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VIJAYAWADA | WEDNESDAY | 26 MAY 2021



WORLD | 5

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SPORTS | 8

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Fugitive Mehul Choksi goes missing in Antigua

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Fugitive diamantaire Mehul Choksi, who was wanted in a ₹13,500 crore loan fraud in Punjab National Bank, has reportedly gone missing in Antigua where he has been staying since January 2018.

According to reports, Mr Choksi, who had taken citizenship of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, was seen driving in the southern area of the island on Sunday. Later, his vehicle was found but there was no trace of him.

A local news agency in Barbuda quoted commissioner of police Atlee Rodney as saying that the police are "following up on the whereabouts of Indian businessman Mehul Choksi", who is "rumoured" to be missing.

Choksi and his nephew Nirav Modi are wanted for allegedly siphoning off ₹13,500 crore of public money from the state-run Punjab National Bank (PNB), using letters of undertaking. The CBI, which is probing the PNB scam, on Tuesday contacted the Antigua embassy in India following reports



● According to reports, Mr Choksi, who had taken citizenship of the Caribbean island nation of Antigua and Barbuda, was seen driving in the southern area of the island on Sunday. Later, his vehicle was found but there was no trace of him.

alleging that Choksi was missing.

While Nirav Modi is in a London prison and is contesting extradition to India, Mr Choksi took the citizenship of Antigua in 2017 using the Citizenship by Investment programme, before fleeing India in January 2018.

Antigua Prime Minister Gaston Browne has said he has "no reliable information till date" that Choksi has fled the country and it was very likely that he was still in Antigua and Barbuda.

In a statement to the

Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda, Browne said authorities were "collaborating" with the Indian government, neighbouring countries and international police organisation to try and locate Choksi.

"Someone from his household indicated that he is missing. Since then Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda put out a statement to that effect. That statement will be shared with the Interpol," he said.

Browne said Choksi has two cases against him in courts of Antigua and Barbuda — extradition and revocation of citizenship — for which he has brought in a celebrated lawyer from the United Kingdom to represent him and this showed his willingness to stay and contest the cases.

"I do not believe that law enforcement or anyone would have contemplated Mr Choksi would have fled the country. In any case we do not have any reliable information to date that he has fled the country. It is likely he may be still here and law enforcement is utilising all the efforts including all intelligence to try and locate Choksi," he said.



Thick smoke billows from one of the crude processing units of HPCL's Visakh Refinery following a fire mishap at Malkapuram in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

8 drown as 2 boats capsize in Sileru reservior on AO border

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 25

Tragedy struck the agency tracts when eight persons, including children and women, all guest workers from Odisha, drowned after two country boats capsized in Sileru reservoir along the AP-Odisha Border on Monday.

The incident took place when 35 members of

migrant families were trying to sneak into the Odisha border at night, fearing lockdown clampdown. Ten persons managed to swim ashore, while eight others drowned in the river.

The police said 35 members of guest workers from Guntawada and Konduguda villages under Malkangiri district in Odisha reached Sileru from

Hyderabad as they lost their livelihoods due to the Covid curfew. After crossing the Sileru in a vehicle, they reached Jonnalamamidi on foot and decided to take a boat ride to reach their hometowns as they feared they may be stopped at the border by Odisha officials.

■ Page 3: Odisha, AP teams begin search operations

Flag other ministers, Congress to Twitter

DC CORRESPONDENTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Delhi Police on Tuesday served notices on two Congress leaders in connection with the probe into a complaint about the alleged "Congress toolkit" matter even as the Congress once again wrote to Twitter asking them to flag tweets by 11 Union ministers referring to the alleged "Congress toolkit" as "manipulated media".

The letter, written to Jim Baker, Twitter's deputy general counsel and vice-president (legal), and Vijaya Gadde, lead for

legal, policy and trust and safety, by Congress' communications chief and general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala says, "The subject matter of the forged Toolkit document was created by certain BJP leaders to gain undue and wrongful political advantage by spreading potentially dangerous, false and fabricated material through their Twitter handles against the Indian National Congress and its leaders". The letter carried the URLs of the specific tweets which the Congress demanded to be marked.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Registration of properties has been affected for the last few days following technical glitches in the central server. This has had an adverse fallout on the daily revenue collections across the state.

Nearly 294 sub-registrar offices dealing with the registration of properties and various documents have not been functioning properly since May 21, causing a lot of inconvenience to the people. The official reason is that they are facing technical snags

13L evacuated in WB, Odisha before landfall

Cyclone Yaas slightly changed course; landfall at Dhamra

RAJIB CHOWDHURI AND AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
KOLKATA/BALASORE, MAY 25

A day before the "very severe" Cyclone "Yaas" makes its landfall and strikes mainly two states in eastern India, a tornado hit two districts of West Bengal on Tuesday, leaving two persons dead due to electrocution and injured several others, while damaging several houses. Eleven lakh people were evacuated to safer places in West Bengal, while in Odisha at least two lakh people were evacuated.

It was also found Cyclone Yaas had slightly changed its course; and will now have its landfall at Dhamra, in Odisha's Bhadrak district, at 5.30 am on Wednesday, instead of Balasore. Heavy downpours and squally winds lashed the coastal districts both states. In the midst of a raging pandemic, those who are Covid-positive are being placed in separate cyclone shelters.

In Kolkata, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has stationed herself at the control room at Nabanna, the state secretariat, for the next two days to lead her government's relief and rescue operations.

The Indian Army has deployed 17 relief columns of soldiers in 10 districts of the state.

The tornado struck two districts — Hooghly and North 24 Parganas — located on both sides of the Hooghly river on Tuesday afternoon. The two victims — Swapan Das Baul (40) and Kamal Majhi (21) — are from Pandua in Hooghly districts. They were out of their homes then.

The director-general of the India Meteorological Department, Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, said: "The storm will further intensify in the next 12 hours and turn into a very severe cyclonic storm. It will have its landfall near Dhamra in Odisha's Bhadrak district. The



Strong waves at the Puri beach, ahead of the landfall of Cyclone Yaas, in Puri, on Tuesday.

— PTI

Jagan puts dist collectors on high alert over storm

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Tuesday directed district collectors and other officials to be on high alert and follow the updates of meteorological department and act accordingly in the Yaas cyclonic conditions.

Addressing a review meeting with the district collectors of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam on the measures to be taken in the wake of Cyclone Yaas, he directed them to monitor the situation closely and help the needy without fail.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das attended the review meeting from Srikakulam through video conference and explained

the situation in the three districts.

He said there was no major impact at present in Srikakulam district except little rain and added that all the higher officials were stationed in Srikakulam.

He said all measures were taken ensuring no Covid patient was present in temporary buildings. Also, to ensure no shortage of oxygen, they arranged generators and diesel readily in case of interruption in power supply.

Srikakulam district collector E. Nivas said they were coordinating with Odisha officials and special teams were placed in Ichapuram so that if any problem arose in transportation of oxygen tankers, it can be immedi-

ately addressed.

Vizianagaram district collector Jawahar said no impact of the cyclone was seen in the district so far and they are well-prepared to deal with any event. He said all generators were arranged at 28 Covid hospitals in the district and added that enough diesel was available for four days.

He said they even arranged gas cylinders in Covid care centers to ensure no shortage to food. Poles and transformers were also readily kept in case of any problem in power supply and added IMD alerts are being shared with mandal-level officers.

■ Page 2: Situation normal in Vizag, says official

windspeed at the time of landfall will most likely be 155-165 kmph, gusting up to 185 kmph." Dr Mohapatra also said the

cyclone would be accompanied by high tidal surges ranging from 2 to 4.5 metres in Dhamra and two metres in Kendrapara and

inundate coastal areas. Several trains that were to run in the cyclone-prone areas have been cancelled by Railways.

CM releases crop insurance money

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

As many as 15.15 lakh farmers got ₹1,829.23 crore as crop insurance in the state. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy noted that the government has taken the responsibility of supporting the farmers at all hard times and thus brought in the free crop insurance scheme, without levying the burden of

premium on them.

The Chief Minister on Tuesday credited ₹1,820.23 crore under YSR Free Crop Insurance scheme to the bank accounts of 15.15 lakh farmers who lost their crop during the 2020 kharif.

He said that unlike the previous regime, under which forced a farmer was forced to pay his share and both state and central governments equally bore the

premium amount to avail insurance, the YSRC government revamped the scheme and was paying the entire insurance premium on its own, ensuring that all the farmers who enrolled themselves on e-crop platform got their share of insurance directly with no middlemen.

The Chief Minister said that a total of ₹3,788.25 crore was spent on the crop insurance scheme in

the last 23 months, including the pending dues of ₹715.84 crore left by the previous Telugu Desam government.

Besides these, the state government had spent ₹83,000 crore towards farmer welfare in the last 23 months. For Rythu Bharosa alone, an amount of ₹17,029 crore was spent.

■ Page 2: Jagan swears by farmers' interests

WEATHER

Max: 40.0°C
Min: 28.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Rain.
Max/Min temp.
40/28 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Shuddha Purnima till 4.44 pm
Star: Anuradha till 1.15 am (Thursday)
Variyam: 11.47 am to 12.39 pm
Durmuhurtam: 11.47 am to 12.39 pm
Rahukalam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Shawwal 13, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.10 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.15 pm
Maghrib: 6.42 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.34 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.36 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 4.26 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 6.08 AM

COUNTER POINT



Covid vaccines and medicines? You are late... the mafia has taken them all!

SHORT TAKES

CISF'S SUBODH KUMAR IS NEW CBI DIRECTOR

New Delhi: Senior IPS officer Subodh Kumar Jaiswal was on Tuesday appointed as the new CBI chief for two years, according to a personnel ministry order.

A 1985-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Maharashtra cadre, Jaiswal is currently the director general of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

A Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led three-member selection committee had on Monday shortlisted his name for the post.

Jaiswal has been appointed as the director, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for a period of two years, the ministry order said.

He has also served as Maharashtra's director general of police in the past.

Daily Covid nos dip to below 2L

New Delhi: The daily fresh Covid-19 cases, for the first time in 40 days, fell below two lakhs on Tuesday, with the Union health ministry terming this as an "encouraging sign" as new cases were 1.96 lakh along with 3,511 deaths. The active caseload too has fallen to 25.86 lakhs and the daily positivity rate has come down to 9.54 per cent. In the last 24 hours, close to 3.27 lakh recoveries were registered.

No bail for fear of death, says SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday stayed directions issued by the Allahabad High Court, which had granted anticipatory bail to an accused in a cheating case observing that apprehension of death due to Covid infection can be a valid ground for granting the relief. It said that courts shall not consider the directions issued by the High Court on May 10 for grant of anticipatory bail to accused in other cases.



IN BRIEF

NAIDU DEMANDS RELEASE OF PARTY LEADERS IN KURNOOL

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday wrote a letter to the AP Director General of Police (DGP), taking strong objection to the 'illegal cases and arrests' of former TD MLA B.C. Janardhan Reddy and other leaders in Kurnool district. He demanded that the DGP withdraw the cases and release the TD leaders unconditionally. He alleged that false cases were filed by the police of Banaganapalli police station against Janardhan Reddy and his supporters. He further alleged that it was the complainant and his henchmen who went to attack the house of Janardhan Reddy and when the TD leader and his supporters resisted their attack, the complainant in turn filed a false case and within no time arrests were made during the midnight of the same day on May 23.

Naidu told the DGP that many TD leaders and activists were arrested but only Janardhan Reddy, Murali and Ramana were produced before the court within 24 hours.

He stated that another six TD activists, whose names were mentioned in the FIR, were produced in the court even after 24 hours of their detention.

He demanded that the DGP take action against the guilty officials responsible for the illegal detention of TD activists. He further demanded that the DGP also take steps to unconditionally release all the illegally detained TD activists and restrain the police from foisting false cases and making illegal arrests.

LOKESH ASKS SHAH TO STOP CLASS X, XI EXAMS IN AP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Telugu Desam MLC Nara Lokesh on Tuesday wrote a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, urging his intervention to impress upon the Andhra Pradesh government to cancel the Classes 10 and 11 examinations in view of the continuing threat from the pandemic. He reminded Amit Shah that the national consultation organised by the union ministry of education had stressed the need to cancel the Class 10 exams even as over 14 states and two national boards (ICSE and CBSE) cancelled the 10th class exams.

Lokesh deplored that the AP government was going ahead with 10th class exams for 6.7 lakh students from June 7 and was also bent on holding the Class 11 exams for 5 lakh students soon. Expressing concern over the AP government's stubborn attitude, he appealed to Shah to use his good offices to make good sense prevail upon the AP government.

He asserted that the central intervention was needed the most, given that over 11.7 lakh students were facing the risk of infections.

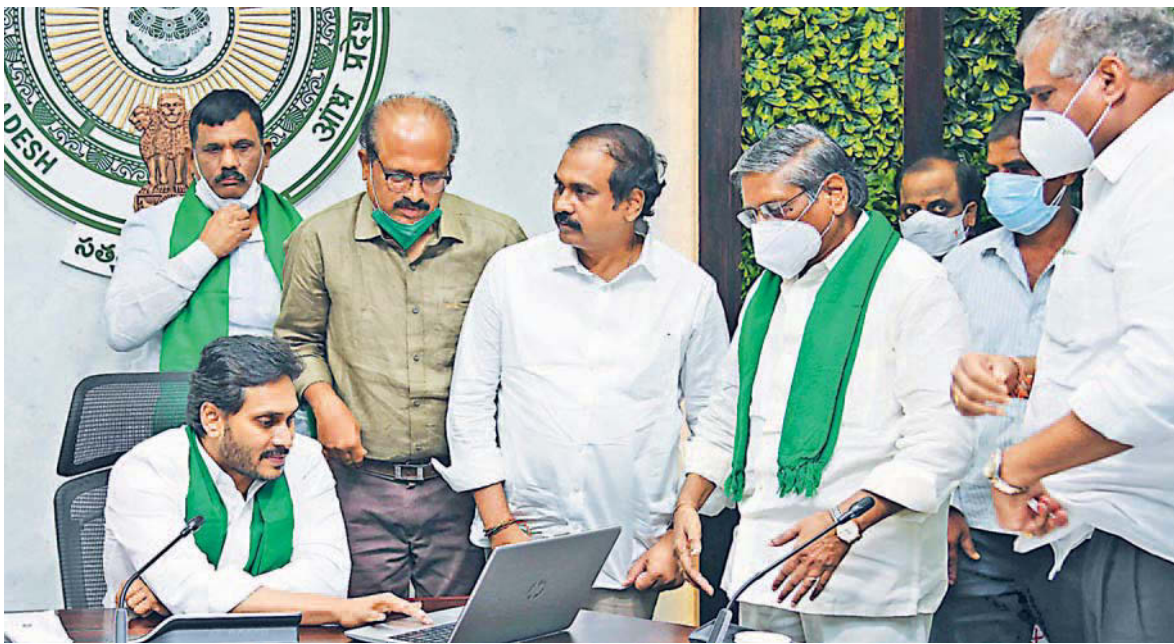
He expressed concern that the situation was still precarious in AP with the Covid positivity rate still staying above 20 per cent.

REBEL MP'S CASE: SC NOTICE TO CENTRE ON CBI PROBE PLEA

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

The Supreme Court on Tuesday issued a notice to the Centre on a plea by K. Bharath, son of YSR Congress MP Kanumuri Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, seeking CBI probe into the 'custodial torture' of his father by the Andhra Pradesh police which had arrested Raju on charges of sedition.

A vacation bench comprising Justice Vineet Saran and Justice B.R. Gavi rejected the AP objection that the plea for CBI probe in a matter concerning the state could not be advanced before the court without making the state a party in the matter. It directed the petitioner to implead the CBI as a party respondent in the case. Senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi appearing for the petitioner sought the deletion of Andhra Pradesh as party respondent which the court allowed at the petitioner's own risk. Senior counsel Dushyant Dave objected to Andhra Pradesh not being made a respondent in the matter, but the court told him that nothing was going to happen as the matter was posted after six weeks.



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy releases the YSR Free Crop Insurance to farmers from his camp office in Tadepalli on Tuesday. Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana (right), Kurasala Kannababu, Special CS (agriculture) Poonam Malakondaiah and other officials are seen.

—BY ARRANGEMENT

Farmers delighted as crop insurance paid

The government is fully paying the premium on their behalf

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 25

The farmers in East Godavari district expressed their happiness over the YSR Crop Insurance scheme as the government is offering it, without putting any burden on the farmers. The government is fully paying the premium on their behalf.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched 'Dr YSR Vuchitha Pantalabhima Padhakam' and credited the crop insurance to the extent 388.98 crore to the accounts of 2,50,866 farmers in East and West Godavari districts on Tuesday.

As many as 1,47,726 farmers benefited from the payment of ₹219.26 crores in East Godavari and 1,02,140 farmers got direct benefits worth ₹169.72 crore in West Godavari district.

The CM released the amounts through a virtual mode. A farmer Marella Venkata Ramana from Yandamuru in Karapa mandal East Godavari district said at the event that he was very surprised to know he got the insurance even though he had not paid the premium.

He said the Jagan Mohan Reddy government introduced Rythu Bharosa scheme, input subsidy, crop insurance scheme and others, helping farmers do away with very high interest loans. East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that the scheme is a cent per cent state scheme, helping all those who took up agriculture and horticulture crops notified by the government.

The scheme was being implemented from 2020 kharif onwards. It applies to all those whose details are registered in the e-crop online. No separate

Jagan swears by farmers' interests

From Page 1

The CM said that his government was working to safeguard the interests of the farmers. It established 10,778 Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) and integrated them with village secretariats to benefit the farmers. He said that the loss in kharif 2020 was being compensated by the onset of next kharif, ensuring that no farmer suffers from losses. Taking transparency in governance to the next level, all these details, compensation for the crop loss etc, will be displayed at RBKs for social audit and those missing out from the list can get enrolled at RBK itself. Not just from seeds to marketing, RBKs also double up as crop purchase centres, he said.

The Chief Minister said that the state government had credited ₹1,038 crore as input subsidy for those farmers who lost their crops in natural calamities, with no delays ensuring that every farmer gets compensated in the same season. He mentioned that besides these, the government had spent ₹18,342 crore for procuring paddy and ₹4761 crore towards purchasing other crops and support the farmers.

In order to provide free nine-hour electricity to farmers during daytime,

₹17,430 crore was spent. He further mentioned that additionally, the government had cleared ₹960 crore paddy procurement arrears and ₹384 crore seed procurement arrears left by the previous government.

Jagan Mohan Reddy said thus, "Supporting the farmer community, the government set up agriculture advisory committees at village, zonal, district and state levels in connection with the RBKs to guide the farmers in crop planning. In order to benefit dairy farmers, the state signed an MoU with Amul to give a better price with an additional of ₹5-₹15 per liter to the farmers. Taking another step forward for the farmers, the government is setting up multi-purpose centers under each RBK, with a total outlay of ₹14,000 crore. Under the YSR Jala Kala scheme, the government had provided over two lakh bore wells at a cost of ₹4,932 crore, besides providing motors to poor farmers. The government has kept every promise made during elections and strictly implemented the election manifesto." Ministers K. Kannababu, Special Chief Secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, AP Agri Mission Vice Chairman M.V.S. Nagi Reddy and other officials participated in the programme.

enrollment is required. BC welfare minister Ch. Srivasa Venugopala Krishna said the farmers were breathing easy following launch of a slew of schemes. Kakinada MP Vanga

Gita said that previously the farmers did not know when they would get the insurance claims.

But, now, they are getting the claims within a stipulated time.

FARMERS HAIL CM FOR INSURING THEIR CROPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL/NELLORE, MAY 25

Kurnool farmers on Tuesday were elated following the release of free crop insurance by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

As many as 1,85,744 beneficiaries had a total amount of ₹181.12 crores directly credited into their accounts. On the occasion, they felt the scheme was a shield against the vagaries of nature.

During kharif last year, they suffered heavy losses due to unseasonal rains to cotton, groundnut, paddy, corn, and Bengal gram in an extent of 4,71,746 acres.

As they got a compensation for which they paid no premium, they thanked the benevolence of the government. Praising it, Lakshmi Kanth Reddy of Chilla Banda in Kodumur mandal said heavy rains washed away Bengal gram in 5 acres and cotton in 7 acres, for which he spent ₹30,000 per acre for cotton crop and ₹5,000 per acre for Bengal gram crop. Jagan Mohan Reddy government was the only government in India that was coming to the rescue of beyond their imagination, he said.

Mohan Reddy, a farmer from Lakshimpuram in Kallur mandal, said he cultivated maize, cotton, and red gram in 9 acres. He spent ₹30,000 per acre on maize crop ₹25,000 on cotton crop, and ₹20,000 on other crops. His entire crop was washed away.

Similarly, another user Chavan Rakesh tweeted: "I request Hon. CM @ysjagan garu to protect Anandayya garu and support Ayurveda, and do not let greedy corporate vultures destroy Ayurvedic Legacy. Ayurveda is the medicine that doesn't give side effects." He even tagged PM Narendra Modi, Sadhguru and Ramdev Baba to the post.

Meanwhile Sarvepalli YSR Congress legislator Kakani Govardhan Reddy dismissed speculations over the confinement of Anandaiah. Speaking to this newspaper, he said they kept Anandaiah at a guesthouse at Krishnapatnam port as people were thronging his village and pressuring him for the medicine. He stated that a study was being taken up by TTD-run S.V. Ayurvedic College and a team from the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) was studying the medicine. "We have requested the Chief Minister to hasten the studies and give clearance for the distribution of medicine at the earliest," he said.

SP Bardar said he had asked the police personnel to alert the people in Donkuru in Ichapuram mandal and Idduvanipalem in Kaviti mandal which are likely to be affected by the cyclone.

Teams from SDRF reached these two mandals on Tuesday evening. They carried torch lights, dragon lights, ropes and life jackets along with them.

cyclone centres in Tekkali division mandals and move paddy and fodder to safe places. He said food should be ready at the cyclone shelters and the vehicles should be linked with the petrol bunks to prevent shortage during the emergency time.

Collector Niwas explained the measures taken so far to mitigate the situation in the event of heavy rains and high velocity winds.

CS reviews steps to face Yaas fury

DC CORRESPONDENT
SRIKAKULAM, MAY 25

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das held a review meeting with senior officials on the preparedness for the impending Cyclone Yaas here on Tuesday. Collector J. Niwas, Superintendent of Police Amit Bardar and senior revenue officials attended the meeting. Adityanath Das asked the officials to shift people to

officers who are busy on Covid-19 duty recently, through heads of departments, to visit industrial and commercial establishments falling in their respective jurisdictions in the districts and promote sale of mist fans with a chemical marketed by Gonag Solutions Private Limited.

The officials were given brochures on how to promote the sale. The brochures mention that disinfectant fans can be applied to all kinds of public

places requiring fast, safe and quick virus elimination. The mist fan will have a water tank of 2.5 or 1.8 litres capacity to fill it up with 25/20 ml sodium hypochlorite or hypochlorous acid to disinfect the given area. Each fan costs along with the chemical, ₹30,000 on an average. Sources said the people close to the minister had even given targets on sale promotion. Periodical review is also being held to find out whether the targets are fulfilled with some

In a bizarre incident, senior government officials from departments of factories, labour and boilers are made salesmen of mist fans and a chemical of a private firm in Andhra Pradesh, all in the name of warding off Coronavirus!

According to highly placed sources, people close to minister for labour and employment G. Jayaram directed district

SAMPAT G. SAMRITAN | DC
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

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Twitterati demands state protection for Anandaiah

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI/NELLORE, MAY 25

With authorities indefinitely stalling the distribution of Bonigi Anandaiah's herbal concoction till its efficacy is scientifically established, there is an outrage on social media, with tweets/posts going viral with the hashtag of #SaveAnadaya, making it one of the top social media trends.

A self-proclaimed Ayurvedic practitioner, Anandaiah of Krishnapatnam village in Nellore district, has become popular following reports in the media a few days ago that the concoction he prepared could cure Covid-19 patients. As the news spread like wildfire, thousands of people started rushing to the village to take the concoction, which was distributed at free of cost.

With massive crowds violating Covid protocols gaining attention, the Lokayukta sought a report on the matter, following which the district administration halted the distribution until its efficacy was tested at lab. Though it was resumed last Friday, thousands of people again thronged the village, forcing the state government to order for a comprehensive study on scientific authenticity of the concoction by the ICMR and Ayush department. Until then the distribution was put on hold.

In the meantime, reacting to the authorities' decision to temporarily halt the distribution and alleged disappearance of Anandaiah, Ayurveda experts, common public and his supporters took to the social media under the hashtag #SaveAnadaya; #SaveAyurveda, emphasising the need to protect him. Some posts are even demanding that the government declare Anandaiah as a national treasure.

A Twitter user going by the name Prashanth Chikaitla tweeted: "If Govts don't approve Anandayya's medicine, they completely lose people's trust. If these incidents continue, people turn against Govts & it may lead to social chaos. It's primary duty of Govts to maintain safety, security & health of people. #supportanandayya #saveanandayya."

Similarly, another user Chavan Rakesh tweeted: "I request Hon. CM @ysjagan garu to protect Anandayya garu and support Ayurveda, and do not let greedy corporate vultures destroy Ayurvedic Legacy. Ayurveda is the medicine that doesn't give side effects." He even tagged PM Narendra Modi, Sadhguru and Ramdev Baba to the post.

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SP Bardar said he had asked the police personnel to alert the people in Donkuru in Ichapuram mandal and Idduvanipalem in Kaviti mandal which are likely to be affected by the cyclone.

Teams from SDRF reached these two mandals on Tuesday evening. They carried torch lights, dragon lights, ropes and life jackets along with them.

officials learnt to have been pulled up for failing to meet targets. Though a section of officials is on the job to please their bosses and people close to the minister to get favour in the form of transfer, promotion and other benefits, a majority of officials have a different take on the issue.

Some of them said when they were busy in making arrangements to face the Covid-19 pandemic by overseeing a series of works dealing with med-



Screen grab of a meme posted on Instagram by 'unprofessional_gang2'.

Pro-Anandaiah comic memes a big hit on social media

AVINASH P. SUBRAMANYAM | DC
TIRUPATI, MAY 25

With online protesters demanding protection for Bonigi Anandaiah, a self-proclaimed Ayurvedic practitioner from Nellore's Krishnapatnam village — who claimed to have prepared a cure for Covid-19, members are fuelling his ever-increasing popularity among the netizens through their well-made memes, putting images and videos from Telugu movies to evoke laughter, on the social media.

For the past few years, Telugu members, who try to keep their followers engaged by posting content about politics, movies and trending topics in an organised manner, have been dominating the social media space, particularly Facebook and Instagram. There are hundreds of meme pages, whose primary agenda is to entertain followers.

When authorities ordered for a comprehensive study on the scientific authenticity of Anandaiah's concoction by the ICMR and Ayush department and temporarily halted the distribution of the

herbal medicine, members got active and began poking fun at China and other corporate hospitals.

Among the top trending memes, an account on Instagram — 'unprofessional_gang2', which have over 66.5K followers, posted an image from Godzilla vs Kong movie, tagging the Godzilla as remdesivir and King Kong as Covaxin/Covishield. On the bottom of the image, actor-MLA Balakrishna, who was tagged as Krishnapatnam medicine, is seen chasing Godzilla and Kong with a wooden stick. Another account — 'oops_memes', which has over 8K followers, posted a meme — poking fun at private hospitals.

With an image from a Telugu movie, a reporter tagged as a private hospital is seen asking a person (tagged as people) 'Covaxin or Covishield', for which an answer was posted below as 'Krishnapatnam Ayurvedic Medicine'.

Surprisingly, a page from a book — claimed to be 159 years old, in which the herbs currently used by Anandaiah and their details were mentioned, is also widely circulating on the social media.

TD: Restore supply of Anandaiah's concoction

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 25

Senior Telugu Desam leaders led by Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy, who is battling for restoring the distribution of Bonigi Anandaiah's concoction to the Covid patients, had an opportunity to witness the effectiveness of medicine during their visit to Krishnapatnam village on Tuesday.

Volunteers assisting Anandaiah administered eye drops and medicine to a youth, Prakash, who was infected by Covid-19 and was struggling even to walk or talk. Prakash belonging to Peddapalli in Telangana was taken to Krishnapatnam by his mother Malleswari with a hope to save his life.

Despite police objections, the duo managed to enter the village with the help of an autorickshaw driver.

On noticing his condition, Anandaiah's assistants applied eye drops to him and he reportedly recovered within 40 minutes.

Comparing Anandaiah to god, Prakash said he would be indebted to him.

TD politburo member

Chandramohan Reddy, MLC Beeda Ravichandra, former NUDA Chairman Kotamreddy Srinivasulu Reddy and TD Doctors Cell president Dr Z. Siva Prasad who watched the incident lauded the volunteers.

In the absence of Anandaiah, the TD team felicitated his wife and the volunteers for their outstanding service to save lives.

Speaking to this newspaper, Chandramohan Reddy demanded that the government starts distributing the medicine immediately, citing the rush of patients, including those in critical conditions, to the village. "Release Anandaiah from confinement and restore distribution of his medicine if you have any humanity left," he demanded. He alleged that some vested interests kept Anandaiah at a secret place and were forcing him to produce the medicine. "It is being supplied to their relatives apart from ruling party legislators and leaders even as people in critical condition were going from pillar to post for the medicine," he charged.

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A senior government official said, "When the entire government machinery is busy dealing with Coronavirus pandemic, such a direction to promote sale of mist fans of a private firm, for self-benefit, is uncalled for. We are being put under pressure to work on it. Some of us are even prepared mentally to get suspended for failing to please our bosses and the people close to the minister and stay put at home instead of doing it."

SHORT TAKES

ODISHA, AP
TEAMS BEGIN
SEARCH OPS

FROM PAGE 1

In the first trip, 17 people set off in two country boats and crossed over to Odisha. In the second trip, 18 persons set sail in the same country boats. When the first country boat capsized allegedly due to the overload or the boat hitting a pole underneath the water, the panic-stricken occupants jumped into the other boat to save their lives. But it too gave in and sank in the river.

Chintapalle ASP Vidya Sagar Naidu said that a team of Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force with the support of AP police and other departments launched a search and rescue operation to trace the missing eight persons. They recovered six bodies so far from the river and the search is on to trace the remaining two bodies.

The police said that seven among the eight victims were children and women. The bodies were shifted to a local hospital in Odisha for post-mortem. A 13-month-old baby also died in the incident.

Meanwhile, AP minister for health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas asked the Visakhapatnam district authorities to take up rescue operations. He also asked them to ensure proper treatment to the people who managed to swim ashore.

AP continues to register dip
in fresh Covid-19 infections

State sees 15,284 new cases and 106 deaths; total cases at 16,09,105

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Andhra Pradesh continues to register dip in fresh Coronavirus infections for the last few days. It saw 15,284 new cases and 106 deaths in the 24 hours ended Tuesday morning.

The state witnessed the highest-day caseload of over 24,000 recently since the outbreak of the second wave of pandemic.

The medical and health department bulletin said that out of the 72,979 samples tested, 15,284 persons were found infected with the confirmed Coronavirus. Out of a total number of 1,87,49,201 samples tested so far in the state, 16,09,105 persons tested positive. Of them 14,00,754 recovered after treatment and 1,98,023 are

still active. In the daily cases, East Godavari reported the highest number at 2,663, followed by 1,970 in Chittoor, 1,840 in Visakhapatnam, 1,412 in West Godavari, 1,387 in Kurnool, 1,034 in Anantapur, 991 in Srikakulam, 978 in Prakasam, 802 in Guntur, 648 in Nellore, 568 in Krishna, 555 in Vizianagaram and 436 in Kadapa.

East Godavari continues to top the state list with regard to the highest number of cumulative active cases at 33,371, followed by 23,239 in Prakasam, 22,205 in Chittoor, 19,277 in Visakhapatnam, 15,807 in Nellore, 15,679 in West Godavari, 14,326 in Guntur, 12,763 in Srikakulam, 11,239 in Krishna, 8,111 in Vizianagaram, 8,006 in

Kurnool, 7,984 in Anantapur and 6,016 in Kadapa.

In the case of deaths, Chittoor reported the highest at 15, followed by 10 each in Prakasam and West Godavari, nine each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Nellore and Visakhapatnam, eight each in Kurnool and Vizianagaram, seven in Srikakulam, five each in Guntur and Krishna and one in Kadapa. With this, the total death toll rose to 10,328 in the state.

The authorities discharged 20,917 Covid patients after recovery from various hospitals in the state during the last 24 hours.

Meanwhile P. Rosaiah, 50, under going Covid-19 treatment committed suicide and the incident took place at Siddhartha Covid Care hospital.

2ND DOSE OF COVID JAB TODAY, TOMORROW

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

The AP government has targeted to inoculate 90,000 persons by administering the second dose of Covaxin for two days from May 26 to 27.

Principal secretary (health) Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Tuesday that directions were issued to district collectors to administer the second dose of Covaxin on Wednesday and Thursday and added that they received 1.17 lakh doses of Covaxin from the Centre and 78,000 doses more are due to arrive.

He said that 4.35 lakh doses of Covishield were received from the Centre while the state govern-

ment purchased 12.74 lakh doses and added that those aged above 45 years and were having touch with the general public in the course of work, to be given the first dose of the jab.

Speaking of the black fungus cases in the state, the health official said that so far 252 cases were reported and out of them, no case of death was reported. The government supplied 3,000 Amphotericin B vials to the hospitals across AP.

On the Krishnapatnam concoction for treating Covid-19 patients, the official said they were waiting for analysis reports from various labs, and that the state government would take a final decision in three to four days.

VIT & JUNIPER
SIGN MoU FOR
NOVEL COURSESDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) has been reached between Juniper Networks Cloud & Automation Academy (JNCAA) and School of Computer Science and Engineering, VIT-AP University, to provide dream jobs in the IT field.

Dr S.V. Kota Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, VIT-AP University, said that the collaboration will help VIT faculty and students to get Juniper Training & Certification and bag their dream jobs with hefty packages.

He explained that this collaboration can bring forth 10 industry-oriented courses with lots of research and career opportunities in the cloud and the networking space. Most importantly, VIT-AP University Juniper Program certified students would be given additional priority by the Juniper team during its recruitment.

Archana Yadav, Program Manager, Juniper Networks Cloud & Automation Academy, said that through this MoU, VIT-AP students can get both training and certification for free. She explained that the expertise and technical support that the collaboration brings would facilitate faculty development programmes (FDPs), national, international conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops etc.

LOKAYUKTA ORDERS RESTORATION
OF KONDAPALLI FORTDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 25

Expressing concern over the dilapidation condition of historical monument Kondapalli Fort in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh Lokayukta Justice P. Lakshman Reddy has directed the Commissioner of AP archeology and museums department to immediately issue a final notification declaring 100 metre periphery of the fort as a prohibited area and 200 metre area thereafter as a regulated area.

The judge also directed the Commissioner to furnish a report on restoration and renovation works on the fort and the structures located within its precincts. He also sought details of efforts made to strengthen the walls.

Major fire breaks
out at oil refineryDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 25

A major fire broke out in one of the crude processing distillation units CD3 in Visakh Refinery of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation, located in Malkapuram area of Visakhapatnam on Tuesday afternoon. The incident took place at about 3 pm and the in-house firefighting system brought the fire under control in one hour. There was no loss of life or injuries to the workers present there.

Regional fire officer of GVMC Niranjan Reddy, who rushed there along with a team of firefighting officials, said that soon after the fire started, the technical staff cut off the supply line and allowed the leftover crude to burn. The cooling process was immediately initiated, he said.

District Fire Officer Ram Prakash said it was a mechanical failure that took place at a height of 30 metres of the pipeline.

"Preliminary reports said the pipeline was worn out which led to leak and subsequently caught fire as the crude oil was heated at 120°C. However, a full technical report on the incident

would be available after two weeks," Ram Prakash told this correspondent.

He said the in-house fire-fighting system tackled the fire and brought the fire under control effectively. The fire tenders of PSUs, Navy and district fire service were partially used. The fire was put out in one hour, he added.

Joint chief inspector of factories Siva Sankar Reddy said his department conducted a safety audit in October last year and found everything was in order. The HPCL itself conducts safety checks every year. He also said as per initial reports, a mechanical failure led to the mishap.

An official release from HPCL in the evening said the fire incident occurred in one of the crude processing units of HPCL's Visakh Refinery at 3 pm. Safety measures and fire fighting was activated immediately and fire has been extinguished. Cooling operations were in progress. There were no casualties and no risk to the public. The other refinery operations are continuing as normal, the release said. Minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao and collector V. Vinay Chand visited the spot.

Jr doctor assaulted
over post-mortemDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

A junior doctor was assaulted, causing bleeding injuries on his face, by a gang of youngsters who found fault with him for conducting post-mortem on the dead body of a man in a medico-legal case, at the mortuary at KGH in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

Dr C. Dutta Prasad Reddy, studying PG second year forensic medicine at Andhra Medical College, conducted post-mortem on the body of a man who was related to them. Angered at it, a group of drunken youth entered the mortuary even as he was conducting post-mortem on another dead body, abused and attacked him with a sharp device, causing severe injuries on his nose, contusions on right shoulder and left chest. The hospital staff rushed to his rescue and saved him from the mob.

Andhra Medical College principal Dr P.V. Sudhakar

- Cops nab the main accused. Junior doctors express outrage at the incident. Govt doctors seek police protection at hospitals
- Some youth seriously hurt him at KGH mortuary

said, "We have lodged a police complaint against the assault on our PG student at the mortuary and it was registered and the main accused was arrested. We condemn such attacks on doctors who are serving people, taking care of health and other issues."

Junior doctors expressed outrage at the attack and demanded the arrest of the remaining accused. Meanwhile, the government doctors urged the state government to come to their rescue by providing police protection at least at hospitals which were vulnerable to such crimes against doctors and medical staff.

AP APPOINTS TWO STATE INFO
COMMISSIONERS FOR THREE YEARSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

AP government has appointed two state information commissioners here on Tuesday.

A journalist, Ulchala Hari Prasad Reddy and an advo-

cate Kakarl-apudi Chennai Reddy have been appointed as state information commissioners for a period of three years from the date on which they assume office or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

11th DAY CEREMONY



Sri KOTAMARTHI SATYA BHAGAVAN
D.O.B: 29-05-1938 D.O.D: 16-05-2021
S/o Kotamarthi Venkanna Kakinada, A.P.
Coconut & Palmyra Fiber Exporter
11th Day Ceremony on 26-05-2021
"You will live in our hearts forever"
We miss you, Love you,
Inserted by: Wife, Grand Children,
Sister, Nieces & Nephews.
(S/122/D00242)

Feed the needy



Homeless people wait in a queue for food at Ratham centre organised by Hare Krishna Movement India in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

— C. NARAYANA RAO

Orphan succumbs to black fungus

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 25

The 51-year-old, who died of black fungus at the Government General Hospital (GGH), was cremated at the Muslims burial ground in Drivers Colony here on Tuesday. Muthavali Shakil Shafi and social activist Md. Jakir took the initiative to perform the last rites when the victim's relatives refused to take the body from the mortuary.

K. Sadiq Vali of Market Street from Uravakonda town was admitted in the

- Though there are 21 patients, the hospital authorities could not manage to get the required number of vials.
- At least eight patients in critical condition.

Covid-19 ward a few days ago due to post-Covid complications. He contracted black fungus and was being treated at a separate ward.

While none of his attendants or relatives came forward to claim the body, hospital authorities gave an appeal following which Shafi and Jakir stepped in to give a decent farewell to the

deceased.

Although around 130 victims of Covid were buried in that place, this was the first instance of a black fungus victim. The body was to be carried at least half-a-kilometre distance from the main gate of the burial ground.

"We arranged a separate set up for the scooter to carry the body and

performed the last rites", Shafi told DC.

Meanwhile, scarcity of antifungal injections is creating panic among black fungus patients undergoing treatment at GGH.

Though there are 21 patients, the hospital authorities could not manage to get the required number of vials. At least, eight patients in critical condition pleaded with the authorities for immediate attention but in vain because of a scarcity of injections.

VMC CONDUCTS
SURVEY TO SPOT
BENEFICIARIESDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 25

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation to provide Jagananna Thodu scheme to all eligible petty vendors in the city, started a survey to identify eligible beneficiaries.

Jagananna Thodu project officer Dr J. Aruna who inspected survey, said that the state government already provided the Jagananna Thodu scheme and is now conducting a survey about the scheme implementation and further to identify more eligible beneficiaries.

60% Covid cases from
villages: Vzm collectorDC CORRESPONDENT
VIZIANAGARAM, MAY 25

More and more Covid-19 cases were being reported from the villages in Vizianagaram district, said district collector Dr M. Hari Jawahar Lal while reviewing the situation with the senior health officials on Tuesday.

In a virtual meeting held with the health officials, MPDOs, tahsildars and senior revenue officials, the collector told them to create village level isolation to contain the spread of the virus.

A list of such isolation centres should be prepared by Wednesday and put into action.

He said around 60 per cent of the total cases in the district are being reported from villages and all the affected persons need to be isolated immediately to prevent spreading.

He said the patients have no home isolation facility and spending with the family members in the same dwelling spreading the virus to all the family members. The patients were also not aware of

the basic precautions needed to be taken after being infected with the virus.

He said there was no need for isolation centres if Covid Care Centres were operating close to the villages. In other places, schools, hostels and other government places should be converted into isolation centres which would be managed by the village sarpanch, Asha workers and ANMs. He said there was no need for waiting for testing people showing primary symptoms.

CASTE | CONUNDRUM Women throw chili powder at SI for not booking case

Clashes erupt after man elopes with girl

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 25

An irate mob of villagers threw chili powder in the eyes of Jonnagiri sub-inspector Suresh for his indifference in taking action against a youth who had eloped with a girl.

The incident occurred at Pagidirayi village in Tuggali mandal of Kurnool district late Monday evening.

The villagers in retaliation ransacked and dam-

aged houses belonging to SC community a member of the community had eloped with a girl from the BC community. About 500 BC families live in Pagidirayi village and most of them are into sub-contract works with Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC).

Pathikonda circle inspector Narayana Reddy said that the girl was married to her relative some 10 days back and the newlyweds did

- Angry villagers ransacked and damaged houses belonging to SCs as their youth had eloped with a girl from a BC community.

not stay together for more than three days.

The SC youth, who lured her out of her wedding, took her to Vijayawada and stayed with friends.

The BC community

mounted pressure on the parents of the boy to produce them in the village. Meanwhile, the boy sent vulgar pictures with the girl on WhatsApp to villagers.

Enraged by the blatant provocation, around 200 villagers went to the police station to represent their case. But when the SI did not respond properly, they targeted properties belonging to SCs and started pulling down their houses. At least three houses were

completely damaged while some were partially damaged, said Narayana Reddy.

When the SI went to the spot to control the mob, BC women threw chili powder in his eyes.

Following the incident, the revenue divisional officer and DSP visited the village and enquired about the issue. The CI said cases would also be filed against some BC members for causing considerable damage to several houses.

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NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER
(through <http://ireps.gov.in>)

Chief Electrical Engineer (Construction), South Central Railway, Secunderabad invites e-tender on behalf of the President of India for the following works in single packet system of tendering.

S. No: 1 NIT No: Tender No. 03-2021-2022-E-GS-CN-BZA Date: 25.05.2021 Name of the work: Electrical Construction/BZA - Guntur division: Temporary un-interrupted Power Supply arrangements with DG Sets including lighting arrangements, air coolers, fans, shamiyanas and chairs etc., Arrangement of Working Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner/Snacks etc. and Arrangement of Accommodation (Executive Rooms) for approximate period of 20 days in connection with Pre-NI/Ni working between Kurichedu - Donakonda section and Additional Electrical arrangements to proposed rooms for LT panel, Wagon Shed at Nallapadu & FOBs etc. between-Nallapadu - Savayapuram section,' Supply of Masks, Hand wash sanitizers & Face Shields etc. in connection with Guntur - Guntakal Doubling with Electrification Projects (401.47 kms) -Electrical arrangements
Details: Estimate Cost: ₹ 53,53,394/-
EMD: Nil Tender Document Cost: Nil
Completion period: 12 (Twelve) months
Date of closing: 16.06.2021 at 15.00 hrs.

- For bid document and other details, please login to website <http://ireps.gov.in>
- Tenderer can submit their offers online during tender submission period which is fifteen days period to closing of tender.
- Tenderer should watch for any Corrigenda (issued online only) upto the date of commencement of the Tender submission period.

Executive Electrical Engineer/ Const./Vijayawada
A0501

For further tender conditions / details and for downloading the tender documents, Please visit website at <https://www.ireps.gov.in> or www.scr.indianrailways.gov.in

EASTERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF A.P. LTD
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TENDER NOTICE

Open tenders are invited through e-Procurement for Shos. works: 1. "Fixing of agency for the work of "Extension of HT Supply to M/s. IREL India Limited, at Sy.No.371,349 and 374, within BARC premises, in Atchutapuram Mandal of Visakhapatnam Circle", work under Partial Turnkey in APEPDC of AP", Bid No. CGM/O&CS/APEPDC/VS/CMO/10/2021-22; 2. Fixing of agency for the work, extension of HT supply for a CMD of 8800KV in favour of the MD&CEO, GVSCL at Sy.No.376, Narava STP Sewage Treatment Plant, Pendurthy, Visakhapatnam at 33KV potential in APEPDC of AP", Bid No.CGM/O&CS/APEPDC/VS/PM/CMO/11/2021-22; 3. Construction of RCC Retaining wall at District Stores, Bommuru of Rajamahendravaram Circle. Further details can be viewed in www.apseura.gov.in

Contact Ph: 0891-2582200, 94408 12567.
Advt-31

Chief General Manager/O&CS APEPDC: Visakhapatnam

ANDHRA PRADESH STATE CIVIL SUPPLIES CORPORATION LIMITED
REGD. OFFICE: Sri Sai Towers, Door No: 10-152/1, 4th & 5th Floor, Ashoknagar, Beside Sirs Company, Bandar Road, Kanuru, Vijayawada - 520 007.
Ln.No: PDS/P212631BR/2020-21 Dated: 25.05.2021

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

EMPANELMENT OF SUPPLIERS THROUGH AP e-Procurement e-Reverse AUCTION PLATFORM FOR SUPPLY OF 1500 MTS OF FORTIFIED RICE KERNELS (FRK) WITH THREE (3) MICRO NUTRIENTS (IRON, FOLIC ACID AND VITAMIN B12) IN 20KG BAG TO APSCL FOR FORTIFICATION OF BOILED RICE TO BE DELIVERED TO FCI.

Andhra Pradesh State Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd., invites tenders for appointment of Manufacturers/Suppliers for supply of 1500 MTS of Fortified Rice Kernels (FRK) for boiled rice. For registration, interested Manufacturers/Suppliers of FRKs from all over India may visit <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or www.apscl.in to view and download tender documents at free of cost.

The details and procedure for obtaining Digital Signature Certificates are mentioned in website <https://tender.approcurement.gov.in> or contact the help desk of procurement portal. Phone numbers: 08645-246370/71/72/73/74.

Last date for online registration and completion of Formalities for the e-Reverse auction shall be up to 5.00 pm of 01.06.2021 and the tentative date of online e-auction through e-procurement auction platform would be on 03.06.2021.

Sd/- VC & MANAGING DIRECTOR

SHORT TAKES

TN TEACHER HELD FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Chennai, May 25: A teacher of a well-known CBSE school here was arrested on Tuesday following a complaint, after allegations of sexual harassment of girl students surfaced against him in the social media, police said.

After the allegations became public, police officers of the crime against women and children wing conducted enquiries and a complaint was received against the 59-year old teacher, city police said.

Investigation revealed that the commerce-accountancy teacher had sexually harassed girls by sending lewd messages, a police release said.

Also, a girl student of the same school was sexually harassed a few years ago by the same teacher and the parents had already complained to school authorities against the teacher for sending obscene messages and videos to students through WhatsApp, the release added.

“The teacher was taken into custody for questioning and he was arrested. He was produced before a magistrate on Tuesday and remanded to judicial custody. He is lodged in Puzhal Central Prison. A case has been registered against him under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and also the Information Technology Act,” a police officer said. School authorities have also been questioned in the matter, he added.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights said it has taken a serious view of the matter and asked the state police to take strict action against the teacher.

MALAYALAM ACTOR HELD FOR WIFE’S SUICIDE

Thiruvananthapuram, May 25: Actor Unni Dev, son of popular Malayalam actor and late Rajan P. Dev, was arrested on Tuesday over the death of his wife Priyanka, police said here.

A physical education teacher in a local school, Priyanka was found hanging in the bedroom of her home at Vembayam near here on May 12, a day after she filed a police complaint of domestic violence against her actor-husband.

The *Aadu* actor was taken into custody from his home in Ernakulam district on Tuesday morning after ensuring that he has turned Covid negative.

A team of police personnel under Nedumangadu DYSP later brought Dev here as the case was registered in the capital district. “As he was Covid positive, we were waiting for him to recover from the disease. We went to his home and took him in an ambulance to the hospital concerned and ensured that he turned negative for the virus infection. A medical certificate was also collected in this regard,” a senior police officer said.

Besides the deceased, the 26-year-old woman’s family also lodged a complaint against Dev for alleged domestic violence and harassing her physically and mentally demanding more dowry.

JAISHANKAR SET TO MEET BLINKEN

New York, May 25: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar has expressed confidence that India will continue to shape the big debates of our times as he interacted with Permanent Representative Ambassador T.S. Tirumurti and other officials and diplomats from India to the United Nations.

Jaishankar arrived in New York on Sunday evening on his first visit to the US after India entered the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member in January this year and will meet UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

A productive strategy session with @ambstirumurti and our UN team in New York @IndiaUNNewYork. Confident that India will continue to shape the big debates of our times, Jaishankar tweeted on Monday after his meeting with Tirumurti, Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador K Nagaraj Naidu and diplomats from the Permanent Mission of India to the UN.

Grateful to EAM @DrSJaishankar for guidance in focussing our efforts in @UN and in Security Council for 2021-22, Tirumurti tweeted.

From New York, Jaishankar will travel to Washington where he is expected to meet US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.



Rough sea in the Bay of Bengal ahead of cyclone Yaas landfall at Digha in East Midnapore district on Tuesday. The Indian Army has deployed 17 integrated relief columns, comprising specialised personnel with necessary equipment and inflatable boats, in West Bengal as cyclone approaches the country’s eastern coast. — PTI

JHARKHAND ALSO SOUNDS ‘YAAS’ ALERT

Bhubaneswar Ranchi, May 25: West Bengal and Odisha have evacuated lakhs of people from vulnerable areas to safety as severe cyclonic storm ‘Yaas’ is nearing the coast and is expected to make landfall on Wednesday morning.

Neighbouring Jharkhand has also sounded an alert and is preparing for the cyclone’s impact.

The Odisha government said it has moved over 2 lakh people from vulnerable areas in coastal districts to safety. Special Relief Commissioner of Odisha, P.K. Jena, said that over 2.10 lakh people residing in kutcha houses in low-lying areas have been moved to cyclone shelters. The highest number of evacuees are from Balasore district (74,132), followed by Bhadrak (73,103).

Evacuation of people is also underway in Cuttack, Kendrapara, Keonjhar, Khurda, Jagattinghpur, Jajpur, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Ganjam, Mayurbhanj, Nayagarh, Puri and Angul districts, he said.

Around 5,000 pregnant women expecting delivery by June 1 have been admitted to hospitals, a health official said.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has rushed Odisha’s Minister of State for Home, D.S. Mishra to Balasore to monitor the situation in the northern parts of the state. Jena said large-scale destruction is anticipated in the coastal region. — PTI

Tornado hits Bengal ahead of cyclone, leaves 2 dead

11 lakh people evacuated; Mamata says high tide remains a concern

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MAY 25

● **THE TORNADO** struck two districts Hooghly and North 24 Parganas, located on both sides of Hooghly, on Tuesday afternoon.

to our relief centres of around 4,000 units at the block, panchayat and state level.”

Earlier the Trinamul Congress supremo, who spent whole day and night at Nabanna during Cyclone Amphan’s strike on the state on May 20 last year, said, “All of us will stay at the state secretariat at tonight and tomorrow to monitor the landfall which is likely to happen by 12 pm on Wednesday and act accordingly. Do not worry. We are guarding you.”

On her government’s measures, Ms Banerjee elaborated, “The rise in water level due to high tide is however our main concern because it may cause floods.” She informed that a workforce of nearly three lakh personnel drawing from all the state and central government agencies has been pressed into service.

“It includes around two lakh police and emergency services personnel like disaster management and 74,000 officers and staff. Cyclone Amphan taught us a big lesson from which we learnt a lot to make these decisions.”

Eastern Command

spokesperson Wing Commander Mandeep Huda said, “The Indian Army is spearheading the Army Relief Effort in West Bengal for preparations for Yaas, which is scheduled to make landfall in the general area bordering West Bengal on May 26, on requisition and in close coordination with the state government of West Bengal.”

“A total of 17 Cyclone Relief Columns, comprising specialised army personnel with associated equipment and inflatable boats, have been deployed to the state. Columns have been positioned in Purulia, Jhargram, Birbhum, Burdwan, West Midnapur, Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia, North and South 24 Parganas. Nine Cyclone Relief columns have been kept standby at Kolkata, for redeployment as necessary in West Bengal, at short notice. These teams are equipped to undertake casualty evacuation of stranded/ marooned civilians, road clearing/ tree cutting operations, and distribution of relief material, as would be required by the local district administration,” he added.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar visited the state secretariat in a first ever move and met the Chief Minister before monitoring the government’s preparedness alongwith her from a ‘war-room.’

Rlys moves 680 tonnes of oxygen from Odisha, WB

New Delhi, May 25: Indian Railways moved 680 tonnes of oxygen from Odisha, West Bengal, and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours in anticipation of cyclone Yaas which is likely to hit the region soon, the national transporter said on Tuesday.

Severe cyclonic storm Yaas is likely to make landfall near Dhamra Port in Odisha’s Bhadrak district early Wednesday morning, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Oxygen Expresses moved 680 tonnes of oxygen relief from Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand in the last 12 hours before the cyclone gets stronger. Eight Oxygen Expresses have moved from the region, a statement from the Railways said.

The country’s major liquid medical oxygen (LMO) generation plants are based in this region and are now proving to be the source of the life-saving gas for other states for supply to hospitals during

the Covid-19 pandemic. So far, the Railways has delivered more than 17,239 tonnes of LMO in more than 1,042 tankers to 14 states since it started operations last month.

Providing relief to oxygen starved states, so far, 263 Oxygen Express trains have completed their journey while two more loaded trains with more than 134 tonnes of LMO in eight tankers are currently on the run.

Amongst the southern states, delivery of LMO to Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana crossed 1,000 tonnes each via the Oxygen Express trains.

Oxygen relief by Oxygen Express trains reached out to 14 states - Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Assam.

Till the time of this release, 614 tonnes of oxygen has been offloaded in Maharashtra. — PTI

VILLAGERS IN ODISHA BANK ON FEATURE PHONES

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MAY 25

As the Very Severe Cyclonic Storm ‘Yaas’ on Tuesday advanced towards the Odisha coast, the power distribution companies in coastal Odisha districts on Tuesday stopped supply in sensitive areas fearing collapse of electrical structures that may cause loss of human and animal lives. The snapping of the power came as a major concern for the people living in the coastal villages as many of them found their smart-phone batteries nearly exhausted.

What worried them most is that not many of them got any immediate alternative to charge their drained batteries.

“After a few hours, the cyclone will make landfall. However, the power utilities have disconnected supplies as a precautionary measure. Our smart-phones have nearly run of batteries. Now, we are completely dependent on our feature phones as batteries of these devices last long - at least for 3-4 days,” said Sudam Patra, a journalist based in Balasore.

During cyclone Amphan on May 20, 2020, Sudam and his journalist friends reported every angle of the event to their respective offices through the feature phones.

Kalyani Barik, a health worker, and her friends bought feature phones a couple of days ago so as to ensure that they remain accessible to people in distress during the cyclone and the aftermath to provide them seamless health-care services.

While diesel power generators have been banned for use by private houses as they would cause back current flow during restoration of electric lines post the cyclone, such machines were installed at cyclone shelters and important government and private establishments for emergency use.

The state government has provided satellite phones to senior officers, relief and rescue teams for uninterrupted communication with district headquarters and the state administration in Bhubaneswar. Tower lights and searchlights have also been given to National Disaster Response Force, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force and other teams to carry out their activities.

● **THE STATE** government has provided satellite phones to senior officers, relief and rescue teams for uninterrupted communication with district headquarters and the state administration.

TOUGH | WORDS

SC told S-G to either withdraw the plea or it would pass order

Narada case: CBI withdraws plea in SC

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 25

After assailing the conduct of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for staging dharma outside the CBI office located at Nizam Palace in Kolkata and the presence of state law minister Moloy Ghatak in the special CBI court where four TMC leaders arrested in Narada sting tape case were produced, the investigating agency on Tuesday withdrew its petition that it had filed in the top court after Calcutta High Court had placed the arrested leaders under house arrest.

Allowing the request of the CBI to withdraw the petition, a vacation bench comprising Justice Vineet Saran and Justice B.R.Gavai gave the investigating agency and all other parties to raise all issues before the five-judge bench hearing the

plea for the grant of interim bail to four TMC leaders. The court in its order said that it has not expressed any view on the merit of the case and said that it was open to all the parties including CBI to raise their the contentions before the five-judge constitution bench of Calcutta High Court hearing the matter.

The CBI had on May 17 arrested two West Bengal Ministers Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim, Trinamul Congress MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata mayor Sovan Chatterje in connection with the Narada case.

The CBI withdrew the petition after the court told the Solicitor General to either withdraw it or they will pass an order on merit. All through the hearing that lasted nearly one hour, the court repeatedly asked as to what the investigating agency

● **THE COURT** in its order said that it has not expressed any view on the merit of the case and said that it was open to all the parties including CBI to raise their the contentions before the five-judge constitution bench of Calcutta High Court hearing the matter.

wanted from the court. “We want to know, what you want from us”, Justice Saran asked Solicitor General in a poser as to what was the prayer of the CBI before the top court.

Sensing the mood of the court, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta urged the court to adjourn that matter and take it up on Friday (May 28).

After giving an opportunity to Solicitor General to consult his team, the court in the resumed hearing after dealing with the pass-over matter gave two options to him - either to

withdraw or court will pass order after considering the matter on merit.

The court said that after the matter is considered by a five-judge bench, they will have the benefit of the views of five learned judges of Calcutta High Court.

As the Solicitor General focused on dharna by Mamata Banerjee outside the CBI office and the presence of Law Minister at the Special CBI court during the course of his arguments spread over 45 minutes, Justice Saran told him that you have two set of people - one who are accused and the other who are not - and you can’t interfere with the liberty of accused people merely on the acts of others.

Telling the Solicitor General that CBI was a powerful entity and can proceed against the people by whose acts it is aggrieved.

“You can take action

against those who you feel subverted the law”, the court told Solicitor General further pointing out “We don’t want to mix the liberty of a citizen (arrested TMC leaders) with the acts of other persons (Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Law Minister).”

As the Solicitor General wanted the case to be transferred outside West Bengal, the court said that it did not want to demoralize the High court which is seized of the matter.

At the outset of the hearing senior counsel Vikas Singh appearing for West Bengal government raised a preliminary objection to the CBI’s plea against an interlocutory order of the High court. He said that the guidelines for the admission of matters during vacations clearly exclude any petition against interim orders of the High court.

CISF’s Jaiswal is new CBI chief

New Delhi, May 25: CISF chief Subodh Kumar Jaiswal was on Tuesday appointed as the new CBI director for two years, according to a Personnel Ministry order. Jaiswal is a 1985-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Maharashtra cadre. He has also served as Maharashtra’s director general of police in the past.

The Central Bureau of Investigation was working without a regular chief for over three months after Rishi Kumar Shukla completed his two-year tenure on February 3.

CBI Additional Director Praveen Sinha, a 1988-batch IPS officer of Gujarat cadre, was appointed the acting chief of the agency after Shukla completed his tenure.

Jaiswal has been



Subodh Kumar Jaiswal

appointed as the director of CBI for a period of two years, the ministry order said.

A three-member selection committee led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on Monday shortlisted Jaiswal’s name. Chief Justice of India N. V. Ramana and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury are the two members of the panel.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

BAD DREAM STOPS GUIDE FROM CLIMBING EVEREST

Kathmandu, May 25: A record-holding Sherpa climber halted his attempt to scale Mount Everest for a 26th time because of a bad dream but plans to try again next year.

Kami Rita already reached the summit of the world's highest mountain for a record 25th time earlier this month but stopped his most recent climb more than halfway to the top. He was making (the 26th) attempt and had reached up to Camp Three "but the weather turned bad and I had a really bad dream," Rita said on return to Kathmandu on a helicopter from the mountain on Tuesday. "The gods were telling me not to go and because I really believe in God, I decided to return," he said but would not elaborate on the dream. Sherpas believe Everest to be a goddess and have a religious ceremony before stepping on the mountain to make their climbs.

TWO CHILDREN AMONG 18 KILLED IN PERU

Lima, May 25: Two children and 16 adults were shot dead in a remote coca-growing area of Peru, the armed forces said Monday, blaming the attack on members of the Shining Path guerrilla group.

The killings late Sunday risk inflaming tensions amid a polarized campaign for the presidency between leftist Pedro Castillo and his rival from the right, Keiko Fujimori.

The villagers were mowed down at San Miguel del Ene in a coca-growing valley where members of the Maoist Shining Path group operate, according to the joint command of the armed forces. The head of the police counter-terrorism unit, General Oscar Arriola, said the dead included 10 men, six women and two children.

The armed forces command blamed the attack on fighters led by guerrilla leader Victor Quispe Palomino, or Comrade Jose. A specialised terrorism unit has been tasked with investigating the killings.

GUAM CAN PURSUE \$160M DUMP CLEANUP LAWSUIT

Washington, May 25: The Supreme Court says the US territory of Guam can pursue a \$160 million lawsuit against the federal government over the cost of cleaning up a landfill on the island.

The justices on Monday unanimously overturned a lower court decision that had said Guam had waited too long to pursue the claim. The case before the justices involves a long-running dispute over the Ordot Dump on Guam. The lawsuit says the Navy built the dump during the 1940s and then deposited toxic military waste there before turning over control to Guam in 1950.

Guam operated the dump for decades. The US has said Guam "vastly expanded" it and "failed to provide even rudimentary environmental safeguards." In 2002, the government sued Guam over pollution from the dump. Guam ultimately agreed in 2004 to close the dump and take steps to stop pollution from the dump, among other things. In 2017, Guam sued the United States, arguing that it's responsible for some of the costs of the cleanup.

POPE PRAYS FOR ITALY CABLE CAR MISHAP SURVIVOR

Rome, May 25: Pope Francis offered prayers Tuesday for "little Eitan", the lone survivor of the cable car disaster in northern Italy that left 14 people dead when the cabin plunged to the ground after the lead cable snapped and the emergency brake failed to engage.

Francis sent a telegram to the local bishop offering his condolences to the families of the dead who, he said were "tragically lost while immersed in the marvels of creation".

Prosecutors have said they are investigating why the lead cable of the Stresa funicular snapped Sunday while it was bringing sightseers up to the Mottarone peak overlooking Lake Maggiore in Italy's Piedmont region. They have said the emergency brake on the supporting cable didn't engage, events that sent the cabin reeling back down the line until it pulled off, crashed to the ground and rolled over down the mountainside until it came to rest against some trees.

Five-year-old Eitan Biran, an Israeli citizen living in Italy, was the lone survivor and was hospitalized in Turin with several broken bones. Pope Francis offered particular thoughts for Eitan.

Mali's ex-coup leader dismisses Prez, PM

EU leaders condemn kidnapping of civilian leadership

Bamako, May 25: Mali's former coup leader Assimi Goita fired the president and prime minister of the transitional government Tuesday but promises to still hold new elections next year.

The move came a day after the two leaders were arrested by the military following their announcement of a cabinet reshuffle. Goita said the president and prime minister had acted without consulting him.

President Bah Ndw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane lead an interim government that was installed under the threat of regional sanctions following a putsch in August, and the detentions on Monday raised fears of a second coup.

Two senior officials, who declined to be named, said that soldiers had taken Ndw and Ouane to the Kati military camp on the outskirts of the capital Bamako. Their detentions followed a sensitive government reshuffle earlier on Monday that was designed to respond to growing criticism of the interim government.

The military kept the strategic portfolios it controlled during the previous administration in the reshuffle. But two coup leaders — ex-defence minister Sadio Camara and ex-



In this file photo taken on September 22, 2020, Colonel Assimi Goita (C), President of CNSP (National Committee for the Salvation of People) addresses the press during the ceremony of the 60th anniversary of Mali's independence in Bamako, one day after announcing that the transitional presidency would be assigned to a retired colonel, Bah Ndw, 70 years, ephemeral Minister of Defence in 2014.

— AFP

security minister Colonel Modibo Kone — were replaced. Coup leaders and army officers have wielded significant influence over the government, casting doubts on a pledge to hold elections by early next year.

The reshuffle came at a time of growing political challenges in the capital Bamako and pressure to stick to the deadline for promised reforms.

Speculation of a coup swirled around Bamako late on Monday, but the city remained relatively calm. Briefly reached by phone before the line cut, Prime Minister Ouane said that soldiers "came to get him". EU leaders condemned what they called the "kidnapping" of Mali's civilian leadership, said council president Charles Michel. "What happened was grave and serious and

we are ready to consider necessary measures," he told reporters after a summit of the bloc's 27 leaders, describing events as "the kidnapping of the president and the prime minister". Earlier, a joint statement by the United Nations, African Union, Economic Community of West African States, the European Union and the United States condemned the arrests.

— AFP

Biden, Putin to meet June 16

Washington, May 25: President Joe Biden will hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin next month in Geneva, a face-to-face meeting between the two leaders that comes amid escalating tensions between the US and Russia in the first months of the Biden administration.

The White House confirmed details of the summit on Tuesday. The two leaders' meeting, set for June 16, is being tacked on to the end of Biden's first international trip as president next month when he visits Britain for a meeting of Group of Seven leaders and Brussels for the Nato summit.

"The leaders will discuss the full range of pressing issues, as we seek to restore predictability and stability to the US-Russia relationship," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement announcing the summit.

Biden first proposed a summit in a call with

Putin in April as his administration prepared to levy sanctions against Russian officials for the second time during the first three months of his presidency. White House officials said earlier this week that they were ironing out details for the summit. National security adviser Jake Sullivan discussed details of the meeting when he met with his Russian counterpart, Nikolay Patrushev.

The Kremlin, in its own statement announcing the meeting, said that the presidents will discuss "the current state and prospects of the Russian-US relations, strategic stability issues and the acute problems on the international agenda, including interaction in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and settlement of regional conflicts." The White House has repeatedly said it is seeking a "stable and predictable" relationship with the Russians.

— AP

HUMAN ERROR LED TO MALAYSIA TRAIN CRASH

Kuala Lumpur, May 25: A collision between two light rail trains in Kuala Lumpur that injured more than 200 people was caused by a train driver's negligence, according to a preliminary investigation, Malaysia's transport minister said Tuesday.

A fully automated metro train carrying 213 passengers collided Monday night with a vacant train that was being driven manually in a tunnel near the Petronas Towers, the world's tallest twin towers. It was the first major crash for the 23-year-old metro system. Pictures on social media after the collision showed bloodied passengers, some lying on the floors of carriages strewn with shattered glass.

"Preliminary investigations found that the accident was caused by the negligence and carelessness of the train driver ... who was driving in the wrong direction," said Transport Minister Wee Ka Siong.

— AP

Lanka cargo fire: India sends help

Colombo, May 25: India has dispatched two Coast Guard vessels and an aircraft to help the Sri Lankan Navy douse the flames on a container ship that caught fire off the coast of Colombo last week, amid intensified efforts by the coastal command to extinguish the fiery wreckage.

The 25 crew members — of Philippine, Chinese, Indian and Russian nationality — on the ship have been rescued. Official sources said at least five Indians were among the crew rescued. The cargo vessel, 'X-PRESS PEARL', was

carrying a consignment of chemicals and raw materials for cosmetics from Hazira in Gujarat to Colombo Port. It caught fire 9.5 nautical miles from the coast here where it was anchored outside the port of Colombo on May 20.

The Indian High Commission in a tweet on Tuesday said, "Help on way! Responding promptly as ever to the request by Sri Lanka, India dispatches ICG Vaibhav, ICG Dornier and Tug Water Lilly for fighting the fire". A major operation was launched to

extinguish the flames of the ship.

A special team of the Sri Lankan Navy, Sri Lanka Ports Authority and Marine Environment Protection Authority reached the fire-hit container ship on May 21.

Officials said a loud explosion was heard on Tuesday morning, possibly the fire remains in the sub sections of the vessel where a load of nitric acid is stored.

The Navy, in a statement released on Tuesday, confirmed the forthcoming Indian assistance. The fire

Iran Prez vote okays 7 but bars Rouhani allies

Dubai, May 25: Iran named the hard-line cleric running its judiciary and six others Tuesday as approved candidates in its June 18 presidential election, barring prominent candidates allied to its current president amid tensions with the West over its tattered nuclear deal.

The announcement carried by state television puts judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, who is linked to mass executions in 1988, in the dominant position for the upcoming vote. He's the most-known candidate of the seven hopefuls, with opinion polling previously showing his anti-corruption campaign drew Iranian support.

He's also believed to be a favorite of Iran's 82-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. But perhaps most notable was who Iran's Guardian Cou-

ncil barred from running. Chief among them was former parliament speaker Ali Larijani, a conservative who allied with Rouhani in recent year. Larijani had been positioning himself as a pragmatic candidate who would back Rouhani's signature 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. That accord is now in tatters as diplomats in Vienna try to negotiate a return of both Iran and the US to the agreement. Larijani seemingly signalled he wouldn't fight the decision.

"I have done my duty before God and the dear nation, and I am satisfied," Larijani wrote on Twitter. "Thank you to all those who expressed their gratitude and I hope you will participate in the elections for the promotion of an Islamic Iran."

Also barred was former

hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's senior Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, a reformist. Ahmadinejad ignored a warning from Khamenei in 2017 and registered, only to be rejected then as well by the Guardian Council, a 12-member panel under Khamenei. During an earlier session of parliament Tuesday, lawmaker Ahmad Alireza-beigi described Ahmadinejad's home as being "under siege" by security forces since the day before.

He also warned that the decision would suppress turnout. Iran's theocracy since its 1979 Islamic Revolution has based its legitimacy in part on turnout in elections. State TV quoted Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, the spokesman of the Guardian Council, as saying "only seven" had been approved.

— AP



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (C) talks with Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, upon arrival at Tel Aviv Ben Gurion Airport, on Tuesday.

— AP/PTI

Blinken: US will aid Gaza without helping Hamas

Jerusalem, May 25: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken vowed Tuesday to rally international support to aid Gaza following a devastating war there while keeping any assistance out of the hands of its militant Hamas rulers, as he began a regional tour to shore up last week's cease-fire.

The 11-day war between Israel and Hamas killed more than 250 people, mostly Palestinians, and caused widespread destruction in the impoverished coastal territory. The truce that came into effect Friday has so far held, but it did not address any of the underlying issues in the conflict, something Blinken acknowledged after meeting Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We know that to prevent a return to violence, we have to use the space created to address a larger set of underlying issues and challenges. And that begins with tackling the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and starting to rebuild," he said. "The US will work to rally international support

US TO UPGRADE RELATIONS WITH PALESTINE

Jerusalem, May 25: Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Tuesday that the US would reopen its Consulate General in Jerusalem — a move that restores ties with Palestinians that had been downgraded by the Trump administration. The consulate long served as an autonomous office in charge of diplomatic relations with the Palestinians. But former US President Donald Trump downgraded its operations and placed them under the authority of his ambassador to Israel when he moved the embassy to Jerusalem.

— AP

around that effort while also making our own significant contributions. He added that the US would work with its partners to ensure that Hamas does not benefit from the reconstruction aid."

— AP

US security aid to Pak still suspended

Washington/Islamabad, May 25: US President Joe Biden has continued his predecessor Donald Trump's policy on suspending security assistance to Pakistan and there is no clarity if the administration will change its stance in the future, the Pentagon has said.

Former US president Trump suspended all security assistance to Pakistan in January 2018, arguing that he was not satisfied with Islamabad's cooperation and role in the fight against terrorism.

"At this time, the US security assistance to Pakistan is still suspended. I will not get into speculating one way or another about if or whether that will change going forward," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said at a news conference on Monday. He was responding to a question on if the new Biden administration has reviewed the policy of the previous Trump administration and if there are any changes in it or if this issue was on the table during talks with the Pakistani leadership.

— PTI

— PTI

LIMITED SUCCESS

Debate causes sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town

Push to review 2020 US ballots spreads

Atlanta, May 25: Six months after Donald Trump's loss, conspiracy theorists and Trump backers are continuing their push for repeated examinations of ballots and finding limited successes. A Georgia judge last week awarded a group the chance to review mail ballots in a large Georgia county that includes Atlanta.

Officials in a rural Michigan county have expressed interest in a review of their voting machines. A similar debate has caused

sharp divisions in a New Hampshire town. In some cases, the efforts have been inspired by an audit of the votes in Arizona's Maricopa County, an elaborate exercise engineered by the GOP-led state Senate. The efforts are unlikely to yield any new revelations about President Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election. The votes have been counted — and often recounted — and certified by local officials.

Still, the lingering debate and legal wrangling

have propelled suspicions and advanced debunked theories. And their sometimes misleading conclusions have been amplified by Trump, whose false allegations of election fraud sparked the push.

The profusion of audits alarms election experts, who note that the Arizona audit has set a troubling new precedent of third-party, partisan review of the ballots, long after elections are over.

"This is bad enough to see it happen once," said

Eddie Perez, an expert on voting systems at the OSET Institute, said of Arizona, but seeing it elsewhere in the country is "dangerous for democracy." The audits are serving a clear political purpose in firing up the Republican Party's base. At a rally outside Phoenix last week featuring GOP Reps. Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene, references to the Arizona audit drew much more enthusiastic applause than even immigration, normally the top hot-but-

ton issue on the right in the border state.

In a statement Monday night, Trump criticised Republican Party leaders for not doing more about "what went on" in November. He cited the ballot reviews underway and promised "more to follow". The Arizona audit has been cited as a template for the others, although each is distinct. In Arizona, the Republican-controlled state Senate subpoenaed more than 2 million ballots.

— AP

DECCAN Chronicle

26 MAY 2021

Vaccines: Fix schedule, focus on procurement

Several state chief ministers are now a frustrated lot, what with their unsuccessful attempts to procure Covid-19 vaccines from the global market. Some of them have demanded that the Union government procure and distribute the doses to them. This is a demand the Centre must consider a top priority as the information from the field on vaccination is thoroughly disappointing.

It's a fact that India launched the world's largest vaccination programme in January but its pace has been on a downward slide as it has progressed. As of now, India has been able to fully vaccinate only around five crore people while it has administered at least a single dose to 19 crore people. Latest reports say that the average number of weekly administration of doses has fallen below one crore, almost a third of the figures one month ago when the drive was at its peak. Of this, almost half is being done by the state governments with the vaccines they procured from the market. However, several states, including Maharashtra and Delhi, have closed down their vaccination camps opened for

The stand of the foreign manufacturers exposes the specious argument advanced by the apparatchiks of the ruling dispensation that the government was following the demand raised by the states for decentralisation of vaccination

people aged between 18 and 44 years; several others have complained that the Centre's supply of vaccine for those aged 45 and above is dwindling and the entire vaccination programme is now on a crawl. The story, in short, is that the programme is gasping for breath at a time it has to pace at full throttle. This is an unfortunate mess the government has created, and the government alone can clean it up.

The first step towards this end is for the government to take charge of vaccine procurement instead of making the state governments scour the international market with their limited experience and resources. That is made necessary for another reason, too: several prominent vaccine manufacturers have made

it clear to them that they have no plans to do business with state governments or private companies and will deal directly with national governments. This stand of the foreign manufacturers also exposes the specious argument advanced by the apparatchiks of the ruling dispensation that the government was following the demand raised by the states for decentralisation of vaccination. It cannot be that the Union government is completely unaware of such setbacks. One fails to understand why the Centre makes state governments waste precious time competing unsuccessfully with one another at a juncture when they must be engaged in fighting the virus on the ground.

The government must not only take over the procurement process but also announce a proper schedule with definite milestones in the number of vaccinations to be administered before the third wave hits the nation. The schedule must be convincing in that it must specify how and when the government plans to procure the vaccine, whether from within the country or abroad and how it plans to reach the last man.

It will be too risky for this nation to think that it can ward off a third wave of the pandemic with an ostrich-like attitude. It must act, instead.

Freedom of speech in peril

The ruling party BJP and the Union government seem bent upon escalating the "Toolkit" issue through its proxy, the Delhi Police, with its big-footed and ham-handed ways of investigation. But this is only a small part of a larger pattern of official India operations to regulate digital content and which aim at not only muzzling criticism but to erase it altogether from popular social media platforms.

An even bigger issue lies ahead as major social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are yet to comply with a May 25 deadline when government's new IT rules heralding a new digital ethics code, a three-tier supervisory system and a grievance redressal mechanism were to kick in. The very foundations of freedom of speech and expression are in peril as India tries to turn social media intermediaries, which post the contribution of individuals, into legally liable entities as "publishers" of content.

The police raids on Twitter offices in and around the capital New Delhi on Monday were clear attempts at intimidation and come in the wake of a clumsy attempt at counter propaganda by a prominent national spokesperson of the BJP, who had been adjudged to have manipulated media in making allegations against a person with avowed links to a major Opposition party.

Twitter may only have been responding to complaints from the Congress about certain tweets ascribed to persons with links to the party. Twitter has the technical capabilities to judge whether there was media manipulation in those tweets but the Delhi police put out a pedantic defence of its action on the grounds that the matter is under investigation and hence Twitter should not have been pro-active in judging the posts by BJP representatives.

As the BJP indulges in a blame game in these distracting sideshows while attempting image management, the country is being deprived of consolidated efforts against the second wave of the coronavirus. The perception is the battle against the pandemic is being progressively lost as evidenced in the shortage of medical oxygen, hospital beds and critical drugs even as mortality rates have risen though positivity rates are dipping.

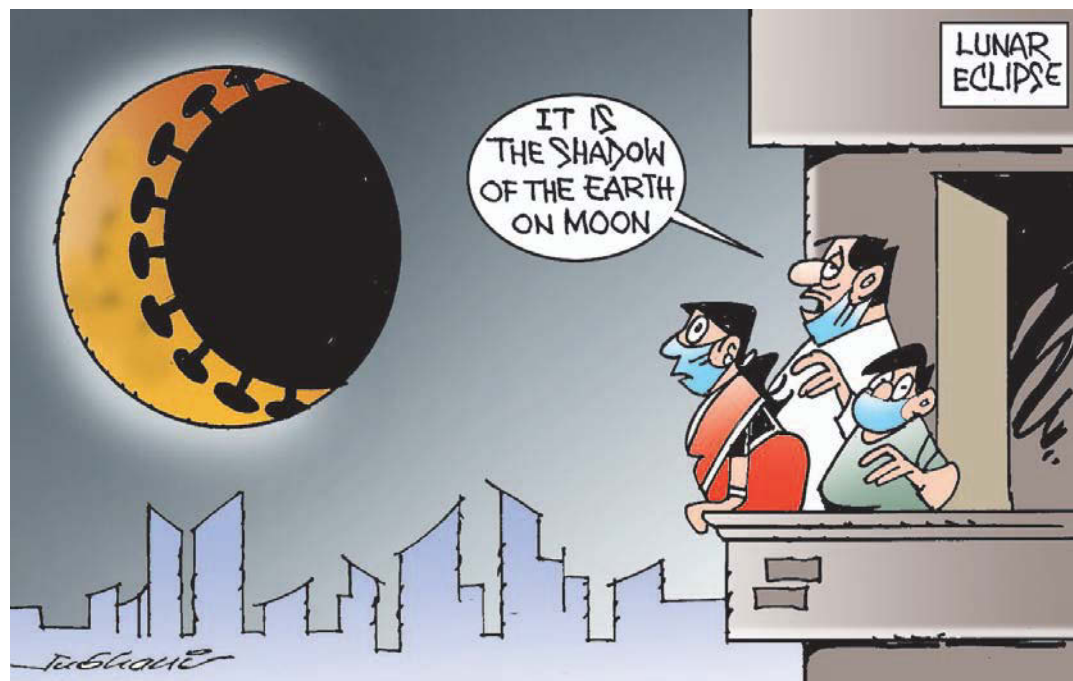
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Subhani



Hubris, narcissism and moment of 'hamartia'



Mohan Guruswamy

The Greeks had words for every personality frailty. In the present case three of these words are of relevance to us: (1) Hubris; (2) Hamartia; and (3) Narcissism. Hubris is described in the dictionary to simply mean "excessive pride or self-confidence; arrogance". Hamartia is usually an artifice in Greek drama as the inner quality that initiates a "movement of spirit" within the protagonist to commit actions which drive the plot towards its tragic end. Narcissism is the pursuit of gratification from vanity or egotistic admiration of one's idealised self-image and attributes. The term originated from Greek mythology, where a young man named Narcissus fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool of water. In the drama of Narendra Modi today, we see quite a bit of the hubris and overweening narcissism, both fatal flaws. The question before us now is whether this is the moment of hamartia which will drive the plot to its tragic end?

The sin of hubris has been a continuing theme that has captured the imagination of historians, philosophers and theologians alike. The Biblical saying "pride cometh before the fall" applies equally well to Ravan, the great king of the Rakshasas whose long years of penance secured him the favour of Brahma, who rendered him invulnerable to the gods and demons alike. We know what happened to him. We, the lesser Hindus, also know that it's not necessary to be a tyrant in order to attract the malefic attentions of the gods. Bali, the celebrated *daiitya*, rose to such an eminence that

Indra and the other gods had to seek the intervention of Vishnu, who once again obliged the devas by consigning Bali to *patala*, or the nether-world.

On April 19, 1959, Cuba's Fidel Castro paid his first post-revolution visit to Washington and met then vice-president Richard M. Nixon for three and a half hours. Following this meeting Nixon appraised him thus: "The one fact we can be sure of is that he has those indefinable qualities that make him a leader of men. Whatever we may think of him, he is going to be a great factor in the development of Cuba and possibly in Latin American affairs generally." In October that year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower authorised a plan to overthrow Castro.

The plan called for the landing in Cuba of a force of Cuban émigré fighters armed and trained by the CIA. This force was then meant to storm its way inland, releasing in its wake a popular upsurge that would topple Castro, just like he did the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Fortunately for Castro, Bay of Pigs, the place chosen for the landing, suffered from two crucial disadvantages. The beach was close to Castro's favorite holiday home and hence had a Cuban military unit garrisoned on it. The shallow waters of the bay also concealed shoals that required the landing force to wade ashore from a great distance, making them sitting ducks. That is precisely what happened. As US warships watched helplessly, President John F. Kennedy realised that he was led up the path and the CIA's urgent pleas for US air strikes would strip whatever was left of the fig leaf of innocence donned by the

The PM then went on to push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history...

United States. He abandoned the landing force to its fate. The few who survived ended up in Cuban jails. When asked what went wrong, JFK's national security adviser McGeorge Bundy replied: "Hubris!"

In February 1961, Robert McNamara, a brilliant Harvard MBA and a former head of Ford Motor Company, took over as the US defence secretary. He took with him an equally brilliant team of systems analysts who were to transform the way the US fought its wars in the future. The systems analysts quantified everything. Every weapons system ordered was subject to a cost-benefit analysis. Even military results were quantified in terms of "area pacified" and "body count".

When Clark Clifford, who took over from McNamara as defence secretary, toted up all the "body count" figures of the war, he found it had exceeded all intelligence estimates of enemy combatants by over half! When he asked: "Why are we then still fighting?", President Lyndon Johnson knew that he too was led up the path. Some years ago I met Robert McNamara at a seminar on the Cuban missile crisis organised by Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. I asked him how he had got it so wrong. He replied with one word: "Hubris".

In 1987, Indian troops went into Sri Lanka at the invitation of the two warring parties to impose an agreement midwifed by

then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. When the LTTE reneged on it, the then Indian Army Chief, Gen. Krishnaswamy Sundarji, assured the government that he would be able to eliminate or disarm the LTTE in just a few weeks. We know what happened. It continues to be sad chapter in the Indian Army's history. It even cost Rajiv Gandhi his life. The question that baffles is how is it that the Indian Army ended up fighting a group that was fostered and supported by the Indian government? And what made the Indian Army think that it would be able to wipe out its onetime protégé in just weeks, if not days? Hubris?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on January 28 this year, virtually addressing the World Economic Forum's Davos Dialogue, had declared India as one of the countries that had successfully controlled the coronavirus. He said: "India took a proactive public participation approach and developed a Covid-specific health infrastructure and trained its resources to fight Covid." He went on to declare "mission accomplished", very much like President George W. Bush had declared atop an aircraft-carrier off the coast of Iraq. He then went on the push his luck a bit further by claiming that India, as the world's largest vaccine producer, would now assume the charge of saving the world! He even announced that this was a turning point in India's economic history and that India was once again poised for greatness.

Was this his moment of "hamartia"? Will this take us to the denouement or the final part of a play, film or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are resolved and the theatre ends?

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

LETTERS

FALL IN CASES

The "drastic" fall in Covid-19 cases should be taken with a pinch of salt, as the same cannot solely be attributed to the partial curfew being implemented in the state (*AP sees drastic fall in Covid cases, DC, May 25*). Comparing May 16, 2021 (12,994/58,835) results with that of May 24, 2021 (24,171/94,530) any layman would understand that less the number of tests, lesser the number of Covid-19 positive cases. Therefore, it is all the more important to restrict the movement of people for breaking the chain. If required the state should opt for total lockdown with the "usual" exceptions like in Delhi.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

TWITTER ACTION

Aakar Patel's article is intriguing (*Why Twitter's action on BJP 'manipulation' is rattling govt, DC, May 25*). Social media platforms such as Twitter are criticised, fairly, when they are used to put about rumours and fake news. If, using its expertise, Twitter identifies media as manipulated or fake, it must be applauded because nothing matters more than the truth. Further, the ruling dispensation at the Centre must, in the interest of truth and justice, ensure the law enforcement agencies get to the bottom of this curious enigma.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

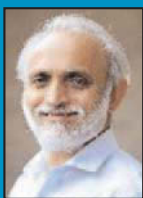
DECCAN Chronicle

69 die in pre-dawn tragedy

HYDERABAD, May 25. Death came in the most cruel way to 69 persons 34 of them children of Palem village, near Kothakota, 10 kms from Wanaparthi; in the early hours today.

Palem is 135 kms from Hyderabad. A truck, No. APQ 4045, driven by Silarniah, and bound for Kurnool from Hyderabad, ploughed into an audience which was witnessing a Bhagavatham, at around 3 am today. Fifty-four persons were injured — ten of them seriously. The injured were rushed to Wanaparthi hospital and Mahboobnagar.

As the Covid-19 pandemic rises, it's crucial to get 'numbers' right



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

Looking at the Covid-19 infection numbers which rose steadily from 33,610 in April 2020 to 1,82,143 in May, 5,66,840 in June (these were also the months of a total national lockdown) to 16,38,870 in July, 36,21,245 in August and peaked at 62,25,763 in September, it is evident the increase was at an alarming rate. In the same period, deaths due to Covid-19 rose from 1,075 to 97,497. While the total infections figure remained high, there was a monthly decline in new infections afterwards. For example, total infections in September were 26,04,518, in October 19,11,356, in November 12,94,572, in December 8,34,983. The lowest monthly rise was in January 2021, compared to December 2020: 4,79,509. It declined further to 3,50,548 from February-end to March-end this year.

There was a spurt in the numbers between the end of March and the end of April: 66,13,641. It seems the gap between the first and second waves was too short. There was no room for declaring the Covid-19 ended either at the end of January or end of February as there was just a decline in numbers but the monthly figures remained sub-

stantial. They show Covid-19 was still raging. Again, the decrease in infections can't be attributed to the phased vaccination programme rolled out on January 16. The infection was moving along a trajectory of its own and the vaccination on its own. Somewhere the two trajectories should reach a point in future, either at the end of this year or sometime in 2022, or even later, when the infections must touch zero and the vaccinations should be at a permanent peak.

When the first wave receded in January-February this year, and the second wave surge became evident in April, the interpreters of Covid-19 numbers made the error of believing things were getting better. It's not just the issue of learning from the pattern seen in other countries that there was an imminent second wave. The first wave numbers didn't flatten enough for even a robust optimist to turn one's back on the pandemic. It's unnecessary to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team for getting the Covid numbers for January/February wrong. The false glimmer of hope created by the receding first wave was a natural

one. Caution would have dictated that the fall in number of infections, however encouraging, wasn't good enough to believe that the trouble had ended.

For long we have believed numbers are sure indicators, that they don't deceive. Most of the time and in most contexts the belief in numbers is justified. But this turns out to be a simplistic assumption when we are dealing with biological phenomenon. It's indeed a matter of debate whether viruses are biological creatures. Though population genetics brings mathematics and biology quite close, we have seen that mathematical models for the coronavirus, especially Covid-19, has been a non-starter.

The infection rates and the fatality rates can serve in inferring some kind of mathematical modelling, but it's unlikely to help in predicting the patterns of the spread of infection or the rate of fatality in a definitive sense. This poses problems for epidemiologists and for governments to manage an epidemic. So, the Covid-19 infection rates in India and in the world which the different dashboards are displaying are signs of how things happened

but the numbers on these dashboards can't be used to predict the future behaviour of Covid-19. The fluctuating graph doesn't point to either the end of the pandemic or its unrelenting course. The infection and fatality figures might just stop blipping on these dashboards. But this cannot be taken to mean that it's all over, or if it comes back against it will be easy to predict its patterns.

The weapons at our disposal to deal with a pandemic like Covid-19 are the vaccines and therapeutic drugs, which need to be modified constantly as mutations emerge in the virus. It's a constant battle, and of course it's not all chaos. There's a certain stability which allows doctors and researchers to work with vaccines and drugs. Even if you succeed in containing Covid-19 and some other similar coronaviruses, the dangers of other pandemics are not ruled out. And with every new menace, you must fight with whatever we have on hand, including drugs that worked earlier and may not work now, and vaccines which were successful may not do the job this time around.

This uncertainty is bad news for

political leaders as they are quite keen on defeating opponents and they love to celebrate victories. The Covid-19 pandemic is proving to be a party-pooper for them. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath are all hell-bent on defeating Covid-19, but their naivety in the matter is not amusing. The medical emergency gives them plenty of opportunity to prove their leadership skills like issuing orders, the one thing leaders enjoy the most. But dealing with a pandemic is a long-drawn affair. It's not just about issuing orders. All that one can succeed is either to contain and minimise its impact, and deal with reconstruction work to undo the destruction it has caused. There is no room for loud and vulgar war cries of victory. Meanwhile, the numbers will need to be tracked as meticulously as possible because they can help in a limited way to deal with the pandemic. But there will be no magical patterns and solutions in the numbers.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,637.53	-0.03
Nifty 50	15,208.50	0.07
S&P 500*	4,195.16	-0.05
Dollar (₹)	72.78	0.26
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.19	-0.04
Euro (₹)	89.19	0.12
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,025*102	0.21
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.62	0.23
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.579	-0.029

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Grain output to rise 2.66% to record 305.43 mt

Foodgrain production is estimated to rise 2.66 per cent to a new record of 305.43 million tonnes in the current crop year 2020-21 (July-June) from 297.5 mt last crop year, on better output of rice, wheat and pulses, the agriculture ministry said in its third advance estimates. Rice production is pegged at a record 121.46 mt against 118.87 mt last year. Wheat production is to increase to a record 108.75 mt from 107.86 million tonnes.

BB's US partner submits Covaxin Master File to FDA



Ocugen, Bharat Biotech's US partner for Covaxin, has submitted a "Master File" to the US FDA prior to seeking an emergency use authorisation in that country. The company is currently evaluating the clinical and regulatory path for Covaxin in the US, including obtaining Emergency Use Authorization from the US FDA, Ocugen said in a recent regulatory filing. Ocugen has submitted key information and data to date.

Clarios sells 10% stake in Amara Raja Batteries

Clarios ARBL Holding LP offloaded a 10 per cent stake in Amara Raja Batteries for a little over Rs 1,276.34 crore, through an open market transaction. The shares were sold at an average price of Rs 747.22. Clarios held a 24 percent stake in Amara Raja, as of March 2021. Morgan Stanley Asia, Integrated Core, and Ghisallo Master Fund LP picked up the shares. After the bulk deal, Amara Raja shares plunged 6.43 per cent.

Triumph drives in Bonneville Bobber at ₹11.75 L

British premium motorcycle brand Triumph Motorcycles has launched the updated version of Bonneville Bobber in India priced at Rs 11.75 lakh (ex-show-room). The 2021 Bonneville Bobber comes with enhanced engine performance, technology and equipment. "The Triumph Bobber has always had a demand among Indian customers and due to this we decided to bring the Bobber back after a gap of one year.



RBI may step in as rupee outdoes peers Re makes strong comeback in May

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, MAY 25

After tumbling in April, the rupee has rebounded this month to become Asia's top-performing currency on positive global cues and fall in daily Covid cases with several states planning to ease restrictions in June, which would help revive economic activities.

The rupee has climbed 1.5 per cent against the dollar in May to beat all its regional peers as the country's daily infections declined rapidly after touching a record high. However, experts said they expect the central bank to step in to limit the rupee's gains, as a strong rupee hurts exporters at a time when the Covid pandemic has hit the economy hard.

The rupee on Tuesday appreciated 19 paise against the dollar to settle at 72.77, as the appetite for riskier assets improved after US Federal Reserve officials attempted to soothe concern over high inflation. Foreign banks may continue to sell the US dollar on account of foreign fund inflows for MSCI's rebalancing of domestic stocks, which is expected to fetch about \$1.35 billion by the end of this week.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic unit opened at 72.85 against the dollar and registered an intraday high of 72.75. It witnessed a low of 72.87. The



rupee finally closed at 72.77 against the American currency, registering a rise of 19 paise over its previous close. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.23 per cent to 89.632.

Abhishek Goenka, founder and chief executive officer at India Forex Advisors, said, "The rupee is slightly on a stronger note but we don't expect it to appreciate a lot as the central bank and the government will not be very comfortable with a strong rupee that hurts exports."

"The RBI has not been so active on the buy dollar side because there is enough liquidity in the system and it cannot infuse more liquidity in the system to buy dollars. Also, the RBI cannot do a sell-buy swap and push the dollar purchases forward since the forward premiums are already very high at 5.4 per cent," Goenka added: "Time

and again the communication by the US Fed that the inflation will be transitory and reassurance that they will not increase the interest rate soon has also weakened the dollar globally which is also impacting the dollar-rupee. The real effective exchange rate is close to 120 which is normally seen as upper band. On the downside, we don't expect the rupee to go below 72.5 and on the upside we don't expect it to go above 74.5-75 in the next three months."

The rupee also has the benefit of offering Asia's highest carry returns. The rupee had tumbled to the lowest in nine months in April as daily coronavirus infections surged above 3 lakh, triggering the unwinding of up to \$50 billion in carry trades, according to Bloomberg.

However on Tuesday, the daily count of Covid-19 cases in the country fell below the 2-lakh mark after about 40 days, according to the government data.

E-COM PLAYERS ONCE AGAIN IN HIRING MODE

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 25

With most of the key cities going into lockdown, e-commerce players are once again in a hiring mode.

In the past three months, over March-May 2021, Flipkart has hired 23,000 people across the country in various capacities.

"The growing demand for e-commerce services across the country as people continue to remain indoors to fight the virus has necessitated a ramp-up of our supply chain, creating thousands of employment opportunities. All new hires will be covered with our health-care and wellness initiatives," said Hemant Badri, senior vice-president, supply chain at Flipkart.

Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice president, Teamlease Services, said, "Most of the e-commerce companies, especially e-grocers and those delivering essential products, have been hiring for the past couple of months. This is the sector which is still fully operational during the lockdown. They do need more people for delivering, packaging and managing warehouses with increased demand. More-over, when existing staff fall ill, they need people to get the job done."

Most of the hiring has been happening for last-mile delivery and warehouses.

Centre mulls stimulus package to aid growth

SIDDHARTHA SINGH MAY 25

India is preparing a stimulus package for sectors worst affected by a deadly coronavirus wave, aiming to support an economy struggling with a slew of localised lockdowns, people familiar with the matter said.

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with small and medium-sized companies, the people said, asking not to be identified as the deliberations are private. The discussions are at an early stage and no timeline for an announcement has been decided, they said. A finance ministry spokesman declined to comment.

The latest wave of Covid-19 infections has made

India the global hotspot for the pandemic and has decimated travel since the second wave picked up in March even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refused to implement a strict nationwide lockdown

The finance ministry is working on proposals to bolster the tourism, aviation and hospitality industries, along with SMEs

like last year's. With nearly 200,000 cases daily many local governments - including Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, India's most industrialised states - have imposed curbs against the spread of the virus.

That has prompted many economists to cut their forecasts for the financial year that began April 1, as rising unemployment and dwindling savings among consumers dim the chances for double-digit growth.

Flagging growth prospects put the onus on policy makers to support activity, especially once the virus caseload eases. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who said last month she's monitoring the economy in a "very detailed fashion," has held discussions with economists in recent days about a stimulus package, the people said.

In April, the finance ministry eased rules for capital expenditure by government departments to try to boost spending in the economy. — Bloomberg

BPCL may sell part stake in IGL, Petronet

AMMAR ZAIDI NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Privatisation-bound Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) may sell a part of its stake in Petronet LNG and Indraprastha Gas (IGL) to shed its promoter status to obviate the need for its new owner to make open offers for the two gas companies, sources said.

BPCL holds 12.5 per cent stake in Petronet, India's largest LNG importer, and a 22.5 per cent stake in city gas retailer IGL. It is a promoter of both the listed companies and holds board positions.

As per the legal position evaluated by the Depart-

ment of Investment and Public Asset Management (Dipam), which is running the process for sale of government's entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL, the acquirer of BPCL will have to make an open offer to the minority shareholders of Petronet and IGL for acquiring 26 per cent shares, three sources said.

This is because BPCL is a promoter of the two companies and since there is a change in ownership of the promoter firm, an open offer is triggered under Sebi (Substantial Acquisitions of Shares and Takeovers) Regulations, 2011.

A way out could be for BPCL to sell a part of its

shareholding in the two firms and shed the promoter status, thereby, obviating the need for open offers, sources said.

BPCL, however, is not in favour of selling the stake, as giving up the promoter status and directorships will mean substantial value erosion for the company.

But the thinking in the government is that the open offers for Petronet and IGL may deter bidders who are mostly eyeing BPCL's oil refining assets and 22 per cent share of the fuel marketing business it commands, sources said.

BPCL spokesperson refused to comment.— PTI

Commodity surge threatens earnings

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 25

Rising commodity costs could affect India Inc's earnings profile and put an end to the benign interest rate regime from early next year.

"There will be adverse impact on auto, consumer goods, consumer durables margins. However, higher commodity price could also lead to earnings uptick in the metals, cement, oil & gas sectors. The IT sector would broadly remain insulated from commodity inflation."

"Earnings in the non-

commodity basket may be adversely impacted given the weak demand backdrop in the economy due to widespread lockdowns," said a report by Motilal Oswal.

The rise in prices comes amid the Covid second wave that restricted economic activity. With uncertainty in the demand and environment, it would be challenging for companies to pass on the rising commodity costs.

"In a constrained demand environment, due to broad based lockdowns and macro uncertainty, corporates would be reluctant to pass on the higher

input prices to consumers and would first exercise other P&L levers to manage margins," the report said.

The construction sector is already feeling the pinch. The rise in prices of steel bars along with cement has added fuel to the construction budget crisis. Also the prices for plastics, man-made polymers and resins, used in everything from piping to insulation, have been rising rapidly over the past few months.

"The rise in raw material prices over the past few months is due to a combination of factors, includ-

ing unprecedented demand, multiple acts of force majeure, and the inevitable interruption of supply chains caused by the Covid-19 pandemic," said Jayesh Rathod, ED, The Guardians Real Estate Advisory.

"In the last three months the iron prices have increased by Rs 20,000 per tonne, which is almost a 50 per cent increase in the iron prices. Apart from this, copper and aluminium prices have also increased which has impacted the construction cost," said Ashok Mohanani, president, Naredco Maharashtra.

Jaypee Associates wants CoC to consider its offer

New Delhi, May 25: Jaiprakash Associates Ltd, the erstwhile promoter of bankrupt-Jaypee Infra-tech, has said its settlement proposal without any "haircuts" should be considered by the creditors' panel, which is set to take a call on two existing resolution plans for the company this week.

Currently, state-owned NBCC and Suraksha Group are in the race to acquire Jaypee Infra-tech

Ltd (JIL), which went into insolvency proceedings in August 2017.

In a letter to JIL's interim resolution professional (IRP) Anuj Jain, the chairman of Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) Manoj Gaur has urged him to consider JAL's settlement offer, which was submitted before the Supreme Court in 2019.

Asserting that JIL has more assets than liabilities, Gaur has also claimed

that lenders would not be entitled to exercise their rights on loan guarantors if the realty firm is sold at a "throw away price".

The committee of creditors (CoC) and homebuyers are scheduled to meet this week to discuss whether more time should be given to NBCC and Suraksha to submit their revised and final bids for JIL.

Urging that JAL's offer should be placed before the CoC, Gaur said the settle-

ment of total liability of Rs 9,783 crore to secured financial creditors is proposed to be done by way of upfront payment, land swap and long terms debentures with a total value of about Rs 12,500 crore.

For homebuyers, he said that JAL would deploy funds for home construction to the tune of Rs 1,650 crore, out of which Rs 400 crore would be upfront.

— PTI

RAISING REVENUE

Tax could cover auto, paper, cement, power & petchem sectors

Indonesia may tax the rich, top polluters

GRACE SIHOMBING & ARYS ADITYA MAY 25

Indonesia seeks to cast a wider net to tax more high-income individuals and top polluters in a bid to replenish its state coffers.

The finance ministry presented the proposals, which could be part of key reforms this year, to a parliamentary commission this week. The government needs to collect more revenue to sustain spending while keeping its vow to bring budget deficit back within the 3 per cent of GDP legal limit, from 6 per cent last year.

"The goal of this tax

reform is not just revenue collection but the sustainability of the state budget," said finance minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati. "The whole world is also accelerating its revenue collection in the midst of soaring budget deficits and debt ratios. This is a response that must be done with caution."

Here are the tax changes under study:

Carbon tax: Taxing carbon emissions will help Indonesia curb greenhouse gases while raising funds for green state investments and social welfare programs, Indrawati said. The government could use existing taxes such as excise,



motor vehicle and fuel taxes to enforce it, or it could create an entirely new levy through a carbon tax.

The tax could apply to emission sources like fossil fuels, motor vehicles and factories, as well as carbon-intensive activities such as those in the pulp and paper, cement, power generation and petrochemical industries.

Income tax: Indonesia

could add a new 35 per cent income tax bracket for individuals earning more than 5 billion rupiah (\$349,000) year. Taxpayers are currently grouped into four brackets, with rates ranging from 5-30 per cent. The country is poised to see the world's fastest growth in ultra-high net worth individuals in the next five years.

Digital tax: Indonesia is finalising the formula to tax digital companies and impose levies on electronic transactions. The government has issued a law stating that taxes could be imposed on companies with significant economic presence in the country, but it hasn't set out regula-

tions for the tariff or how it would impose and calculate it.

Tax amnesty: Indonesia could take another stab at a tax amnesty programme, following a 2016 programme that uncovered 4.813 trillion rupiah (\$336 billion) in undeclared assets. Taxpayers who have undisclosed assets as of the 2019 tax year might be able to settle their past obligations at current income tax rates without any sanctions. However, those who failed to disclose their assets during the first tax amnesty period in 2016 will have to pay income tax above the highest tax amnesty rate.

— Bloomberg



Bob Chapek

Walt Disney Co. plans to close 100 of its international TV channels this year as it marches toward a future where streaming services such as Disney+ are front and centre.

Chief executive officer Bob Chapek, speaking on Monday at JPMorgan Chase & Co's technology and media conference, said the closures come in addition to the 30 foreign networks the company shuttered last year.

"The great majority of that content will migrate to Disney+," Chapek said. "That continues to be a core strategy for us as we pivot toward direct-to-consumer."

The company's purge of networks last year included the Disney Channel in the UK, part of Chapek's efforts to streamline and modernize the entertainment giant. This year, the company has added more content for grown-ups to its Disney+ offering in Europe, using the Star brand. Chapek said the majority of Disney+ customers in the region have begun watching the Star programming.

Disney introduced Disney+ Hotstar in India last year. That service, which features cricket matches and other local content, now accounts for 30 per cent of Disney+'s total subscriber count of 103.6 million globally. In April, meanwhile, Disney announced plans to close a number of its sports networks in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.

Chapek said the closures going forward will depend on contracts the company has in individual markets.

Consumers are increasingly choosing to watch content online, and Disney wants to stay ahead of the trend, Chapek said.

"We don't want to be on the back end of that wave," he said. "We want to be on the front end of that wave." — Bloomberg

GOVT URGED TO SELL SUBSIDISED EDIBLE OIL THROUGH PDS

New Delhi, May 25: Trade body SEA has counselled the government to distribute edible oils at subsidised prices through the public distribution system (PDS), in a bid to give relief to the poor from the rising edible oil prices.

The Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) has also suggested the government to curb speculative trading of oilseeds and edible oils on the commodity bourses and insist on compulsory delivery contracts.

That apart, the Mumbai-based trade body said the Centre should freeze tariffs at lower levels, reduce agri-cess on imports and revisit customs duty reduction measures.

In a letter to food secretary Sudhanshu Pandey, SEA president Atul Chaturvedi said: "Last few months we have witnessed unprecedented price increase not only in edible oils but in practically all commodities across the world. Reasons for the unprecedented increase have been discussed umpteen times."

Chinese buying, stimulus money, la Nina weather problems in palm and soya producing areas, labour problems in Malaysia due to Covid-19, aggressive bio-diesel thrust in Indonesia and renewable fuel from soybean oil in the USA and Brazil, etc, are some of the major reasons, he said.

To tackle the price rise in the short-term, the SEA president said the government should "subsidise" edible oils by Rs 30-40 per kg through PDS. The port-based refineries have adequate spare capacity across the coastline of India for this purpose."

The central government distributes only foodgrains at subsidised rate of Rs 1-3 per kg via PDS to over 80 crore beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act.

The SEA also recommended a freeze of tariff value on edible oils at lower levels. "Our back of envelope calculation says \$200 per tonne reduction in tariff value would give relief of around Rs 5,000 per tonne." — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Govt to open 143 Khelo India spots

New Delhi: The Sports Ministry has decided to set up 143 Khelo India centres across seven states with a total budget of ₹14.30 crore in its bid to nurture talent at the grassroot level. These centres will be set up in Maharashtra, Mizoram, Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Each centre will be entrusted with one sports discipline. The Khelo India centres have been launched by the Sports Ministry in partnership with state governments to ensure the availability of grassroot-level infrastructure across the country. “It is our endeavour to make India one among the top 10 countries in the 2028 Olympics. To fulfil this goal we need to identify and nurture a large number of talented sportspersons from an early age,” Sports Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a statement. — PTI

Pep is England’s Manager of Year

London: Manchester City’s Pep Guardiola has been named manager of the year by England’s League Managers’ Association, it was announced on Monday. Guardiola steered City to the Premier League title and League Cup this season and this Saturday the Spaniard’s side will bid to be crowned kings of Europe for the first time when they face English rivals Chelsea in the Champions League final in Porto. Former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager Guardiola topped a poll where the other leading contenders were Leeds’ Marcelo Bielsa, Norwich’s Daniel Farke, Chelsea women’s manager Emma Hayes, West Ham’s David Moyes and Leicester’s Brendan Rodgers. — AFP

Flick to replace Loew after Euro

Berlin: Outgoing Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick will succeed his former boss Joachim Loew in the Germany dugout after Euro 2020, the German Football Association (DFB) announced on Tuesday. “It’s all gone surprisingly quickly, but I am very happy to be Germany coach from the autumn,” said Flick, 56, after signing a three-year contract to succeed Loew. “I am hugely excited, because I see the class of players, and especially young players, which we have in Germany.” Flick, who was assistant coach to Loew when Germany won the 2014 World Cup, has long been the favourite to take over from Loew, who will leave the job after 15 years in charge later this year. — AFP

Honda ready for Mugello challenge

Italy: The MotoGP World Championship returns to the Autodromo Internazionale del Mugello for round six of the 2021 season, Marc Marquez and Pol Espargaro ready for their next challenges. With a wet and wild French GP behind them, the Repsol Honda Team have regrouped and are ready to do it all again at the Italian Grand Prix. Having been unable to race in Mugello in 2020 due to the global pandemic, 2021 marks a welcome return to the iconic Italian circuit. 2019 produced a thrilling battle with Marquez taking second by just 0.043s after an intense race with Danilo Petrucci and Andrea Dovizioso. Marquez arrives in Italy buoyed by his showing in France, leading the race and lapping faster than the leaders despite suffering a fall.

Bucks bash up Miami Heat

Los Angeles: The Milwaukee Bucks produced an exhibition of three-point shooting to crush the Miami Heat as the Denver Nuggets bounced back to level their NBA first round playoff series with victory over Portland on Monday. Bryn Forbes erupted for five threes in the first half and Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points to give the Bucks a resounding 132-98 win over last year’s NBA Finals runners-up. — AFP

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IPL BACK TO GULF

League likely to start on Sept. 18 with 10 double-headers in 3 weeks

New Delhi, May 25: The postponed Indian Premier League will resume tentatively on September 18 or 19 in the UAE with as many as 10 double-headers expected to be played during a three-week window, a senior BCCI official said on Tuesday. The final might be held on October 9 or 10. The three-week window will be enough for the league to complete its remaining 31 games for the season, a win-win scenario for all the primary stakeholders including the BCCI, franchises and broadcasters. The IPL was postponed on May 4 after multiple Covid-19 cases inside its bio-bubble came to light. “The BCCI has spoken to all the stakeholders and the likely start could be between September 18th to 20th. Since September 18 is a Saturday and 19 a Sunday, it is more likely that you would want to re-start it on a weekend date,” the official said on conditions of anonymity. “Similarly, October 9th or 10th will be the final as it’s a weekend. We are finalising the itinerary and there will be 10 double headers and seven evening matches along with four main games (two qualifiers, one eliminator and the final), which completes the list of 31 matches,” the source added.

The Indian team’s last Test match against England is set to finish on September 14 at Manchester and on the next day, the whole team (save Hanuma Vihari and Abhimanyu Easwaran) will be flown to UAE in a chartered flight for a “bubble to bubble” transfer. “The Indian team and the English players who will be available will fly in the same charter flight from Manchester to Dubai. Similarly, the West Indies players will also fly in after completing the Caribbean Premier League engagements. There will be three-day quarantine for players arriving from Britain and



the Caribbean.”

INDIA’S T20 SERIES VS S. AFRICA CANCELLED

The BCCI has decided to cancel India’s T20 series against South Africa scheduled in September, which was a build-up to the side’s World T20 preparations.

“The series can’t be held and in any case there can’t be any better preparation for the T20 World Cup than playing a high intensity tournament like IPL. Since the T20 World Cup will start within a week or 10 days after completion of the IPL, the SA series can only be held at a later date. “There is a chance that India might play extra games when they tour South Africa early next year,” the source said. The India home season also had a two Test series against New Zealand in November and the dates of which could be shifted depending upon when the T20 World Cup ends. — PTI

England-bound squads in 8-day hard quarantine

Mumbai, May 25: India captain Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and head coach Ravi Shastri joined the England-bound squad’s bio-bubble on Tuesday as it began its eight-day hard quarantine along with the women’s team here.

The Indian women’s team members also entered their eight-day hard quarantine at the Grand Hyatt in Mumbai located near the international airport. The teams are expected to fly out on June 2 after all the playing and non-playing members return three negative RT-PCR results. The men’s team will first take on New Zealand in

● **The Indian women’s team members also entered their eight-day hard quarantine at the Grand Hyatt hotel in Mumbai located near the international airport.**

The World Test Championship final against New Zealand from June 18 before a full series against England. The women are scheduled to take on the hosts in one Test, three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals starting June 16. “Wriddhiman and Prasidh Krishna joined the bubble two days back

after recovering fully from Covid-19. Mumbaikars like Virat, Rohit and coach Shastri have all now joined the bubble,” a BCCI source confirmed. It is learnt that approval for allowing the players’ families is still awaited but the BCCI is hopeful that it would be done soon. “We can’t have our players being away from their families for three months and that too in a bubble. That’s never great for mental health,” the source said. The negotiation on quarantine duration once the side reaches England is still on and the hard quarantine (confined to hotel rooms) could be shortened. — PTI

Sushil may lose WFI contract

New Delhi, May 25: Arrested in a murder case, double Olympic-medallist Sushil Kumar is set to be dropped from the Wrestling Federation of India’s annual contracts list along with Pooja Dhanda on account of non-performance when the body holds a review meeting next month.

The meeting between the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) and sponsors Tata Motors was to be held in 2020 but was put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic.

A WFI source said the decision to drop Sushil is purely based on performance and has nothing to do with his arrest for his alleged involvement in the murder of a fellow wrestler, Sagar Dhankad, at the Chhatrasal stadium. “It is clear that Sushil and Pooja have not done anything notable since they were offered contracts. They will not make the cut when the review meeting is held next month,” a WFI source said. The WFI had taken a leaf out of BCCI’s book to offer central contracts to its players in 2019. About 150 wrestlers had got one-year contracts which are subject to review. Sushil was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade A contract after initially being placed in Grade B that gave the

● **Sushil Kumar was promoted to ₹30 lakh Grade ‘A’ contract after initially being placed in Grade ‘B’ that gave the wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh.**

wrestlers an annual remuneration of ₹20 lakh. Pooja was also placed in Grade A. Sushil could not win any medal in the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta and also bowed out of the 2019 World Championship with a close first-round defeat. He has not competed since then. The 2018 World Championship bronze-medallist Pooja too has lost her place in the 57kg category. She did not compete in 2020 and her last medal-winning performance came in July 2019 when she won a silver at the Grand Prix of Spain. When contacted, WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar did not confirm exclusion of the two wrestlers but hinted such a step cannot be ruled out either. “All decisions will be made at the meeting only. But one thing is sure that sponsors’ money will not be distributed for nothing. We have to utilise the money wisely,” Tomar said. — PTI

HOCKEY STADIUM NAMED AFTER BALBIR SINGH SR

Chandigarh, May 25: The Mohali International Hockey Stadium was on Tuesday officially renamed after the legendary Balbir Singh Sr on the occasion of his first death anniversary. The renaming was officially announced at a tribute ceremony held here to remember the three-time Olympic gold medallist, who died at the age of 96 on May 25 last year. One of the country’s most accomplished athletes, the iconic centre-forward was the only Indian among 16 legends chosen by the International Olympic Committee across modern Olympic history during the 2012 London Games. “The Mohali International Hockey Stadium has been dedicated to the memory of Padma Shri Balbir Singh Sr in a formal ceremony at the hockey stadium on Tuesday on the first death anniversary of the legendary sportsperson,” Punjab Sports Minister Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi said. Sodhi said from now on the stadium would be known as “Olympian Balbir Singh Senior International Hockey Stadium. — PTI

Thapa secures 5th successive medal

Dubai, May 25: Seasoned Indian boxer Shiva Thapa (64kg) secured his fifth successive medal at the Asian Championships by advancing to the semifinals after out-punching Kuwait’s Nader Odah in the last-eight stage here on Tuesday.

Thapa prevailed 5-0 in a lop-sided clash to set up a showdown with defending champion and top seed Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan. Usmonov out-classed John Paul Panuayan. Thapa won a gold in the 2013 championships, bronze in 2015 and 2019 and silver in 2017. He is assured of at least a bronze in the ongoing edition, bettering his own position as the most successful Indian boxer in the tournament’s history. Thapa was in control from the word go and was hardly tested by his opponent, who also faced a standing eight count in the opening round. The Assamese boxer was particularly impressive with his left jabs. However, Commonwealth

ASIAN | BOXING

● **Shiva Thapa prevailed in a lop-sided clash to set up a showdown with defending champion and top seed Bakhodur Usmonov of Tajikistan.**

Games bronze-winner Mohammed Hussamuddin (56kg) went down to Uzbekistan’s reigning world champion Mirazizbek Mirzahailov in a fiercely-fought quarterfinal. The Indian boxer lost 1-4 after giving the top-seeded defending champion quite a fight. Mirzahailov, who is also the Asian Games champion, was caught off guard by Hussamuddin’s powerful counter-attacks on more than one occasion. However, the Uzbek’s assured footwork and precisely-placed straights for a majority of the bout, helped him seal it in the end. — PTI

US virus travel warning won’t hurt Games

Tokyo, May 25: A new US travel warning for Japan over virus risks will not affect this summer’s pandemic-postponed Olympic Games, the Japanese government and Tokyo 2020 organisers said Tuesday. The US State Department advisory released on Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners. It cites government health advice, as well as “secondary factors such as commercial flight availability, restrictions on US

citizen entry, and impediments to obtaining Covid test results within three calendar days”. The advisory comes with less than two months until the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics, which were postponed last year as the pandemic took hold. Japan’s government said the measure would not affect the Games. “It is our understanding that there is no change to the US position to support Japan’s effort to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games,” government spokesman Katsunobu Kato told a regular brief-

● **The US State Department advisory released on Monday urges citizens to avoid travel to Japan, where the borders are already closed to almost all foreigners.**

ing. He added that Japan had been told the decision was “not related” to the plans of the US Olympic delegation. Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said she “didn’t think it would impact

the Games”, adding the organisers would “do their best to prepare for the Olympics whose priority is safety and security”. The US Olympic and Paralympic Committee also said it remained confident that safety measures and frequent testing for athletes and staff “will allow for safe participation of Team USA athletes this summer”. A State Department spokesman said Washington understood “the careful considerations that the Japanese government and the International Olympic

Committee are weighing as they prepare for the Tokyo Olympics this summer”. “President Biden proudly supports the US athletes who have trained for these Games and will be competing in the best traditions of the Olympic spirit,” he said. Japan has seen a relatively small Coronavirus outbreak, with 12,000 deaths. But the country has been battling a fourth wave of infections that prompted the government to impose states of emergency in several places including Tokyo. — AFP

COVID-19 POSITIVE MILKHA SINGH CLINICALLY STABLE

Chandigarh, May 25: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is “clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement” as he fights Covid pneumonia, the hospital where he is being treated said on Tuesday. Milkha was on Monday admitted to the Intensive Care Unit of Fortis hospital in Mohali. The 91-year-old tested positive for the virus last Wednesday. “Mr Milkha Singh is clinically stable with decreasing oxygen requirement,” the hospital update read. He was diagnosed with “Covid pneumonia” on Monday after his admission. Earlier Milkha’s golfer son Jeev had said that the decision to hospitalise him was a precautionary measure. Milkha is suspected to have contracted the infection from house helps who had tested positive for the virus. — PTI