care to respect the opposition and did not hold an all-party meeting even once. Govt would only use the Budget address by Governor to sing paeans of CMs.

## FAKE MESSAGE TURNS VIRAL ABOUT CURFEW TIMINGS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

The Fact Check AP portal of the Andhra Pradesh government busted a fake information on Covid curfew timings that was circulating on WhatsApp and other social media platforms on Tuesday. It said there was a reduction in relaxation of curfew timings.

The relaxation time would be reduced to between 6 am and 10 am from the present 6 am to 12 noon from May 20. It turned viral on social media platforms. Further, the message stated that AP is in the second place in Coronavirus deaths. This was also untrue. AP is in the ninth place in Covid-19 deaths.

According to the portal, a malicious message was circulating on WhatsApp after the announcement of an extension in curfew in Andhra Pradesh. The message claimed that during the extended curfew period, the "relaxation time will be from 6 am to 10 am. The government affirmed that there is no change in the timings and the message was fake and untrue.

The government clarified that with 9,481 deaths, AP stands at ninth slot in the country in fatality rate, and the percentage of deaths is 0.7 per cent of the total cases, which ranked 26 in the country.

● **ACCORDING TO** the portal, a malicious message was circulating on WhatsApp after the announcement of an extension in curfew in Andhra Pradesh.



Fishermen felicitate Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy after he released the funds under the YSR Matsyakara Bharosa scheme at his camp office in Tadepalli on Tuesday. Minister S. Appalaraju (third from right), MP Mopidevi Venkata Ramana (second from right), Chief Secretary Adityanath Das (left), Special Chief Secretary (Agriculture) Poonam Malakondaiah and others are seen. — **BY ARRANGEMENT**

## 31,662 fishermen in East, West Godavari dists get ₹31.65 crore

East Godavari collector said 30,213 fishermen families being extended ₹30.21 cr aid

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MAY 18

As many as 31,662 fishermen families got ₹31.65 crore as compensation towards the losses they incur due to ban on fishing during the conservation period from April 15 to June 14. Each family was paid ₹10,000 in East and West Godavari districts. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy extended the benefits under the YSR Fishermen Bharosa Scheme on Tuesday through a video conference.

East Godavari collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that 30,213 fishermen families including 84 OCs, 198 SCs and 11 STs were getting ₹30.21 crore aid. He said the government had already released ₹78 crore compensation to be given by Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation.

West Godavari collector Karthikeya Misra said that 1,449 families would get ₹1.44 crore in the district. Narasapuram MLA M. Prasada Raju handed over a cheque for the amount to the fisheries department officials.

Participating in the video conference, a fisherman Barre Lakshmi Narasimha Raju of China Boddu Venkatayapalem in Tallarevu mandal praised the Jagan Mohan Reddy government for implementing the welfare schemes for the fishermen community. Expressing his happiness over getting

## TD OPPOSES MOVE TO TURN TEMPLES INTO COVID CENTRES

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Telugu Desam has objected to the government move on turning temples into Covid centres. TD state executive secretary Buchi Ram Prasad on Tuesday warned the Jagan Mohan Reddy government not to play with the sentiments of Hindus by continuing its partial attitude towards temples, archakas and devotees in the state.

Ram Prasad pointed out that in the temples, there would be no toilet facilities usually, hence, it would not be possible to provide required facilities to the Covid patients. He further deplored that it was unfortunate that the present rulers targeted the temples instead of using schools and function halls that would have all the necessary facilities. "Had this Chief Minister held a review meeting even once to find out and resolve the problems of archakas in the temples? What did he do for their well-being in the past two years?" he also asked.

The TD alleged that since the YSRC came to power, there were over 180 attacks on the Hindu temples all over Andhra Pradesh but the YSRC government miserably failed to take any single step.

## ₹332.90 crore earmarked to set up 100 aqua hubs

From Page 1

The CM deplored that the previous government completely neglected the welfare of fishermen and aquaculture in the state. In order to create more opportunities for the fishermen who were hitherto going to other states in search of livelihood and risking their lives, eight new fishing harbours would be set up.

He informed that works were afoot on four harbours during the phase-I at Juvvaladinne in Nellore district, Uppada in East Godavari, Nizampatnam in Guntur, and Machilipatnam in Krishna district, with an outlay of ₹1,510 crore. Four more harbours would be set up in Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, West

₹10,000 into his account, he said that during the Covid-19 pandemic period, the fishermen were facing difficulties to get even loans from private financiers and under such circumstances, the state government provided a breather to them. He mentioned that in the past, if an elder or breadwinner of the family died, the family used to

Godavari and Prakasam districts with an expenditure of ₹1,365 crore, which would create employment for 80,000 fishermen.

The Chief Minister said that the state had set up 35 aqua labs to check the quality of aqua products with an expenditure of ₹50.30 crore besides AP Fisheries University in West Godavari district to take up training and research in aquaculture.

An outlay of ₹332.90 crore had been earmarked to set up 100 aqua hubs to help farmers procure better prices for their produce. Each hub would have 120 retail shops to sell their produce directly. In phase-I, 25 aqua hubs were being set up across the state.

Recalling the poor governance by the previous gov-

ernment that failed to compensate the fishermen of Mummidivaram village, the CM said that his government paid compensation to the extent of ₹75 crore to the fishermen who incurred a loss due to GSPC evacuations.

Though they did not get the amount from the company, the government paid it on humanitarian grounds, he added.

Minister for fisheries Dr Seediri Appalaraju, MP Mopidevi Venkata-ramana, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, Special Chief Secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, Commissioner of Fisheries Kannababu, Government Advisor (Agriculture) Ambati Krishna Reddy and other officials were present in the event.

video conference from the collectorate at Kakinada, BC Welfare Minister Ch. Srinivasa VenuGOPALA Krishna said that the CM increased the subsidy on diesel from ₹6.03 to ₹9. Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy advised that the fishermen get their nets and boats repaired during the conservation period.

## FISHING HARBOUR TO COME UP AT BUDAGATLAPALEM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 18

Deputy Chief Minister Dharman Krishna Das said that the works on the proposed fishing harbour at Budagatlalalem under Etcherla mandal in Srikakulam district would begin this year.

The Deputy CM said ₹10,000 each was credited to the accounts of fishermen to help in tiding over the crisis caused by Covid-19 and two-month fishing holiday.

He said the amount was deposited in the accounts of 16,630 fisherfolk in 11 mandals in Srikakulam. He said Bhavanapadu greenfield port works would begin soon and the fishing jetty at Vajrapukotturu would also be completed this year. A university on fisheries would come up in West Godavari, he said.

In Visakhapatnam, minister for tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao said 22,366 fishermen were being benefited under the Matsyakara Bharosa scheme for which ₹22.36 crore was being spent by the government.

The compensation towards the fishing holiday losses was a meagre ₹4,000 under the Telugu Desam government and now it was enhanced to ₹10,000.

staff working there. He further said that service to humans was service to god.

He reminded them Coronavirus centres had already been started at worship places of all faiths, the BJP was trying to cause differences among people by misleading them on the Coronavirus centers issue. He demanded that Lakshminarayana and other BJP leaders shun politics and cooperate with the government towards containment of Covid-19 by offering services to priests and temples staff.

without any concern. He said the YSRC government led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is reconstructing those 40 demolished temples, which show their respect towards Hindu temples.

The Mayor said that the government was starting Covid care centres at temples and 'Satrams' to treat temple priests and other

## YSRC strongly hits out at BJP for opposing Covid care at temples

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

YSRC Congress has strongly hit out at BJP for its strong opposition to starting Corona centres in temples, and said all should cooperate with the government for the containment of Covid-19.

Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) Mayor Kavati Sivanaga Manohar Naidu flayed senior BJP leader Kanna Lakshminarayana's stance on the issue. He alleged that the BJP was trying to create differences among people of various faiths in the name

of religion.

Naidu recalled that as many as 40 temples were demolished in Vijayawada during the regime of Telugu Desam government, but the then minister for endowments belonging to BJP and other saffron leaders including Lakshminarayana turned mute spectators to the attack on Hindu temples

MORE | TESTS

50,000 samples collected from persons suffering from fevers during the survey

## AP to continue its survey to curb spread of Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Andhra Pradesh government will continue for a few more days its survey to detect cases of fever in all districts as part of its efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19 in the state.

Principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons on Tuesday that the initial fever survey for three days in AP helped them identify 90,000 people suffering from fever,

which indicates the possibility of a person suffering from Covid-19. "We intend to continue such surveys to identify people suffering with fever," Singhal stated.

Explaining details of the first survey, he pointed out they had collected blood samples of 50,000 persons suffering from fever. Some of them had been tested for Covid-19 too. Those preferring to be in home isolation while suffering from fever had been given isolation kits. The first

● **PRINCIPAL SECRETARY** (health) Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons on Tuesday that the initial fever survey for three days in AP helped them identify 90,000 people suffering from fever, which indicates the possibility of a person suffering from Covid-19.

survey got completed in just three days as a strong contingent of ANMs and Asha workers had been available throughout the state. This enabled authorities to initiate measures for curbing the spread of virus.

The principal secretary disclosed that 104 call cen-

tre received 12,629 calls in the last 24 hours. Of them, 2,747 calls had been for admission to hospitals while 1,617 for test results. He said through telemedicine call centre, 16,000 persons suffering with fever and staying in home isolation have been advised about medications they

## Policy will be effective from April 15, 2021

From Page 1

It provides incentives to the private sector to set up the plants.

The state government has already received letters of intent from companies like Nova Air (Sri City), Air Liquid (Kadapa), Praxair (Chittoor) and Inox Air Products (Vijayawada/Guntur) to enhance the oxygen production in the state. Moreover, six Pressure Swing Adsorption (PSA) units have already been identified and refurbished to produce oxygen.

Several entrepreneurs are keen on setting up small and medium-scale oxygen plants. The state government is in talks with several suppliers across the globe for importing zeolite molec-

ular sieve as it is a key component in the oxygen PSA plants.

The policy aims to distribute the manufacturing of oxygen across the state by adopting zoning methodology. The incentives allow for subsidising capital expenditure (Capex) (30 per cent up to 30 lakh/MT) as well as operating expenses (Opex) (power subsidy up to ₹2 per unit) to allow investors to maintain profitability during these uncertain times. The policy will be effective from April 15, 2021 and will be valid for a period of one year. It also incentivises first movers and the time limit for commissioning PSA, Lox and Heliox plants is six months, 18 months and 24 months respectively from the date of sanction.

## Tax waiver for 2014 and 2015 cost AP ₹60 crore

From Page 1

In the pre-Goods and Services Tax regime, a two per cent tax was levied on the inter-state rice and broken rice sales if they were transported along with C form and five per cent tax in the absence of C form. Several rice millers carried out sale transactions without the C form.

Thanks to their lobbying, the previous Telugu Desam government waived the balance three per cent tax for 2014 and 2015 financial years. There was, however, a strict condition that those rice millers who would

like to avail the waiver should have mandatorily paid the two per cent tax and completed tax assessment for the two fiscals.

"While some rice millers fulfilled the conditions and availed waiver, many ignored and continued to commit the same fraud till 2017 till the GST came into existence," sources in the tax department told *Deccan Chronicle*.

While the waiver for 2014 and 2015 would cost the government ₹60 crore, another ₹90 crore would be lost if the tax evasion for the remaining years was also taken into consideration, they added.

## Govt has no hand in MP's arrest: Sajjala

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Asserting that the government has no role in the arrest of MP K. Raghuram Lakshminarayana, Go-ernment Adviser (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said the TD is conspiring to defame the government.

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, Reddy said that Raju was involved in anti-party activities and made several criticisms against the party despite being elected on the party ticket. He questioned why Raju did not resign if he did not like the party. Refuting TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's allegations that the MP was unnecessarily booked on treason cases, he said that in the past Naidu had filed such treason cases against Telan-

gana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao under Section 124A in the cash-for-vote case, and later against MLA Giddi Eswari, Muslim youth and many more. He said that Naidu was conspiring behind Raju's back to destabilise the government.

Reddy said, "Since Raju went against the Constitution, we wrote a letter to the Speaker seeking his disqualification. However, over the past few months his criticism went overboard and he even started to target Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy more personally, which is clearly evident that all these are taking place under the direction of Chandrababu Naidu, who has been toying with Raghurama to obstruct the government."

## Harsh Vardhan had said no dearth of funds

From Page 1

Union health minister Harsh Vardhan went on record in the Lok Sabha in last March that there would be no dearth of funds. But his promise could fetch only ₹15 crore in the current fiscal in addition to ₹5 crore which had been released as per milestones. A few months ago, G. Kishan Reddy, minister of state for home, visited the campus and announced the Centre's grandiose plan of expanding the facility

from the current 50 acres to 150 acres with more facilities.

"The Centre has been neglecting Bibinagar AIIMS for a long time. We handed over the required buildings to the Centre in time but it failed to start full-scale operations even today. Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao has been pursuing with the Centre for adequate funds for the last seven years but in vain," said G. Jagadish Reddy, energy minister and in-charge of undivided Nalgonda district.

must take. He maintained that they have received no complaint on short supply of medicines from anywhere.

Singhal said during the last 24 hours, AP received 620 metric tonnes of medical oxygen allotted by the centre. He explained in detail how medical oxygen is being distributed throughout the state from various centres.

He advised people not to get carried away by misinformation on social media platforms on number of

Covid-19 cases and deaths. He made it clear that the state government has been announcing all such details on a regular basis.

The principal secretary pointed out that the state government has issued an order to provide ₹15,000 each to next of kin of Covid-19 deceased as financial assistance for performing the last rites.

He said based on a report of state-level experts' committee, they are not carrying out plasma therapy in AP.



## SHORT TAKES

## 2 ARRESTED FOR SLANDERING VIJAYA SAI

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

The Guntur police arrested two software professionals associated with Telugu Desam's CBN YouTube channel for telecasting objectionable video content against YSR Congress MP Vijaya Sai Reddy. Addressing a press meet at Guntur on Tuesday, Guntur Urban SP R.N. Ammi Reddy said that Madineni Venkata Mahesh Babu and Mulpuri Sri Sai Kalyan were software professionals working for the channel and other digital platforms.

The SP said that the duo telecast a video comparing the MP to monkey with voiceover and further circulated various fake posts against the government by morphing photos and information. The duo used to post fake and morphed posts on Facebook and Twitter.

## THUNDERSTORMS LIKELY IN NORTH COASTAL AP: IMD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 18

A low pressure area is likely to form over East Central Bay of Bengal and neighbourhood around May 23, a report by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday. The system might bring in rain to coastal AP and propel advancement of the southwest monsoon.

The monsoon is likely to advance into the South Andaman Sea and southeast Bay of Bengal around May 21. Southeasterly and southerly winds will prevail all over Andhra Pradesh during the next few days.

The IMD predicted thunderstorms for north coastal AP and a rise in temperature by two to three degrees Celsius during the next three days.

## GOVT CRACKDOWN ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

The Andhra Pradesh government has set up anti-human trafficking units (AHTUs) in 10 districts in addition to the already existing three, taking the total units to 13, to prevent and combat the crime of human trafficking in the state. It issued an order here on Tuesday, establishing the new AHTUs at Chittoor, Kakinada, Kadapa, Kurnool, Vijayawada, Nellore, Ongole, Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam. At present, such units exist at Eluru, Guntur Urban and Anantapur.

Additional DIG-CID will be the nodal officer for the state-level AHTU, while at district-level, the SP/CP concerned will act as the nodal officers. Each AHTU will have an inspector, two sub-inspectors, two head-constables and two constables. The government declared all the AHTUs to be police stations and they will be housed at Disha police stations.

The charter of duties of the units includes dealing with offences of human trafficking and providing a multi-disciplinary approach and ensuring a joint response by all stakeholders. They also deal with human trafficking as an organised crime involving offences such as wrongful restraint and confinement, selling and buying minors for the purpose of prostitution, begging, bonded labour, gang rape, subjecting women and children to commercial sexual exploitation and others.

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## People ignore curfew rules

SP asks cops to slap huge penalties on violators as per Covid guidelines

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MAY 18

The 18-hour curfew which has been extended till the end of May last is not yielding desired results in the district.

In major towns like Kurnool, Nandyal and Adoni, people are freely moving on roads on pretext of going on emergency work such as getting medicines.

The traffic sometime resembles that during normal days and is even witnessing jams in the district headquarters, at APSRTC bus station road, hospital road, Rajivhar Circle etc.

District SP Kaginelli Fakkeerappa has warned people not to flout the curfew regulations in their own safety and that of the society at large. But, the cops on the ground are unable to enforce the regulations strictly.

The daily health bulletin put fresh positive cases at 991 on Tuesday, taking the total count to 1,02,193 in the district. Of the total cases, 93,776 people had recovered from the virus and 7,772 patients are still being treated. The cumulative death toll has touched 645.

People are hanging around in groups near tea stalls and tiffin centers even after the relaxation time from 6 am to 12 noon. But at some places in the city, public is not returning home and are seen moving around carelessly. It is also worrying that at some of the shopping complexes, key circles, and tea stalls, many people are not wearing face masks and not maintaining a physical distance as well.

A senior citizen Siddharamayya, a resident of Madhuramgar in the city, opined that the police and the municipal officials were seen only while closing down shops, general stores and business establishments. But they are nowhere in controlling gathering during the relaxation period or after that. Unless people's movement is checked, the spread of Covid-19 cannot be stopped. The virus cannot move itself and it is only the humans who carry it around and spread it to others, he pointed out.



Relatives of a Covid-19 patient taking him to the government hospital on a two-wheeler for treatment, at Benz Circle in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

## AP records 21,320 new Covid cases, 99 deaths

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Andhra Pradesh registered 21,320 fresh Coronavirus infections and 99 deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported that out of 91,253 samples tested, 21,320 persons were found infected with the Coronavirus.

Out of a total of 1,81,40,307 samples tested so far in the state, 14,75,372 tested positive for the virus, and of them, 12,54,291 recovered and 2,11,501 are undergoing treatment.

In the daily caseload, 10 districts reported more than 1,000 cases each, with East Godavari coming at the top with 2,923 followed, by 2,804 in Anantapur, 2,630 in Chittoor, 2,368 in Visakhapatnam, 1,762 in West Godavari, 1,466 in Srikakulam, 1,291 in Guntur, 1,251 in Nellore, 1,048 in Krishna, 1,036 in Kadapa, 991 in Kurnool,

## FOUR ARRESTED FOR SELLING REMDESIVIR INJECTIONS IN BLACK

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Krishna district police nabbed four persons selling remdesivir injections in black market on Tuesday. The police seized five remdesivir injections from them. District Superintendent of Police M.

965 in Vizianagaram and 785 in Prakasam.

East Godavari also tops the state list in the cumulative active cases at 30,463, followed by 23,139 in Chittoor, 20,545 in Prakasam, 20,155 in Visakhapatnam, 18,745 in Nellore, 18,614 in Guntur, 16,637 in Anantapur, 14,502 in West Godavari, 12,781 in Srikakulam, 9,953 in Krishna, 9,789 in Kadapa and 8,406 in Vizianagaram.

In the case of deaths,

Ravindranath Babu informed the media in Machilipatnam on Tuesday about the arrests. He said that the police arrested M. Saibabu, Koorella Rukmini, Palaparti Gopiraju and Markapudi Mohana Rao. Saibabu and Kurella Rukmini work in Andhra Hospital.

Chittoor, Krishna and Vizianagaram recorded 10 each, followed by nine each in East Godavari and Prakasam, eight each in Anantapur, Guntur, Visakhapatnam and West Godavari, six each in Kurnool and Srikakulam, five in Nellore and two in Kadapa.

The state health authorities said 21,274 Coronavirus patients were discharged after recovery in the last 24 hours in the state.

asked them to file huge penalties on violators as per Covid guidelines. He also urged the public to come out only in emergencies.

## GOVT URGED FOR VAX TO ALL RTC STAFF

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

The AP Public Transport Department (APSRTC) National Mazdoor Unity Association has urged the government to protect the lives of RTC employees by administering Corona vaccines to all of them on priority. It deplored that as many as 240 employees died due to Covid-19 and 9,200 are suffering from the pandemic across the state.

Association president P.V. Ramana Reddy and secretary Y. Srinivas Rao wrote a letter to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on the problems faced by the RTC staff during the current Covid pandemic surge and appealed to him to direct the medical and health department to vaccinate the RTC staff immediately as 50 per cent employees are yet to be vaccinated.

They requested that the RTC staff be recognised as frontline warriors and provide jobs on compassionate grounds to the families of those claimed by the deadly virus.

They said that in all 18 per cent of the staff had been diagnosed as infected by the virus till now.

● 240 employees died due to Covid-19.



## Many Covid-19 deaths going uncounted

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN |  
DC  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 18

Several Covid-19 deaths are going unreported, especially at private hospitals as people are taking their loved ones home against medical advice when there were bleak chances of survival and performing last rites after their death in various parts of AP.

This practice is very much prevalent in rural areas where family members take patients to hospitals in critical stage, and return with them when told there are no beds, oxygen or other facilities.

Such deaths are not being reported to the government. The families prefer this way as they do not want to miss the chance to bid final farewell and conduct last rites, because they would not be handed over the bodies if deaths were due to Covid-19.

Though this practice is also found in urban centres, it is more prevalent in rural areas.

What is worrying is that people are taking back the sick home even if they are found to contract the viral infection, and thus are putting themselves at risk.

In Rajahmundry, a 63-year-old woman was infected with Coronavirus and was

admitted in a private hospital. After a few days, as her oxygen levels dropped alarmingly, the hospital advised the family to shift her to any other hospital which has a ventilator. However, losing hope in her recovery, her son hired an ambulance to take her home and on the way, he even purchased a body bag and placed an order for a coffin. She died within a few hours of reaching home. Though it was a Covid-19 death, it went unaccounted for. Her family members buried her body at a burial ground as per their tradition.

However, her husband and two sons were infected. Her husband is in critical care at KGH, Visakhapatnam. A distant relative, who was asked to take care of her grandchildren aged 10 years and seven months, was also infected along with the older child. Though the child recovered, he lies in critical condition at KGH. The deceased woman's daughter and son-in-law who wore PPE kits during the funeral were, however, not infected.

In another case at Kakinada, a 65-year-old retired employee was infected with the Coronavirus and was taken to the government hospital. His oxygen saturation was down to 80 per cent.

## Burial ground used for isolation of Covid +ve

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC  
MAHBUBNAGAR, MAY 18

With Covid-19 infections spreading even to remote areas, the residents of Kishtampalli Thanda in Nawabpet mandal in Mahbubnagar district took a rather dismaying decision. They are shifting those who tested Covid-19 positive to the burial ground for isolation purpose.

Kishtampalli village sarpanch Srinivasulu said the burial ground is

adjacent to the Palle Vanam (village forest). A congenial atmosphere prevails there with sufficient natural oxygen supply.

The thanda is 500 metres away from Kishtampalli.

The burial ground is adjacent to the thanda that has a population of 200.

The village is safe from Covid-19 but residents of the thanda were infected. The sarpanch said four people recently came

from Pune to the thanda. All of them tested positive. They spread the infection to the other houses. "As the houses are small and congested, we have decided to shift them to the burial ground (Vaikunta Dhamam) where we have recently built a room."

The Vaikunta Dhamam has trees that turn the air fresh. This is an ideal place for people to live in isolation. Both electricity and water connections have been provided

there.

The sarpanch urged the thanda people to take care of their health and shift people with symptoms of corona to the isolation room. Villagers are helping them with food and medicines.

"We have served these isolated people with biryani in the past two days," the sarpanch said.

A tribal who was isolated along with 10 others from his thanda said he was feeling better with sufficient sunlight.

## ‘Stop Ayurvedic eye drops for Covid’

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MAY 18

Noted physician and Jana Vignana Vedika executive member Dr M.V. Ramanaiah has demanded that administering of free eye drops as Covid cure at Krishnapatnam village in Nellore district be stopped forthwith. The doctor feared that people may otherwise lose their eyesight in case these drops are being made in unhygienic conditions.

Likewise, retired senior medical officer of Ayush department, Dr V. Ramakrishna Reddy of Ongole has called for extreme care while producing and administering eye drops.

Dr Ramanaiah underlined that there is no scientific evidence about the efficacy of medicines or eye drops being offered

Krishnapatnam by local Ayurveda doctor Bonigi Anandaiah to thousands of patients making a beeline to the village every day.

The doctor acknowledged that Anandaiah has been offering Ayurveda treatment to patients affected by brain stroke and victims of snake and scorpion bites. However, he expressed surprise that he is now offering treatment for Coronavirus too free of cost.

"Though there is no danger with oral medicines, eye drops can damage the entire nervous system," Dr Ramanaiah cautioned.

He and retired senior

Ayush medical officer, however, opined that government can examine the effectiveness of Anandaiah's medicines by allowing him to treat 20 critically ill patients after taking consent from the kin of ailing.

Dr Ramakrishna Reddy pointed out that administering Ayurvedic medicines through eyes, nose, under tongue and through anus is an age-old practice. He said any medicine applied through these four paths gives immediate results, explaining the reason behind critical Covid patients responding to eye drops at Krishnapatnam with

sudden improvement in their oxygen levels.

The retired senior Ayush medical officer explained, "Applying medicine through eyes is known as Nethranjanam in Ayurveda. Medicines, such as Ananda Bhai-ravi, Mrityunjaya Rasam, Seethansa Rasam, and Prabhakaravati, are applied to eyes in the form of paste like Katuka (kajal). Such medicine would reach the brain in seconds and help people come out of even coma, unconsciousness and very high fever," he explained.

Dr Ramakrishna Reddy said ingredients used by Anandaiah in his oral medicines are harmless. He, however, maintained that the state government should validate these medicines through lab tests before they are administered to general population.

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## IN BRIEF

## NO HIGH COURT RELIEF FOR KALRA

**New Delhi, May 18:** The Delhi High Court on Tuesday declined to direct an expeditious decision on the bail plea of businessman Navneet Kalra, arrested in connection with alleged black marketing of oxygen concentrators, saying "let the law take its own course".

Justice Subramonium Prasad declined to interfere with the observations made by a sessions court while dismissing Kalra's anticipatory bail plea, saying the Supreme Court has already laid down the law with regard to observations made by courts and their reporting by media organisations.

The high court declined to grant the reliefs sought on behalf of Kalra, represented by senior advocate Vikas Pahwa, saying that he had moved an anticipatory bail plea which has become infructuous due to his arrest and therefore, nothing remains in the matter.

Pahwa had made two oral prayers on Tuesday, that directions be issued to the trial court concerned to decide his client's bail plea expeditiously and secondly, to expunge the observations made against Kalra by the sessions court as due to his arrest he can no longer challenge the order denying him anticipatory bail.

## NIGHT CURFEW TO CONTINUE IN 36 GUJARAT CITIES

**Ahmedabad, May 18:** The night curfew in 36 cities of Gujarat, including nine metros, has been extended by three more days to control the spread of coronavirus, the state government said on Monday.

As per the decision taken by Chief Minister Vijay Rupani, the limited restrictions, including the curfew between 8 pm and 6 am, will continue to be in place in 36 cities from Tuesday to Thursday, a government release said.

Restrictions currently in force in other parts of Gujarat except these 36 cities will also continue between 6 am on May 18 till 6 am on May 20, it said.

Rupani said the government will take a call on whether to extend the night curfew and other curbs beyond May 20 after assessing the situation.

Gujarat on Monday reported 7,135 new coronavirus positive cases, taking its infection count to 7,59,754, while 81 deaths increased the toll in the state to 9,202, an official said.

The government has only ordered the continuation of essential services and activities during these three days, in accordance with the Centre's guidelines, said the release.

Services directly associated with the operation of Covid-19 and those specified as essential and urgent will not be affected. Medical, paramedical and allied health services, oxygen production and distribution systems will also continue, it said.

## BADRINATH OPENS AFTER WINTER CLOSURE

**Gopeshwar (U'khand), May 18:** The famous temple of Badrinath in the upper Himalayan region of Uttarakhand opened after the winter break early on Tuesday amid traditional rituals.

The chief priest of the temple, Ishwar Prasad Namboodiri, opened the portals of the temple at 4.15 am chanting Vedic hymns and praying for the well-being of all.

However, the opening ceremony was a subdued affair with only a limited number of people, including the priests, the Dharmadhikari and administrative officials, attending it in compliance with the Covid-19 standard operating procedure.

In normal circumstances, thousands of people turn up at the high-altitude temple dedicated to Vishnu to witness its opening ceremony.

For the second consecutive year, the temple witnessed a simple, thinly-attended opening ceremony.

The temple was decorated with around eight quintals of marigolds on the occasion.

With the opening of Badrinath, all the four Himalayan temples known as char dham are now open in Uttarakhand. Kedarnath opened on Monday while Yamunotri and Gangotri opened on May 14 and 15 respectively. However, they have been kept out of bounds for pilgrims for the time being due to the pandemic.



Guest workers leave for their native states from the inter-state bus terminal at Kaushambhi during the second wave of the Coronavirus in Ghaziabad on Tuesday. - PTI



A medic, wearing a PPE, conducts random Covid-19 testing of street vendors near Charbagh Railway Station in Lucknow on Tuesday. - PTI

## MP sees rise in black fungus cases

Medical examination of all those who have recovered from Covid-19 to be conducted

**RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 18**

Surge in black fungus infection cases in Madhya Pradesh has sent alarm bells ringing in the state administration forcing the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government to launch microbiological surveillance in the hospitals.

State medical education minister Vishwas Sarang told reporters that the government has launched a drive to detect black fungus infection cases in the state by conducting medical examination of all the

people who have recovered from Covid-19 in MP.

"We have launched microbiological surveillance in all the government as well as private hospitals in the state to detect potential cases of black fungus infection. We have ordered medical examination of all the people who have recovered from Covid-19 to detect developing infection cases and treat them", Mr Sarang said.

An official report said a total 500 cases of black fungus infections have been reported in the state so far.

The infection has claimed life of a man who had recovered from Covid-19 recently in the state.

"The ongoing survey to detect such cases could only establish the gravity of the situation in the state", a senior officer of the MP health department said.

The state government has created dedicated treatment facilities for such cases in the five government-run major hospitals in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior and Rewa.

"We are facing shortage of antifungal drugs and

injections in the market. We have approached the Centre to ensure adequate supply of antifungal drugs and injections to the state as soon as possible", Mr Sarang said.

The Madhya Pradesh government had earlier declared that all the patients suffering from black fungus infection would be treated free of cost in all the government hospitals.

The state government on Tuesday fixed prices of the anti-fungus injections manufactured by various pharmaceutical companies and warned that

action would be taken against the druggists who were found selling the products at inflated prices.

Meanwhile, Chhattisgarh government has also ordered microbiological surveillance in all the government and private hospitals in Chhattisgarh to detect cases of black fungus infection.

"As many as 76 cases of black fungus infections have been detected in Chhattisgarh so far", a spokesman for the Chhattisgarh health department told this newspaper on Tuesday. Chhattisgarh health

director Dr Priyanka Shukla has written letters to all chief medical health officers of the districts in the state and all the medical establishments in the state to conduct microbiological surveillance in the government and private hospitals in their areas and send weekly reports to the state health department.

The state health department asked the government and private hospitals in Chhattisgarh to follow the standard treatment protocol set for treatment of people suffering from black fungus infection.

## EFFORTS BEING MADE TO RAMP UP VACCINE SUPPLY: MODI

**New Delhi, May 18:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that continuous efforts are being made to ramp up Covid-19 vaccine supply in a big way, asserting that attempts are on to provide states 15-day advance schedule of the inoculation programme as it will allow them to prepare accordingly.

Interacting with state and district officials at a virtual meeting, he described them as "field commanders" in the fight against Covid-19 and said localised containment zones, aggressive testing and sharing correct and complete information with people are weapons to defeat it.

The meeting was attended by district magistrates from 46 districts across nine states.

People's convenience increases when information like bed availability for the sick or the vaccine availability are easily available, Modi said and also asked officials to curb black-marketing and take strict action should be taken against those who do so.

Noting that coronavirus infections are decreasing in some states and increasing in some others, he emphasised the need to be more vigilant in the face of decreasing tally and underlined that he has always stressed that the fight is about saving every single life.

Asserting that vaccination is a strong way to fight Covid, Modi said myths about it have to be collectively rooted out.

The health ministry is streamlining the system and process of vaccination, he said, stressing the need to stop vaccine wastage.

Noting that every district has its own unique challenges, he told officials that they had a free hand to innovate to suit their local needs and asked them to share their feedback about any change in policy they may want without any inhibition.

Hailing officials, the prime minister said many of them worked despite being Covid positive while some lost their family members but they gave duty their foremost priority.

"You understand the challenges of your district much better. So when your district wins, the country wins. When your district beats Corona, the country defeats Corona," a PMO statement said quoting Modi. He asked officials to also take care of the ease of living of every citizen of their district, saying there is a need to stop infection and also ensure unhindered flow of essential supplies.

- PTI

● Hailing officials, Modi said many of them worked despite being Covid positive while some lost their family members but they gave duty their priority.

## Ex-IMA chief dies of Covid; 2nd wave claims 270 doctors so far

## Corona cases continue to fall

**New Delhi, May 18:** The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday said 270 doctors across the country have succumbed to the coronavirus infection in the second wave of the pandemic so far.

The list of the deceased doctors includes former IMA president Dr K.K. Aggarwal, who succumbed to the deadly virus on Monday.

Bihar saw the maximum number of 78 deaths of medical practitioners, followed by Uttar Pradesh (37), Delhi (29) and Andhra Pradesh (22).

According to the IMA Covid-19 registry, 748 doctors succumbed to the disease in the first wave of the pandemic.

"Last year, 748 doctors across India succumbed to Covid-19, while in the current wave, in a short period, we have lost 270 doctors."

"The second wave of the pandemic is turning out to be extremely fatal for all and especially for the healthcare workers who are at the forefront," IMA president Dr JA Jayalal said. Padma Shri awardee and eminent cardiologist Dr K.K. Aggarwal has died of Covid-19, a statement posted on his Twitter handle said.

Aggarwal (62), the former national president of the Indian Medical

**VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 18**

There appears to be some light at the end of the dark tunnel of the Covid-19 second wave, as for the second consecutive day India recorded less than 3 lakh daily new cases while daily recoveries crossed more than 4.22 lakh for the first time.

A decline of 1.63 lakh in the active caseload in the last 24 hours was registered, and 2,63,533 new cases.

However, the death fig-

ures continue to be very high. It may be noted that a total of 4,329 fresh fatalities were recorded in 24 hours on Tuesday.

Also, several states that were earlier reporting very high cases are now showing a decline in daily trends while some others continue to show an upward trajectory.

However, a Union health ministry official on Tuesday said that only two per cent of total population has been affected so far and 98 per cent are still susceptible.

Association (IMA), was admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here and was on ventilator support since last week.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal described his death as a "setback for the whole nation".

"Passing away of Dr. KK Aggarwal is a setback for the whole nation. He acted all his life for the health rights of common people especially poor, deprived n marginalized. A great

human being. RIP! (sic)," he wrote on Twitter.

According to the statement posted on Twitter, Aggarwal passed away at 11.30 pm on Monday after a "lengthy battle with Covid-19".

"Even during the pandemic, he made constant efforts to educate the masses and was able to reach out to 100 million people through numerous videos and educational programmes and saved countless lives.

He wanted his life to be

celebrated and not mourned," the statement said.

Aggarwal posted videos raising awareness about the deadly virus on his Twitter handle. Even while he was hospitalised, his team at the Heart Care Foundation of India kept uploading videos about Covid-19.

In January, Aggarwal's banter with his wife during a live session on a social media platform had left netizens in splits. In the video, Aggarwal's wife was heard scolding him for going to take the anti-Covid vaccine shot alone and not taking her along.

The former IMA president is survived by wife Dr Veena Aggarwal, son Nilesh and daughter Naina. He had received the Padma Shri, the country's fourth-highest civilian honour, in 2010. He was also honoured with the Dr B.C. Roy Award.

Aggarwal's name was mentioned in the Limca Book of Records for training the maximum number of people in the lifesaving technique of hands-only CPR at one go.

Aggarwal was born in Delhi on September 5, 1958.

He completed his MBBS from MGIMS, Sevagram under the Nagpur University, where he was adjudged the best graduate in 1979.

- PTI



Relatives of a patient react to the non-availability of a bed at a Covid hospital in Kolkata. - PTI

## Odisha extends curbs till June 1

**AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 18**

The Odisha government on Tuesday extended the lockdown restrictions in the state till June 1 to arrest the steady surge in cases of Covid-19.

The first two-week long lockdown that came into force in the state on May 5 is set to end on Wednesday.

According to chief secretary Suresh Kumar Mohapatra, after thorough consultation with health experts, the government decided to extend the lockdown for two more weeks.

Sources said the State had exhibited a Test Positivity Rate (TPR) of 20 per cent but after nearly two weeks of lock-

down, the TPR has now dipped to 18.2 per cent.

This apart, in another major development, the government revised the period of relaxation for availing of essential commodities from 6 am to 12 pm daily to 7 am to 11 am.

"The weekend shutdown will however continue as usual. Tighter restrictions will be clamped during the week-ends and violators will be strictly dealt with," chief secretary Mr Mohapatra informed through a virtual press briefing.

Offices in private/corporate and civil society sector shall work with reduced manpower, preferably at 33 per cent of their staff strength.

Government offices will function with not more than 10 per cent staff.

**FIGHTING | COVID** Over 1,000 children, parents reach out to govt helpline to tackle Covid woes

## Kids, parents open up about Covid stress

**New Delhi, May 18:** From facing loneliness in Covid-19 isolation ward to exhibiting aggressive behaviour after parents contracted the virus, over 1,000 children and parents have reached out to government helpline seeking help.

With an objective of providing psychological first-aid and emotional support to children affected during the pandemic, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is providing tele-counselling to children through Samvedna

(Sensitising Action on Mental Health Vulnerability through Emotional Development and Necessary Acceptance) - a toll-free helpline launched to provide psycho-social mental support for affected children. According to Women and Child Development Ministry officials, redressal of 1,009 complaints have been done between September, 2020 to May 7, 2021.

In a case from a Covid-19 isolation centre in Aurangabad, a 15-year-old child expressed frustra-

tion over not getting enough love from parents due to more number of siblings and called up to talk about her parents' pressure of getting her married of early.

The counsellor spoke to the child and her parents and suggested to encourage her to focus on academics.

In another case, parent of a six-year-old child in Kanpur called to discuss the aggressive behaviour of their child who was lodged in an isolation centre after contracting the virus.

The counsellor suggested that the child engage in different activities like narrating stories or playing with toys. It was found that as the parents were keeping to themselves after the family tested positive, the child was feeling lonely and exhibiting aggressive behaviour.

A 17-year-old boy from Madhya Pradesh's Singrauli isolation centre called up and talked about being scared of loneliness. The counsellor advised him to spend time engaging in activities he is interested in and making a reg-

ular routine to get away from boredom.

This tele-counselling service is available on a toll-free number 1800-121-2830 from Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 1 pm and 3 pm to 8 pm and is exclusively for children who are willing to talk and are in need of counselling.

When a child/caretaker/parent dials Samvedna, they get to speak to a professional counsellor in a safe environment. Tele-counselling is provided to children under three categories: children who are in quarantine/isolation/Cov

id care centres, children who have Covid positive parents or family members, and children who have lost their parents due to the pandemic.

This service caters to children from all over India in various regional languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Oriya, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, the Women and Child Development Ministry said.

This service was launched in September 2020 and aims to support children in the difficult times of pandemic.



SHORT TAKES

SHARK KILLS SURFER OFF OZ EAST COAST

**Sydney, May 18:** A surfer was killed by a shark on Tuesday off the Australian east coast, police said.

The man, aged in his 50s, had been surfing off Forster, 220 kilometres (137 miles) north of Sydney, when he was attacked late in the morning, a police statement said.

Onlookers pulled the man from the water suffering critical injuries to his upper right thigh, police said.

The Ambulance Service said the man could not be resuscitated despite the best efforts of paramedics and bystanders at the scene.

Forster beaches have been closed. Police said they were working with government authorities to identify the species of shark.

Lower North Coast Surf Life Saving branch president Brian Wilcox said a drone search after the attack had spotted two sharks in the area.

JET RETURNS TO SAN JOSE AFTER ENGINE ISSUE

**San Jose, May 18:** Federal officials say an American Airlines plane returned to the main San Jose airport shortly after takeoff on Monday after pilots reported an issue with one of the plane's two engines.

The airline said the pilots shut down the engine after an indicator light came on. The Federal Aviation Administration said it was investigating the incident. American Airlines flight 2049 took off for Phoenix but circled and returned to Mineta San Jose International Airport shortly after takeoff. The airline said the plane landed safely and taxied to the terminal, and no one was injured.

There were 112 passengers and five crew members on board the Airbus A320.

The two engines on the 20-year-old jet were made by International Aero Engines, a joint venture of Pratt & Whitney and German and Japanese companies.

In February, a Pratt & Whitney engine shed pieces of the housing over Denver during a United flight.

400 KG COCAINE BOUND FOR KOSOVO SEIZED

**Rome, May 18:** Italian border police said Tuesday they seized more than 400 kilogrammes of cocaine from South America in a joint operation with Kosovar and Albanian authorities.

The drugs, with an estimated market value of more than 100 million euros (\$122 million), were first detected at the port of Gioia Tauro, in the southern Italian region of Calabria.

They were hidden in a container coming from Santos, Brazil "officially containing chicken," the Guardia di Finanza border police said in a statement.

Italian authorities decided to let the container continue its journey and arrive at its final destination in Lipjan, Kosovo.

There, Italian, Albanian and Kosovar police intervened and arrested 25 people, including seven charged with international drug trafficking.

Italy is known as a key hub for the illegal drugs trade, and its fearsome 'Ndrangheta mafia, based in Calabria, controls most of the cocaine entering Europe.

CANADIAN JAILED FOR SMUGGLING IMMIGRANTS

**Washington, May 18:** A Sri Lankan-origin Canadian national on Monday was sentenced to 32 months in prison on charges of smuggling undocumented immigrants from Sri Lanka into the US for financial gains. Sri Kajamukam Chelliah, aka Mohan, in his February guilty plea admitted to conspiring with others to facilitate the travel of undocumented immigrants from Sri Lanka through Haiti, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Bahamas to the United States from on or about July 1, 2019, through on or about October 10, 2019.

Federal prosecutors said during the course of the conspiracy, Chelliah worked with other human smugglers, arranging housing and transport for undocumented immigrants en route to Canada through the United States.

Chelliah arranged for the individuals to be transported from the airport in Port Au Prince, Haiti, to a hotel where he housed and provided them with food. He then arranged for transportation by boat from Haiti to Turks and Caicos Islands, then to the Bahamas, and then by boat to Miami, Florida.

HK suspends operations of its Taiwan office

**Hong Kong, May 18:** Hong Kong is temporarily shutting its representative office in Taiwan, officials said Tuesday in the latest indication of strained ties.

"The Hong Kong Economic, Trade and Cultural Office (Taiwan) has temporarily suspended operations, with effect from today," Hong Kong's government said in a brief statement, which did not give a reason for the closure. A government spokesperson said that the decision "has nothing to do with the Coronavirus situation" in Taiwan where cases have recently spiked and prompted the re-imposition of some social distancing measures.

Asked whether the closure was tied to politics, the spokesperson declined to comment.

Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council, which handles relations with China, said it "deeply regrets the Hong Kong government's unilateral decision" and vowed to keep its own office in the financial hub open despite strained ties.

Hong Kong abides by authoritarian China's view that democratic, self-ruled Taiwan is part of its territory and must be seized one day, by force if necessary Like Beijing, Hong Kong does not recognise Taiwanese authorities as legitimate.

NEW CATHOLIC BISHOP: RESPECT PLURALITY

**Hong Kong, May 18:** Hong Kong's incoming Roman Catholic bishop Stephen Chow called for plurality to be respected, in a time of polarisation in the Catholic community as the city's political situation deteriorates.

Chow said while he had "no big plan" on how to unify a diocese that had become politically polarised over the last two years amid months of anti-government protests in Hong Kong, he believed that God wanted them to be united.

"Unity is not the same as uniformity," Chow said at a news conference Tuesday. "One thing I've always mentioned recently in schools is (there is) unity is plurality. — AP

However, there is a huge amount of trade between Hong Kong and Taiwan. According to Hong Kong's government, Taiwan is its second-largest trading partner, its third-largest market for domestic exports, its fifth-largest market for re-exports and its second-largest source of imports. — AFP



Bangladeshi journalist Rozina Islam, (C), is escorted by police to a court in Dhaka on Tuesday. — AP

Scribe's health anomaly stories lands her in jail

**Dhaka, May 18:** A senior Bangladeshi woman journalist, known for her investigative reporting, was arrested on charges of violating a colonial-era official secrecy law, the police said on Tuesday, triggering protests by the rights groups and her colleagues. Rozina Islam, a senior reporter of Bangla daily *Prothom Alo*, the largest daily newspaper based on circulation, was on Monday detained for over five hours by the Health Ministry officials for allegedly clicking a picture of a document with her cell phone without permission.

She was later arrested by the police. The ministry filed a case against her at around midnight under the 1923 Official Secrets Act while she spent her night under the police custody, the police said. She was produced before a court here with a petition seeking her to be remanded in custody for five days, which the judge rejected and sent her to jail to await the routine

legal procedures.

The judge said he would entertain the prosecution charge and the defence statements including her bail petition on Thursday. A prosecution lawyer told reporters that "whether the allegation is true or false, a case has been filed" which needed a procedure to be disposed of.

Rozina, who earned the reputation of being an investigative journalist, has in recent months published several reports exposing the health ministry's alleged malpractices during the Covid-19 pandemic, drawing public attention. She also published several reports involving the health sector which included alleged graft in procurement at the health ministry, corruption in doctors' recruitment and how urgent medical equipment for Coronavirus treatment were left at Dhaka airport for months. "The incident is unfortunate," Health Minister Zahid Maleque told TV channels without elaborating further. — PTI

VAST | RESOURCES

Shrinking polar ice offers opportunities for shipping routes

Russian base projects its Arctic power

**Nagurskoye (Russia), May 18:** During the Cold War, Russia's Nagurskoye airbase was little more than a runway, a weather station and a communications outpost in the Franz Josef Land archipelago.

It was a remote and desolate home mostly for polar bears, where temperatures plunge in winter to minus-42 Celsius (43 degrees below zero Fahrenheit) and the snow only disappears from August to mid-September. Now, Russia's northernmost military base

is bristling with missiles and radar and its extended runway can handle all types of aircraft, including nuclear-capable strategic bombers, projecting Moscow's power and influence across the Arctic amid intensifying international competition for the region's vast resources.

The shamrock-shaped facility — three large pods extending from a central atrium — is called the "Arctic Trefoil" and is painted in the white-red-and-blue of the national

10 wounded, 4 seriously, in Gaza strike: Israeli medics

Attack came as Palestinians went on strike in a rare collective action

**Gaza City (Gaza Strip), May 18:** A strike launched from Gaza on Tuesday wounded 10 people in southern Israel, four of them seriously, Israeli medics reported, as Israel and Gaza's Hamas rulers continued to trade attacks.

The projectile attack Tuesday afternoon hit a region in southern Israel, according to the Magen David Adom rescue service. It came as Palestinians across Israel and the occupied territories went on strike in a rare collective action against Israel's policies. With the war in Gaza showing no sign of abating and truce efforts apparently stalled, the general strike and expected protests could again widen the conflict after a spasm of communal violence in Israel and protests across the occupied West Bank last week.

Israel's airstrikes toppled a six-storey building that housed bookstores and educational centres used by the Islamic University and other colleges, leaving behind a massive mound of rebar and concrete slabs. Desks, office chairs, books and computer wires could be seen in the debris. Residents sifted through the rubble, searching for their belongings. Israel warned the building's residents ahead of time, sending them fleeing into the predawn darkness, and there were no reports of casualties.

Israel said it was targeting militants, their tunnels and rocket launchers across the territory. "The whole street started running, then destruction, an earthquake," said Jamal Herzallah, a resident of the area. "This whole area was shaking."

Heavy fighting broke out May 10 when Gaza's militant Hamas rulers fired long-range rockets toward Jerusalem in support of Palestinian protests against Israel's heavy-handed policing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a flashpoint site sacred to Jews and Muslims, and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. — AP



Palestinians carry the body of Obaida Jawabreh, killed on Monday during clashes with Israeli soldiers, at his funeral in al-Aroub refugee camp, north of Hebron city in the the occupied West Wank, on Tuesday. — AFP

Biden supports Israel's right to self defence

**Washington, May 18:** US President Joe Biden, in a telephonic call with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, supported Israel's "right to defend itself" against indiscriminate rocket attacks and encouraged him to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians, the White House has said. Biden welcomed efforts to address inter-communal violence and to bring calm to Jerusalem, the White House said in a readout of the call.

During the phone call on Monday, Biden reiterated his firm support for Israel's "right to defend itself" against indiscriminate rocket attacks, it said. He encouraged Israel to make every effort to ensure the protection of innocent civilians, it said.

● BIDEN WELCOMED efforts to address inter-communal violence and to bring calm to Jerusalem, the White House said in a readout of the call.

The two leaders discussed progress in Israel's military operations against Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza, the White House said. "The President expressed his support for a ceasefire and discussed the US engagement with Egypt and other partners towards that end," said the readout.

Palestinian militant group Hamas has fired more than 3,000 rockets over Israel during the past seven days, pushing more than half of Israel's popu-

lation into shelter houses and Israel has carried out hundreds of devastating retaliatory attacks in Gaza. More than 200 people have been killed in the recent escalation in the region, including a caregiver from India.

US Secretary of State Tony Blinken, who is travelling right now, also spoke to his Israeli counterpart, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi and discussed America's efforts to bring an end to the violence, which has claimed the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, including children, said State Department Spokesperson Ned Price.

"Blinken also expressed deep concern at the inter-communal violence," Price said.

— PTI

EU MULLS WAYS TO HELP DEFUSE ONGOING CONFLICT

**Brussels, May 18:** European Union foreign ministers are meeting Tuesday to discuss how to use the 27-nation bloc's political clout to help diplomatic efforts to end the fighting between the Israeli armed forces and Palestinian militants.

The EU has been united in its calls for a ceasefire and the need for a political solution to end the latest conflict — now in its second week — but the nations are divided over how best to help. No firm decisions involving threats of sanctions or other measures are likely from the ministers' video-conference. At least 212 Palestinians have been killed in heavy airstrikes so far, including 61 children, and over 1,400 people wounded, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

— AP

China offers to host Afghan peace talks

**Beijing, May 18:** China, which has stepped up its diplomacy between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the wake of the US troops withdrawal from the war-torn country, has offered to host peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Significantly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who in the last two days held telephone talks with his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts, said that

China will back the Afghan government headed by Ashraf Ghani in playing a leading role. The offer to facilitate peace talks was made during Wang's phone talks with his Afghan counterpart Mohammad Haneef Atmar on Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told a media briefing on Tuesday.

Asked to elaborate, Zhao said, "China is ready to facilitate intra-Afghan tal-

ks and will provide necessary conditions for negotiation in China." The US had announced its plans to withdraw its troops completely from Afghanistan by September.

The US troop pull-out has raised concerns in Beijing that it may lead to the regrouping of Xinjiang province's Uygur Muslim militants in Afghanistan, which shares borders with China.

During their telephonic

conversation, Wang told Atmar that "China will continue to support the Afghan government in playing a leading role in the country's peace and reconciliation process", state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported.

Wang also called on all parties to support and implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions to promote a smooth transition of the Afghanistan situation, to avoid in

particular a resurgence of terrorist forces, it said.

In a comment that may not go down well with the Taliban, Wang, according to the report, expressed his hope that Afghanistan's future leadership will pursue a moderate Muslim policy, promote a foreign policy of peace, maintain friendship with neighbouring countries, and firmly combat all forms of terrorism.

— PTI

6K migrants arrive by sea: Spain, Morocco square off

**Madrid, May 18:** Spain faced a humanitarian and diplomatic crisis Tuesday after thousands of Moroccans took advantage of relaxed border controls in their nation to swim or paddle in inflatable boats onto European soil.

By Tuesday morning, around 6,000 people had crossed the border into

the Spanish city of Ceuta since the first arrivals began early Monday, the Spanish government said, including 1,500 thought to be teenagers.

The city of 85,000 people lies in North Africa on the Mediterranean Sea, separated from Morocco by a double-wide, 10-metre (32-foot) fence.

The sudden influx of migrants into Spain has deepened the diplomatic row between Rabat and Madrid in the wake of Spain's decision to allow in for medical treatment of the chief of a militant group that fights for the independence of Western Sahara.

— AP

Moeed Yusuf is Pakistan's NSA

**Islamabad, May 18:** Pakistan PM Imran Khan has appointed his Special Assistant on National Security Moeed Yusuf as the country's National Security Adviser (NSA).

Yusuf's elevation comes in the backdrop of the reported backchannel communication with India early this year, resulting in the restoration of the 2003 ceasefire agreement on the Line of Control in February. A notification dated May 17 was issued by the Cabinet Division to appoint Yusuf as the NSA. "The Prime Minister has been pleased to approve that Dr Moeed W. Yusuf, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Security and Strategic Policy Planning, shall function as National Security Adviser with the status of Federal Minister, with immediate effect," the notification read.

Last month, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Chaudhry was asked by several journalists about reported backchannel talks with India.

Instead of outright rejection, he said: "States

have their ways and means to communicate which remain available even during wars. Therefore, whether any talks are taking place between India and Pakistan is not important."

In New Delhi, asked about the media reports that backchannel talks between India and Pakistan were going on for more than a year, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi did not give a direct reply. "If you talk about channels of communication on this issue, let me just recall that our respective high commissions exist and are functioning. So that is a very effective channel of communication," Bagchi said last month. India has told Pakistan that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Islamabad in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India has said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility.

Yusuf is an academic with experience of working at various think tanks in the US.

— PTI



## DECCAN Chronicle

19 MAY 2021

### CBI's partisanship mars its actions over Narada

Those who are found to have broken the law must face the full force of the law. In a democracy no one is too high to be placed above this principle, which cannot but apply in the case of the West Bengal ministers and MLAs arrested in the Narada sting case that came to light in 2016 though the sting had been carried out two years earlier.

Where public servants are concerned — and the expression includes legislators — there is a moral dimension as well. They are keepers of public trust and exercise authority, including over public finances, in the name of the people. When they misuse their position for their private gain, the faith of the people in the system as a whole is shaken, and that is why they must not be permitted to get away when they do that.

However, in order that public servants are not harassed through motivated or frivolous complaints, or for vexatious ends, procedures are laid down for their investigation or arrest. The first step here is grant of sanction for their prosecution by appropriate authority.

In the case of chief minister Mamata Banerjee's ministers — Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee — and MLA and former minister Madan Mitra — ordinarily the Speaker of the Assembly should have been the proper authority to accord sanction for their prosecution. This is pretty much standard procedure.

Instead, state governor Jagdeep Dhankar, who appears to be fast acquiring a reputation for political partisanship losing over his status as high constitutional authority, was approached by the CBI and the arrests followed in five days flat.

The Assembly had just been constituted after the recent state election and the Speaker would have been place in a matter of days. Yet, the CBI chose to approach the governor for sanction although it could just easily have waited a few days more in such an old case. This cannot but re-confirm its status as the Centre's "caged parrot". Sadly, the governor did not send the file back either. This is so much the pity and does no good to India's claim to be a constitutional democracy.

Is it not a little curious that the CBI did not seek permission for the prosecution of Mukul Roy, who defected to BJP some years ago, and Suvendu Adhikari, who defected to the saffron party weeks before the recent election and is now the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly? This episode re-asserts the widely held impression that the BJP has become a dry-cleaner and acquiring its membership permits allegedly tainted politicians to come out smelling of roses.

This is a time when a responsible Centre should be working in partnership with states to fight the dreaded Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government's priority evidently lies elsewhere.

It is signalling that after BJP's emphatic defeat at the hands of the Trinamul Congress in the recent state polls, the Centre would take the fight against the legitimate victors to the extremes through the blatant manipulation of procedures even at the cost of hurting the spirit of democracy. Centre-state relations become collateral damage in such a scenario. Development and people's welfare will be on the backburner as political fights escalate, probably in the end leading to street battles. Truly, all this means the willful negation of the mandate of the people.

### Taxes & FDI: Change attitude

It is one of life's simplest aphorisms that you can't have the cake and eat it too. If the Government of India's approach to getting foreign investment is akin to having the cake, its attitude towards trade disputes in which foreign investors emerge victorious as in international arbitration is the equivalent of wanting to eat the cake. The Scottish oil exploration company Cairn Energy has exposed this contradiction in official India's approach even as it has escalated the process by moving to attach Air India's properties abroad on the legal premise that the national carrier is India's alter ego.

A law on retrospective taxation that the previous UPA government passed in 2012 had proved extremely damaging to the country's reputation as an investment destination. Vodafone hit the arbitration trail to expose India's income tax claims as arbitrary. The basic approach hasn't changed despite NDA being in the saddle when losing such claims in arbitration awards. Far from being graceful in defeat and settling, official India has pursued matters legally through appeal and this after having acted in a questionable and predatory manner in the Cairn issue by selling the company's assets and shares to monetise its claims.

Official India can lay a claim to a sovereign right to its tax laws but this does little for the image of a country desperately seeking foreign investments in industry as they come with considerable job generating qualities while also fulfilling the "make in India" criterion dear to the central government as a policy initiative best serving national interests. At one time, there were as many as 17 claims, stemming from disputes over undelivered incentives, retrospective taxation and payment disputes, with regard to investments under bilateral treaties through which capital flowed into India.

The impression India leaves in potential foreign investors is it is a difficult country to deal with because its track record is not that good in keeping its word and delivering on promises after attracting investments. Only a change in attitude can help correct that and settling Cairn's \$1.2 billion award would be one way to demonstrate that India is keen on facilitating ease of doing business.

#### DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

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Subhani



## India can vaccinate swiftly by using 'mohalla method'

Probal DasGupta

The irony is stark. Millions scramble for oxygen cylinders and hospital beds, oscillating between life and death. Around the same time, several other millions decided the political fortunes of five states/UTs.

Earlier this year, Indians defied a mortal fear of the coronavirus and voted in large numbers, with a turnout of 70 per cent or higher across states. On jobs, though, it was different. A listless rollout plan curtailed the availability of vaccines and people's tentativeness only hastened the inevitable. In two weeks, a second wave swept India, spiralling into its biggest crisis. An overpowered medical infrastructure burst at its seams.

But that's not the point. While every life-saving equipment is a survival kit, it's the pace of vaccinations that will ultimately ensure India's endurance against the virus. The point is: the secret to winning this war lies in our learning from past experience, including elections.

January 13, 2011 was a historic day for India. A two-year old child in West Bengal was found crippled by polio but was later cured. It was the last time polio would strike here. That day, India became polio-free. Two years earlier, India housed half the world's polio cases. No one thought the country could ever eradicate it. However, aided by the state, Unicef and others, India's feverish campaign against polio, led by 2.5 million vaccinators, touched 200 million homes, with 700,000 vaccinations in each round. Despite its challenges of poor infrastructure, India relied on its strengths: a "mohalla", or community, outreach.

Today, only 12 per cent Indians have got their first dose, against 50 per cent in America. Currently, the vaccination rate is less than half million a day, sometimes falling further, given the shortage of vaccines. At this rate, it may take until summer 2022 to vaccinate 75 per cent of India. Are we prepared for more casualties until then? A more dynamic and swifter pace of vaccinations is the antidote to arrest fatality numbers, build confidence and encourage a quicker economic revival. The polio experience is a test case. Juxtaposing the polling principle onto the vaccine execution plan gives it the kick it requires. The polling database, with details of citizens and their residences, is a ready master-sheet. In December 2020, Union home secretary Ajay Bhalla asked (then) chief election commissioner Sunil Arora to identify people above 50 at the polling station level. A promising start was made, but the plan ignored key aspects of our election experience. We should replicate our polling expertise, that was used in the polio campaign: the "mohalla method".

Currently, the approach of using hospitals for vaccinations has proved counterproductive. A sudden desperation and opening up of vaccinations for the 18-44 age group has led to longer queues. This inevitably means a high probability of an infection while on a hospital visit. Using the CoWin platform to register and then showing up with identifiers like PAN or Aadhaar cards at selected job centres like schools, community halls or sports venues often used as polling booths will decentralise the process. Mumbai and Gurgaon recently started "drive-in" jabs. More such measures must be undertaken across the country. The aim should be to reach people, rather than herding them at overcrowded hospitals.

The "mohalla method" will increase vaccinated numbers in clusters. The knock-on effect is that as

neighbourhoods vaccinate, infections will slow down in clusters, creating identifiable safe zones. Earmarked vaccinated zones enable city administrations to loosen lockdowns methodically in areas where jabs have crossed high numbers and infections have fallen.

Using age as the sole criteria for prioritisation, instead of a combination of age, economic status and population density, was always expected to pose challenges. The prioritisation of senior citizens meant most people unlikely to go to work were vaccinated first. Next in line were the 45-plus population, many of whom can afford private vehicles. The most vulnerable population was the 18-45 age group — where more people use public transport. Given India has over 70 per cent people under 45, and most frontline workers including delivery personnel fall in this category, the approach meant most of India was unvaccinated against the second wave.

States with worse Covid numbers could form the bigger focus in this vaccination plan. At a city level, densely populated areas require more vaccine booths — based on voter lists from elections. Citizens who aren't on voters' lists in their neighbourhoods can use Aadhaar cards. This also helps those facing a tech challenge in online registrations.

The "mohalla method" demands deployment of substantial numbers of health workers, logistics, and vaccines. Cynics may say this isn't possible. But it actually works. India has over 12 lakh medical professionals, 7-8 lakh alternative medicine professionals, around two lakh medical students, diagnostic centre professionals,

**We can reach a national jab rate of 10 million (one crore) a day, which means vaccinating the country in 4-5 months. If a third wave were to arrive in late 2021, most of India would have been vaccinated.**

armed forces doctors, nursing assistants to provide jabs, the local police and paramilitary to handle the logistics and the armed forces to provide administrative support. Every neighbourhood can plan 5-6 centres of 25-30 volunteers each. Neighbourhood clusters could be simultaneously vaccinated in around 45-60 days (given availability of healthcare resources, vaccine supplies and errors in calculation). We can reach a national jab rate of 10 million (one crore) a day, which means vaccinating the country in 4-5 months. In a worst-case scenario, if a third wave were to arrive in late 2021, most of India would have been vaccinated.

But do we have vaccines? Choosing just two vaccines and then exporting them when just eight per cent of India was vaccinated was bound to lead to shortages. India needs over two billion jabs. Scaling up is a no-brainer. J&J's Phase 3 trials are set to begin. Russia's Sputnik V is here and will be distributed by Dr Reddy's Labs. Bharat Biotech has ramped up its capacity from 200 million to 700 million doses a year. India has asked for a waiver on intellectual property and barriers on vaccines from Europe and America.

It's taken a catastrophe for us to realise we must speed up vaccinations. To execute the blueprint, the bottom line is to shed lethargic bureaucracy and ensure an efficient supply chain and execution. A crisis taskforce needs to have a crack team of senior experts from amongst medical professionals, the armed forces and civil services. Like the polio campaign earlier, a targeted media campaign involving cricket and movie stars must be the focus. The campaign must be on a war footing and the national leadership has to make this period count. The war isn't over till we have enough ammunition to fight for our citizens. And we must vaccinate to win.

*The writer, a retired Army officer, is the author of Watershed 1967, based on a forgotten war between India and China, and a member of the guest faculty at New York's Columbia University*

#### LETTERS

SONU SOOD

Sonu Sood the Bollywood actor has mesmerised millions by his humanistic tendencies and by his humanitarian approach to the panic-stricken people due to lack of oxygen and other amenities in this pandemic time. We salute this super hero.

**Dr Syed Sarmad**  
Kurnool

#### NARADA FALLOUT

The selective arrests of Trinamool Congress leaders leaving other accused who belong to the BJP in the Narada chit fund scam case by the CBI in West Bengal is surprising. The brazen acts of omission and commission by the Central agency and its differential treatment of the accused of a same case would hurt fate of the case itself.

**Dr D.V.G. Sankararao**  
Vizianagaram

#### GOOD DECISION

In this prevailing Covid-19 pandemic situation, it was a good decision to extend the curfew as the cases are piling up at hospital doorsteps (*Partial lockdown in AP till May 31, DC, May 18*). In addition, the announcement made by the government to provide financial aid to the children is a welcome move.

**M. Vinesh**  
Visakhapatnam

## 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

### New colony to come up on Jubilee Hills

HYDERABAD, May 18.

The Jubilee Hills Co-operative House Building Society here, as been making good progress during the last two years and construction of about 500 houses is expected to commence shortly.

The Society has acquired about 1,400 acres of land, with a view to provide fully developed plots for nearly 2,500 members for construction of houses. Facilities have not been made for starting construction of 500 houses in the first phase.

Situated as it is at a height of about 2,000 feet, the colony, when developed, would be one of the most beautiful residential places in the city with well laid out parks and lawns, wide roads and all facilities.

Standing atop the hillocks or sitting in the balcony of a house, one can have a panoramic view of the city.

Sanjay Kumar



## Political fallout of the Covid crisis across India

Various factors contributed to the BJP's poor performance in the West Bengal Assembly elections and one can't relate its poor showing only to the severe Covid-19 crisis and its mismanagement across the country. But the political fallout of the Covid crisis and its mismanagement for the BJP can't be ruled out. The results of the Uttar Pradesh panchayat elections have already given a glimpse of the challenge the BJP may face in the near future. It faced a tough challenge from the Samajwadi Party in the panchayat polls. The severe health crisis that India is facing at the moment may not have yet made the extremely popular Prime Minister Narendra Modi unpopular, but disappointment among a large number of Indians has started building. People may not directly blame the PM for the present health crisis, though some do, but what seems to have disappointed many Indians is his continued campaign for his party in West Bengal, which saw eight phases of voting.

With Covid cases rising alarmingly in several states, and cities gasping for

oxygen, there were even demands to merge the last few phases of the West Bengal polls to reduce the campaign, but the Centre was silent and BJP leaders continued to address big rallies in that state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi cancelled his rallies, which seems to have done damage control over people's disenchantment with Mr Modi, but the Election Commission, that announced a ban on big rallies hours after Mr Modi's announcement that he was cancelling his rallies, created the perception among ordinary people that his move was guided by the EC's decision, of which he may have got a hint in advance.

What seems to have disappointed many people is Mr Modi's somewhat delayed effort in trying to address the Covid crisis, weeks after India plunged from one crisis to another — from non-availability of beds to the shortage of oxygen, not to mention the non-availability of ventilators for patients in desperate need of it for treatment. When the country faced these multiple health crises, what people saw was Prime Minister Modi addressing several election rallies in West Bengal. People saw

this as a huge contrast to last year's Covid crisis and Mr Modi's handling of it. Last year, when Covid-19 had just erupted in India, Prime Minister Modi was in full command, as he took charge and announced a nationwide lockdown. There was criticism of the way the lockdown was announced and implemented without giving advance notice, but overall Mr Modi was applauded for his bold decision which seemed to have prevented the spread of Covid-19 across India.

Now, when people were looking towards Mr Modi for his leadership in handling this crisis, he failed to establish a connect with people. Citizens remember that during last year's crisis, that was far less severe than this one, he led from the front, addressed the nation several times, and kept a connect with ordinary people. It is true that the Centre is trying its best to solve even this present crisis and started the import of Covid vaccines and oxygen, along with several other such steps, but these should have been done much earlier. Though the Centre took these initiatives, at the same time it always tried to shift the responsibility to state

governments, on the ground that health is a state subject. Putting the blame on state governments for the current health disaster was not appreciated by most people. It is important to note that there has been no change in the constitutional provisions — health was a state subject last year, as it is this year — so why did the Centre take all the praise last year and now, as things are going out of hand, is trying to pass the blame to the states?

What might complicate the issue further and contribute to the growing disenchantment of people with the Central government, Prime Minister Modi and the BJP, is the emerging controversy around the pricing of the Covid vaccines. Not that there were no controversies around vaccination earlier, there were news about a shortage of vaccines and India having exported vaccines to various countries, but the *tu-tu-mai-mai* between the states and New Delhi may increase further on the differential pricing of the vaccines. It is understood that as of now the same vaccine will be procured by the states at a higher price, but it would be available to the Centre at a lower price. This dif-

ferential price is understandable if it is between private and government hospitals, but it is hard for an ordinary citizen to understand why he has to pay a higher price if he is given a vaccine purchased by a state government and a lesser price if the same vaccine is purchased by the Central government.

What seems to have made people feel unhappy with the Centre is its lack of initiative in negotiating with the Serum Institute of India for a better price, and instead advising the states to negotiate the price themselves. The question is — why can't the Centre take the initiative on this? This is not a "normal" health crisis across the country, in the midst of a raging pandemic, the question of whether health is a state subject or not should not even arise. Some states may have erred in their preparations, but it is not the time to play the blame game. This is a time for all the states and the Centre to work together and fight a national calamity.

*The writer is a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and a political analyst. The views expressed here are personal.*



quick  
BITES

## INDICATORS

		%
Sensex	50,203.73	1.26
Nifty 50	15,108.10	1.24
S&P 500*	4,159.06	-0.10
Dollar (₹)	73.04	0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.58	-0.30
Euro (₹)	88.95	0.05
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,833▲333	0.69
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	67.56	-2.74
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.976	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.654	0.014

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

Credit Suisse to  
hire over 1,000 IT  
staff in India

Credit Suisse Group said it planned to hire over 1,000 IT employees in India this year to show its commitment to the country and its intention to establish it as a global technology innovation centre for the bank. The hires will comprise developers and engineers with capabilities in technologies such as cybersecurity, data analytics, cloud, API development, machine learning and artificial intelligence.

CCI okays APSEZ  
stake buy in  
Krishnapatnam

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) gave nod to proposed acquisition of additional 25 per cent stake of Adani Krishnapatnam Port Ltd by Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd. The acquirer already holds 75 per cent shareholding in Adani Krishnapatnam Port. "As a result of the proposed combination acquirer will hold 100 per cent shareholding and sole control of the Target," a release said.

Maruti opens  
₹126-cr hospital  
in Ahmedabad

Maruti Suzuki, in partnership with Zyklus Hospitals, has announced the start of a multi-speciality hospital at Sitapur in Ahmedabad. With a total capital expenditure of Rs 126 crore, the hospital has been fully funded by the Maruti Suzuki Foundation—a CSR initiative of Maruti Suzuki. At present, it is being used as a Covid care facility to help treat patients in the region. The facility is expected to serve more than 3.75 lakh people.

Ujjivan SFB Q4  
net jumps 86%  
to ₹136 crore

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (SFB) reported an 86 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 136 crore for the fourth quarter from Rs 73 crore a year ago. Total income was down by 9 per cent at Rs 735 crore from Rs 810 crore. Net interest income also fell by 21 per cent to Rs 368 crore against Rs 467 crore. "The quarter was exceptionally good. Our disbursement was at an all-time high," MD & CEO Nitin Chugh said.



■ Occupancies improve, but revenues nearly halve

Covid hotels stay in  
biz on thin marginsSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

In order to address the scarcity of beds, hospitality chains have tied up with hospitals to provide accommodation with care for Covid patients. While this has improved the occupancies, the revenues are significantly lower.

Since mid-April, several hospitality chains, including Taj Hotels, Ginger, ITC, Crowne Plaza, Radisson, Sarovar, Welcomhotel and Oyo, have opened their properties for Covid patients with mild symptoms as well those seeking isolation.

"At present, we have over 80 active quarantine and isolation facilities. Additionally, we have mapped and ensured readiness across 750 properties, which can be turned into quarantine centres across



the country, in case the need arises or demand increases," said Rohit Kapoor, CEO, Oyo India and South-East Asia.

"For mildly affected employees, we have isolation facilities with health-care service providers. This includes 24\*7 nurse care, on-demand pathology and pharmacy support, daily doctor visits, meals, among other services," he said.

According to Pradeep Shetty, honorary secretary

of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, more than 100 properties should be offering accommodation to Covid patients across key cities. "The occupancies should have been otherwise nil in these hotels due to the lockdown and Covid fears. Now the properties would be having around 30 per cent occupancies," he said.

However, the revenues are significantly low for the rooms. Some of the

state governments have capped the room rates for these facilities. As per the directive of the Delhi government, five star properties should not charge more than Rs 5,000 per patient per day and Rs 4,000 for four and three star properties.

"The average revenues per room would be around 50 per cent of the usual tariffs. Further, there could be some revenue sharing with the hospital partner," said Shetty.

According to Jaison Chacko, secretary general, FHRAI, there is also reluctance from the part of the staff. "We have been requesting the government to categorise hotel staff as frontline workers and provide them vaccination. Most of the hotel employees are not vaccinated and this puts their lives at risk," he said.

LNG IMPORTERS  
DEFER DELIVERIES  
ON WEAK DEMANDSTEPHEN STAPCZYNSKI  
MAY 18

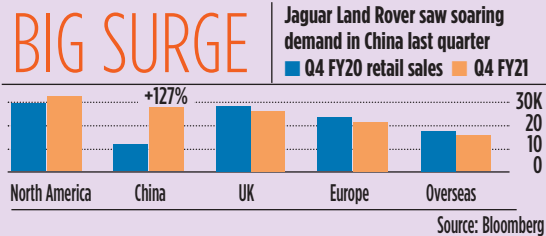
India's liquefied natural gas importers are asking suppliers to defer deliveries as measures to curb the spread of the deadly Covid-19 virus have cut demand for the fuel.

At least three companies, including Indian Oil Corp, have asked to delay shipments slated for May and June delivery, according to traders. Inventories at import terminals in western India, such as Dahej, are near full capacity, the traders said.

The deferrals illustrate the extent of the natural gas glut, which has worsened over the past several weeks. While Indian firms have been accepting most contracted LNG deliveries, they have disappeared from the spot market since the virus worsened last month and shipments became too pricey.

To make matters worse, a cyclone in the vicinity of import terminals has also forced diversions.

—Bloomberg

Tata Motors Q4 loss  
narrows to ₹7,600 crMICHAEL GONSALVES  
PUNE, MAY 18

Tata Motors, India's biggest automaker, which owns British iconic luxury car maker Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), narrowed its losses in the March 2021 quarter.

The Mumbai-based passenger and commercial vehicle maker's consolidated net loss for the quarter came down to Rs 7,605.4 crore, mainly on account of asset write downs in its subsidiary JLR, compared with a net loss of Rs 9,864 crore in the year-ago quarter. The company has incurred cash write downs on assets worth Rs 9,606.1 crore during the quarter.

This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. This is apart from the restructuring costs of Rs 5,388.2 crore. In total, the exceptional loss in Q4 related to JLR stood at nearly Rs 14,000 crore.

It posted a loss of Rs 9,894.2 crore in the corresponding period last year and profit at Rs 2,906.45 crore in the December 2020 quarter.

The carmaker's revenue from operations came in at Rs 88,628 crore for the fourth quarter, up 42 per cent from the revenue of Rs 62,492 crore clocked in

the same quarter last year.

On a standalone basis, Tata Motors reported a net profit of Rs 1,646 crore as against a loss of Rs 4,871 crore in the year-ago period.

For the full financial year 2020-21, the company reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 13,395 crore, against a net loss of Rs 11,975 crore in the previous year.

JLR sold 12 per cent more luxury vehicles in the March quarter as purchases more than doubled in China.

However, Tata Motors has flagged global supply-related challenges, where coronavirus cases are still high in many markets.

"Supply chain issues, in particular for semi-conductors, have become more difficult to mitigate and are now impacting production plans for Q1. The company is working closely with affected suppliers to resolve the issues and minimise the effect on customers," Tata Motors said in an exchange filing on Tuesday.

"While demand remains strong, the supply situation over the next few months is likely to be adversely impacted. We expect Q1 FY22 to be relatively weak," it said.

## Sensex rises above 50,000 pts, Nifty regains 15K zone

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MAY 18

The market trended higher for the second consecutive session on further drop in fresh daily Covid cases and gained over 1.2 per cent, anticipating limited impact of lockdowns currently in place in various parts of the country.

The Sensex gained 612.60 points, or 1.24 per cent, and settled well above the 50,000 mark at 50,193. The

Nifty-50 too crossed the 15,000-mark to close at two-month high of 15,108, gaining 184 points.

"Barring the rising daily deaths and slower vaccination drive, we observe more positivity around the Covid-19 situation. Daily cases have fallen below 0.3 million mark this week with visible peaking, driven by Maharashtra, UP, Delhi, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana,

Gujarat, MP, Telangana, Jharkhand and Bihar. India's recoveries exceeded daily cases for the first time since mid-March and India's share in global recoveries rose to 53 per cent versus 50 per cent in daily cases," JM Financial said about Covid situation.

"Even as 25 states/Union territories (UT) comprising 90 per cent of GDP have lockdown-like curbs overlapping between May

12 and May 24, cases in 20 states/UTs comprising 70-72 per cent of GDP have peaked. Thus these restrictions could be eased soon," analysts from JM Financial said.

"NSE's India VIX index, an indicator of market volatility fell further by 1.89 per cent from 19.60 to 19.24 levels, a new low for 2021. Declining volatility is supporting the bullish market sentiment," said analysts.

The broader market outperformed which led to market capitalisation of all companies traded on BSE hitting a new high of over Rs 216.39 lakh crore.

The BSE Mid-cap Index gained 1.87 per cent and BSE Small-cap Index gained 1.28 per cent.

Both foreign portfolio investors and the domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 618.49 crore and Rs 449.52 crore respectively.

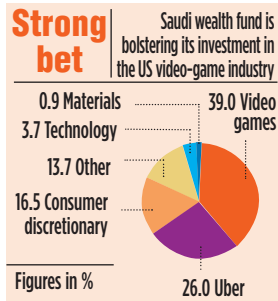
## Saudi wealth fund loads up on video-game makers

PAUL ABELSKY  
MAY 18

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund doubled down on its pandemic-era investments in video-game makers and added new bets as it raised holdings of US stocks by about a fifth to \$15.4 billion while exiting oil shares.

The Public Investment Fund brought its total commitment to video-game makers, including Activision Blizzard Inc, Electronic Arts Inc and Take-Two Interactive Software Inc to \$6 billion during the first quarter, according to regulatory filings. Those holdings were valued at \$3.3 billion at the end of the fourth quarter.

The PIF also added to its roster by buying \$141 million worth of stock in South Korean e-commerce



giant Coupang Inc, whose biggest backer is Japanese conglomerate SoftBank Group Corp.

Another new investment last quarter included Compute Health Acquisition Corp, a blank-check company set up by Intel Corp chairman Omar Ishrak, with the PIF buying a 8.7 per cent stake for \$75.7 million. The fund exited its stake in Suncor Energy Inc, Canada's top

integrated oil producer, selling 51 million shares.

The \$400-billion PIF is funded through a mixture of borrowing, cash and asset transfers from the government, and retained earnings from its investments. Chaired by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and managed by governor Yasir Al Rumayyan, the fund has outlined a plan to grow its assets to over 4 trillion riyals (\$1.1 trillion) by 2025.

As the PIF is positioning itself to power the local economy, it's also made several high-profile investments in recent years, including a stake in Uber Technologies Inc and big commitments to Softbank's Vision Fund.

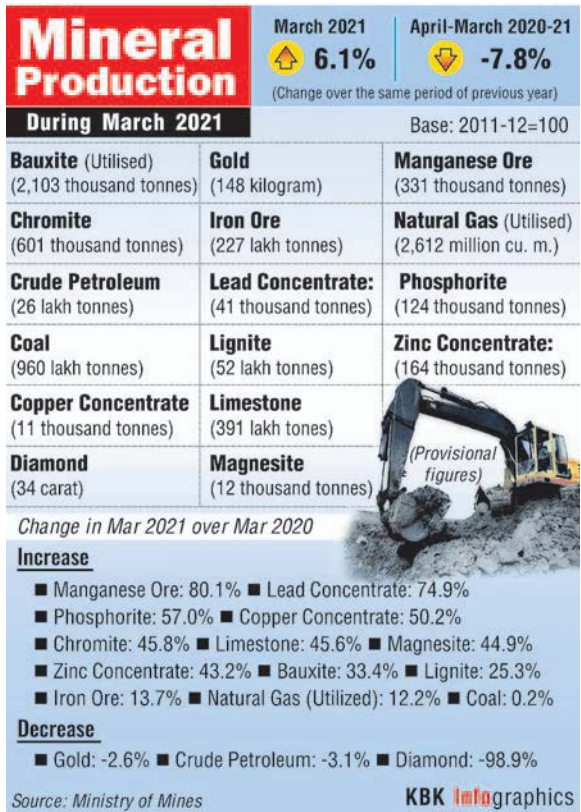
The Riyadh-based fund acquired more than \$3 billion worth of stock in the three US video-game mak-

ers for the first time during the fourth quarter. By contrast, its exposure to US equities in the third quarter fell by \$3 billion, mainly because the PIF sold stakes in exchange-traded funds that track the real estate and materials sectors.

Prince Mohammed is a big fan of video games, particularly "Call of Duty," Activision's best-selling franchise. He told Bloomberg Businessweek in 2016 that he was part of the first Saudi generation to grow up with the gaming technology.

In the first quarter, the fund more than doubled its Activision Blizzard stake to 33.4 million shares and almost doubled its holding in Electronic Arts, reaching 14.2 million shares at the end of March.

—Bloomberg

DISRUPTIONS MAY  
DELAY COMPLETION OF  
HOUSING PROJECTSSANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MAY 18

Supply chain disruptions and worker migration due to localised lockdowns are affecting the construction of residential properties in key cities. The completion of more than 4 lakh housing units scheduled for this year might be delayed due to these disruptions.

Over 4.22 lakh units are scheduled to be completed by 2021-end across the top 7 cities, according to Anarock Property Consultants. Of this, 72 per cent of the total homes to be delivered by 2021-end are already sold out. Though there is no outright ban now during the current localised lockdowns unlike the first lockdown last year when construction activity came to a complete halt, disruptions in raw material supply chain may cause some delay in completion.

"The tally of 4.22 lakh homes scheduled for delivery across the top 7 cities by 2021-end must, however, be viewed in context with the severe second wave of Covid-19 infections. All the top cities have been affected, and it is likely that a part of these project deliveries will be pushed to 2022," said Anuj Puri, chairman, Anarock Property Consultants.

The transportation of raw materials is getting affected due to restrictions. Further, the closure of stores selling non-essential goods and restricted timings are affecting the availability. Most of the construction sites are permitted to deploy only a fraction of the workforce by ensuring social distancing norms. This too has affected the pace of work.

Moreover, the migration of workers to their native places ahead of lock-down in some cities has considerably constrained the construction activity.

"Now, amid the ongoing second wave of Covid-19 and the various curbs due to the lockdown in various states, the sector is facing a gradual slowdown which has made it extremely difficult to sustain the momentum," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.

STOCKING | UP Once viewed as liabilities, fatter inventories are back in vogue

## World economy is running low on everything

BRENDAN MURRAY,  
ENDA CURRAN &  
KIM CHIPMAN  
MAY 18

A year ago, as the pandemic ravaged country after country and economies shuddered, consumers were the ones panic-buying. Today, on the rebound, it's companies furiously stocking up.

Mattress producers to car manufacturers to aluminum foil makers are buying more material than they need to survive the breakneck speed at which demand for goods is recovering and assuage that primal fear of running out. The corporate buying and hoarding is pushing supply chains to the brink of seizing up. Shortages, transportation bottlenecks and price spikes are nearing the highest levels in recent memory, raising concern that a supercharged global economy will stoke inflation.

Copper, iron ore and steel. Corn, coffee, wheat and soybeans. Lumber, semiconductors, plastic and cardboard for packag-



ing. The world is seemingly low on all of it. "You name it, and we have a shortage on it," Tom Linebarger, chairman and chief executive of engine and generator manufacturer Cummins Inc., said on a call this month. Clients are "trying to get everything they can because they see high demand," Jennifer Rumsey, the Columbus, Indiana-based company's president, said. "They think it's going to extend into next year."

The difference between the big crunch of 2021 and past supply disruptions is the sheer magnitude of it, and the fact that there is - as far as anyone can tell - no clear end in sight. Big or small, few businesses are spared. Europe's

largest fleet of trucks, Girtelka Logistics, says there's been a struggle to find enough capacity. Monster Beverage Corp. of Corona, California, is dealing with an aluminum can scarcity. Hong Kong's Momax Technology Ltd. is delaying production of a new product because of a dearth of semiconductors.

Further exacerbating the situation is an unusually long and growing list of calamities that have rocked commodities in recent months. A freak accident in the Suez Canal backed up global shipping in March. Drought has wreaked havoc upon agricultural crops. A deep freeze and mass blackout wiped out energy and petrochemicals operations across the central US in

February. Less than two weeks ago, hackers brought down the largest fuel pipeline in the US, driving gasoline prices above \$3 a gallon for the first time since 2014. Now India's massive Covid-19 outbreak is threatening its biggest ports.

For anyone who thinks it's all going to end in a few months, consider the somewhat obscure US economic indicator known as the Logistics Managers' Index. The gauge is built on a monthly survey of corporate supply chiefs that asks where they see inventory, transportation and warehouse expenses - the three key components of managing supply chains - now and in 12 months. The current index is at its second-highest level in records dating back to 2016, and the future gauge shows little respite a year from now. The index has proven unnervingly accurate in the past, matching up with actual costs about 90 per cent of the time.

To Zac Rogers, who helps compile the index as an assistant professor at

State University's College of Business, it's a paradigm shift. In the past, those three areas were optimized for low costs and reliability. Today, with e-commerce demand soaring, warehouses have moved from the cheap outskirts of urban areas to prime parking garages downtown or vacant department-store space where deliveries can be made quickly, albeit with pricier real estate, labour and utilities. Once viewed as liabilities before the pandemic, fatter inventories are in vogue. Transport costs, more volatile than the other two, won't lighten up until demand does.

"We're going to continue to see some price increases over the next 12 months," Rogers said.

A growing chorus of observers are warning that inflation is bound to quicken. The threat has been enough to send tremors through world capitals, central banks, factories and supermarkets.

—Bloomberg



## SHORT TAKES

## Big guns Federer, Serena busted

**Geneva:** Roger Federer lost the first match of his comeback proper on Tuesday as the Swiss tennis great tumbled out of the Geneva Open on his first outing in two months.

Federer lost 4-6, 6-4, 4-6 to Spanish clay court specialist Pablo Andujar to wreck the 39-year-old's hopes of stringing a run of matches together. Meanwhile, former world number one Serena Williams crashed out of the WTA tournament in Parma, Italy, on Tuesday when she was beaten in straight sets 7-6, 6-2 in her second round match by Czech Katerina Siniakova.

The 39-year-old, currently ranked eighth in the world, had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her premature exit from the Italian Open, where she also lost in the second round in what was her first match in three months. — *AFP*

## England rest IPL stars for NZ series

**London:** England on Tuesday rested IPL stars including Jos Buttler and Jonny Bairstow for the upcoming Two-Test series against New Zealand while Jofra Archer and Ben Stokes were not considered for selection due to injuries. England named a 15-man squad for the series starting June 2. “Multi-format players Moeen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran and Chris Woakes are rested after completing a quarantine period following the cancellation of the Indian Premier League earlier this month. They will spend some time resting before joining up with their respective counties in due course,” the ECB said in a statement. — *PTI*

## Covid-free Saha fit for English tour

**New Delhi:** Wriddhiman Saha has recovered from Covid-19 and will be available for India's tour of England next month. Saha has reached his home in Kolkata after completing over a fortnight-long quarantine at a Delhi hotel. The wicketkeeper was picked for the England-bound squad subject to fitness. The 36-year-old was among the players who contracted the dreaded virus in the currently-suspended Indian Premier league while playing for SunRisers Hyderabad. “Wriddhiman is back home yesterday after two and half weeks of hotel quarantine in Delhi,” a source close to the player said. Saha will have to return after negative RT-PCR test before joining the pre-departure bio-bubble in Mumbai, where the squad will undergo hard quarantine before boarding the flight to England. — *PTI*

## BCCI pays for Oz players' quarantine

**Sydney:** The BCCI is footing the bill for the 14-day quarantine of Australian IPL players, who have arrived here from Maldives, Cricket Australia interim CEO Nick Hockley said on Tuesday. Most of the 38 members of the Australian contingent, including top players, officials and commentators, landed at the Sydney airport on Monday after a forced stopover at Maldives. The players had to spend 10 days in Maldives due to a ban imposed by the Australian government on travellers from Covid-ravaged India till May 15. Hockley said the BCCI has kept its promise and funded the whole operation. “Yes,” Hockley told *Sydney Morning Herald* when asked if BCCI was paying for the quarantine. — *PTI*

## Cricketer Priya's mom dies of Covid

**New Delhi:** India international Priya Punia, who is part of the UK-bound women's cricket squad, has lost her mother to Covid-19. The 24-year-old cricketer wrote a heartfelt post on social media after her mother succumbed to the deadly virus. “Today I realised why you always told me to be strong. You knew that one day I would need the strength to bear the loss of yours. I miss you so much! No matter the distance I know you are always there with me. My guiding star, my mom. Love you always,” Punia wrote on *Instagram*. — *PTI*

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## GHOST FROM PAST

## Bancroft backtracks, other Aussies urge to end ball-tampering row

**Sydney, May 18:** Cameron Bancroft backtracked after dropping hints of other bowlers' involvement in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal while the men in question, including top pacer Pat Cummins, claimed innocence and pleaded for an end to “rumour-mongering and innuendo” surrounding the incident that tarred Australia's cricketing reputation.

Bancroft kicked up a storm recently when he stated that it was “pretty self explanatory” when asked whether other bowlers in the team knew of the plan to use a sandpaper on the ball during the Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018.

On Tuesday, a *Sydney Morning Herald* report, quoting sources familiar with the situation, stated that Bancroft had no fresh information to give to Cricket Australia's integrity unit, which contacted him. CA had offered a reinvestigation after Bancroft's interview.

The men who were caught in the storm triggered by his statement were Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Nathan Lyon, who were all part of the team during the series. They issued a joint statement to deny any knowledge of the illegal plot.

“Bancroft, who is playing county cricket in the UK, had responded overnight on Monday in a conciliatory manner and indicated that he did not have significant new information to share with CA,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* report stated.

“Bancroft said to have told CA he is supportive of the investigation and satisfied with the outcome,” it added.

The Australian bowling attack in the Cape Town



A file photo of Cameron Bancroft addressing a press conference in Perth to issue an apology for his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

Test also comprised all-rounder Mitchell Marsh.

According to the report, Bancroft also reached out to the affected bowlers in order to explain his recent comments.

“...Bancroft had claimed he was left flustered by the unexpected line of questioning and that there was no malice behind his remarks.”

The joint statement issued by Cummins, Starc, Hazlewood and Lyon sought closure.

“We pride ourselves on our honesty. So it's been disappointing to see that our integrity has been questioned by some journalists and past players in recent days in regard to the Cape Town Test of 2018,” the statement read.

“...we feel compelled to put the key facts on the record again: We did not know a foreign substance was taken onto the field to alter the condition of the ball until we saw the images on the big screen at Newlands.”

The four bowlers said they learned valuable lessons and it is time to move on from the issue.

“None of these excuses what happened on the field that day at Newlands. It was wrong and it should never have happened.

“We've all learned valuable lessons and we'd like to think the public can see a change for the better in terms of the way we play, the way we behave and respect the game.

“We respectfully request an end to the rumour-mongering and innuendo. It has gone on too long and it is time to move on,” the statement said.

## WARNER CAN REVEAL MORE, SAYS BROAD

England pacer Stuart Broad feels Australian cricket would be in for an “interesting time” if David Warner ever decides to write a book and open up about the ball-tampering scandal that led to him being barred from national captaincy for life.

Broad also agreed with Bancroft — who was banned for nine months for his role in the scandal — and then Australian bowling coach David Saker that the knowledge of the illegal play was not limited to the three men who were suspended for

their part in it.

“I have seen a couple of comments from David Warner's agent, too, and I think it will be an interesting time when he stops playing for Australia and writes a book,” Broad said.

“There's no doubt the Aussies would have been hoping this episode was signed sealed and delivered. It was an incredibly tough thing for those three players to go through. I can't see it still being a conversation (when the Ashes start) in November, but I can see it being sung in the Barmy Army stands if they're allowed.”

Broad said in his experience, a bowler is very sensitive to the condition of the ball. — *PTI*

## DE VILLIERS' SA RETURN RULED OUT

**Johannesburg, May 18:** Cricket South Africa on Tuesday announced that AB de Villiers won't be coming out of international retirement ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup in India, saying that he has decided “once and for all” to not change his mind.

Putting to rest speculations around his comeback, CSA said that “discussions with AB de Villiers have concluded with the batsman deciding once and for all, that his retirement will remain final.”

The statement was reportedly made after CSA announced the team for upcoming tour of the West Indies, though it focussed largely on the squads for the two Test matches and five T20Is in the Caribbean islands rather than de Villiers' retirement.

In May 2018, de Villiers had announced his retirement from international cricket. He played 114 Tests, 228 ODIs and 78 T20Is before announcing the surprise decision.

However, last month the 37-year-old versatile cricketer said it would be “fantastic” to make an international comeback ahead of the T20 World Cup. — *PTI*

## Kane ready for showdown

**London, May 18:** New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is excited to face India in the World Test Championships (WTC) final next month as he considers show-downs against Virat Kohli's men to be a “fantastic challenge”. India and New Zealand square-off in the final of the inaugural World Test Championships in Southampton from June 18.

“When we play against India, it has always been a fantastic challenge and so it is really exciting to be playing against them,” Williamson said in a video posted by the ICC on its Twitter handle.

“It's really, really exciting to be involved in the final, obviously to win it would be that much better,” said the 30-year-old considered one of the best current batsmen in the world.

Talking about championship and how it progressed, Williamson said, “We saw the contests in the WTC has brought real excitement.

“...the games were really tight such as in the India-Australia series and our series against Pakistan as well where you had to really fight hard to get the results, which is really great.”

New Zealand pacer Neil Wagner admitted India possess fast bowlers who



India captain Virat Kohli and his New Zealand counterpart Kane Williamson.

can exploit the English conditions but said the wickets can change anytime and become flat also.

“India has a lot of quality fast bowlers who have done well in different conditions, they can swing (the ball) under overcast conditions but when the sun comes out it (wicket) is flat and nothing happens.

“(English) Conditions can change throughout and so I am not getting carried away too much,

trying to control the controllables.”

India batsman Hanuma Vihari, who is in England for a county stint with Warwickshire, said it would be a great feeling to play for his country in the WTC final.

“I am excited but I would want to be in that moment and not to get too much carried away by the importance of the situation,” he said.

“But as a sportsman, to play for India in the final

of inaugural World Test Championships is always a great feeling,” said the 27-year-old batsman who is currently playing county cricket in England.

The majority of the Kiwi players have reached the UK as they play a two-match series against England starting June 2 before the WTC final.

The Indians are expected to reach here in the first week of June. — *PTI*

## Faf received death threat for Cup debacle

**New Delhi, May 18:** Former South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis has revealed that he and his wife received death threats after a mix-up with AB de Villiers led to the latter's run out during their 2011 World Cup semi-final defeat to New Zealand.

Played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Dhaka, South Africa lost the match by 49 runs to be knocked out of the tournament, which was won by co-hosts India.

“I received death threats after that (match). My wife received death threats. We turned on



Faf du Plessis

social media and we were blown away. It became very personal. There were some very offensive things said that I won't repeat,” du Plessis was

quoted as saying by *ESPNcricinfo*.

“It makes you introverted towards people and you put a shield up. All players go through this and it

forces us to keep our circles very small. It's why I've worked so hard on creating a safe space within our camp,” he added.

## SOUTH AFRICA ANNOUNCE SQUAD

South Africa named 19 players for two Test matches to be played in St Lucia and 20 players for five T20 internationals in Grenada. — *PTI*

**Squads: Test:** Dean Elgar (c), Temba Bavuma (vc), Quinton de Kock (wkt), Sarel Erwee, Beuran Hendricks, Marco Jansen, George Linde, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi,

Anrich Nortje, Keegan Peterson, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Preenlan Subrayen, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams.

**T20:** Temba Bavuma (c), Quinton de Kock (w), Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasen, George Linde, Sisanda Magala, Keshav Maharaj, Janneman Malan, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Lungi Ngidi, Anrich Nortje, Andile Phehlukwayo, Dwaine Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Tabraiz Shamsi, Rassie van der Dussen, Kyle Verreynne, Lizaad Williams.



Sudhakar Vemuri

## Quiet please! Ref Sudhakar leaves badminton court Covid claims renowned official

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 18

Renowned badminton official Sudhakar Vemuri passed away in Hyderabad on Tuesday morning while being treated for Covid-19. He was 71 and left behind his wife and two daughters.

Sudhakar umpired at three consecutive Olympics — Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, only Asian to do so.

The respected umpire also officiated in several tournaments including two Asian Games in 1982 (New Delhi) and 1994 (Hiroshima, Japan), one Special Olympics in 1995 (Connecticut, USA), Thomas and Uber Cups, Sudirman Cups and World Championships, and many other national and international tournaments in India and across the world.

After retiring as an umpire in 2004, he became a referee and later a Course Conductor and Assessor.

He was the deputy chairman of Badminton Asia's Technical Officials Committee till he breathed his last.

He is also the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from Badminton World Federation (BWF) and Dr Ramineni Foundation Award in USA.

Born on December 1, 1949 in Hyderabad, Sudhakar did his schooling from Methodist Boys High School, graduation at Nizam College and completed his Master's degree from Osmania University before working for the Food Corporation of India, Syndicate Bank and Airtel.

Sudhakar entered the field of badminton in 1976 as a Line Judge in the Asian Championships held in Hyderabad. He became a State Umpire in 1980, National Umpire Grade II in 1982 and Grade I in 1984 by securing 99%, the highest mark.

Subsequently, he became a Badminton Asia Certificated Umpire and International Badminton Federation (IBF) Accredited Umpire in 1988 before graduating to the IBF Certificated Umpire (the highest level in international umpiring) at the World Championships in

A colossal figure in the badminton circuit in Hyderabad, he passed on his wisdom to several upcoming players and officials. He leaves an unparalleled legacy of integrity, honesty and commitment to badminton, and will remain irreplaceable in the hearts of those who knew and loved him.

— **PULLELA GOPICHAND**  
National badminton coach

I am shocked to hear that Shri Sudhakar Vemuri sir, international badminton umpire, has passed away. I extend my deepest condolences to his family.

— **P. V. SINDHU**  
Badminton world champion

Really sad to hear about Vemuri Sudhakar sir. My condolences to his family.

An irreparable loss to badminton. He trained many officials and players to be perfect and I personally have learnt a lot from you sir. You will always be in our heart.

— **N. SIKKI REDDY**  
Badminton doubles player

Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1991.

“He was an excellent teacher for the Technical Officials of India and Asia. Badminton Association of Telangana (BAT) conveys its deepest condolences to his bereaved family,” BAT president K. Taraka Rama Rao (KTR) and officials stated in a press release.

The Badminton Association of India too mourned Sudhakar's demise. “The sport has also lost one of its biggest emissaries,” it said.

“We thank him for all that he has achieved with Badminton Asia. We send our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones. May he rest in peace,” Badminton Asia stated.

“Deeply saddened. He was a person with high umpiring standards and a great guide to Indian badminton,” said Jagan Mohan Rao Arishnapally, Handball Federation of India president.

## WRESTLER | MURDER CASE

## Court denies bail to ‘hiding’ Sushil

**New Delhi, May 18:** A Delhi Court on Tuesday refused to grant anticipatory bail to absconding Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl that led to the death of a wrestler.

Additional Sessions Judge Jagdish Kumar denied the relief to Sushil Kumar against whom a case of murder, abduction and criminal conspiracy has been registered.

Wrestler Sagar Rana died, while two of his friends Sonu and Amit Kumar got injured, after they were allegedly assaulted by Sushil Kumar and other wrestlers on May 4 night, at the stadium premises in the national capital.

Fearing arrest, the international wrestler moved the Rohini court in Delhi on May 17 seeking anticipatory bail, asserting that



Sushil Kumar

the investigation against him is biased and that no injuries are attributable to him.

However, Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Srivastava, representing the police, told the court that there is electronic evidence where he could be seen with a stick and hitting the wrestler.

— *PTI*