

IN BRIEF

PLAINT FILED IN HC AGAINST KURNOOL COLLECTOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MAY 10

Irked by the apathy and indifference of the Kurnool administration in providing vaccination facilities to the citizens, an advocate filed a complaint in the AP High Court seeking action against district collector G. Veera Pandian and District Medical and Health Officer Dr Rama Giddaiah.

C. Nagendrantha, former president of Kurnool Bar Association, said that collector Veerapandian and DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah have failed in their duties to provide required vaccine on 8-5-2021 and to arrange vaccination following Covid-19 safety protocol at the vaccination centres and thereby deprived hundreds of beneficiaries second dose of Covaxin vaccination.

He said that due to lack of planning and coordination by the district administration, many people were on the hazard of exposure to the virus on May 8 at the vaccination centres and thus they are liable for action under the Disaster Management Act and under Section 166 of IPC and also for the violation of human rights of the public.

NO BIOMETRIC ATTENDANCE FOR WARD VOLUNTEERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 10

The state government issued an order to dispense with the biometric attendance capture of all village/ward functionaries and volunteers and to follow the physical attendance system.

The state government in its order issued on Monday also postponed the biometric attendance linked salary to the village/ward Secretariat functionaries with effect from May 1.

SITUATION WENT OUT OF CONTROL AT HOSPITAL

From page 1

According to sources, there are 135 ventilators-equipped beds of which 55 had been occupied by patients, and some others were on high-flow oxygen.

The patients became critical as their condition deteriorated due to breathlessness after a sudden drop in the oxygen supply, much to the shock of their attendants.

According to an eyewitness' account, paramedical staff attempted to save the lives by performing cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) on some patients.

The situation, however, went out of hands with nearly 10 patients losing their lives and leaving 10 more patients in critical condition, according to unconfirmed reports.

Although the hospital officials denied the number of deaths and said they were assessing the situation, a top police official confirmed 10 deaths.

Sources said the ward was under the grip of panic as the anguished attendants started damaging several items in the ward.

Irate relatives of patients present in the hospital premises rushed into the ward and damaged some furniture after coming to know about the incident.

Fearing attack, the hospital staff, including doctors ran away from the scene. More people started reaching the hospital as some television channels flashed the news. An official in the hospital attributed the incident to the late arrival of oxygen from Chennai and said the oxygen supply was restored and the situation was well under control.

Taking serious note of the incident, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy gave orders to the officials to take immediate steps to protect the patients.

He also sought a report on the incident.

Meanwhile, TD Tirupati president G. Narasimha Yadav demanded that the officials present the facts before the people and said the state government had to take responsibility for the incident.

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● The CM also sought a report on the incident.



Ambulances coming from Andhra Pradesh are stopped by the Telangana Police at the checkpost in Kodad near Ramapuram crossroad on Monday. — DC

AP, TS chief secys hold talks to end impasse

Health dept getting ready to buy vaccines from abroad

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 10

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal has sounded confident that the issue of ambulances carrying Covid-19 patients being not allowed entry to Telangana from AP will be resolved. The official told the media on Monday that chief secretaries from the two states are holding discussions.

Meanwhile, based on direction from the state government the health department is getting ready to purchase Covid vaccines from foreign countries, including Russia's Sputnik, by calling global tenders. This is, if the state got the permission from the Centre. Referring to the number of Covid-19 vaccines being administered in the state, he said 73.49 lakh doses were received so far from the Centre. Of them, 73 lakh doses were already administered. The state government has placed an order for purchase of 16.85 lakh doses, of which 4.93 lakh doses have already reached the state. He said all vaccine doses are to be administered to those aged above 45 years. On the second dose, he said 6.90 lakh doses were to be given to the people on this count, and by May 15, the number would go up to 10.96 lakh doses. By May 31, some 17 lakh doses would be administered.

Though the state government was ready to pay ₹1,600 crore for purchase of four crore vaccine doses, the norms set by the Centre for purchase of the vaccine doses stood in the way.

The manufacturing companies were to give away 50 per cent of their production to the Centre while the remaining share could be sold to the states, that too as per direction from the Centre.

Patients must show confirmation of beds

FROM PAGE 1

A local police officer said, "We are not asking for any letter from hospitals. We are asking for at least a telephone number of a doctor or a hospital in Hyderabad in their possession to confirm the availability of bed. If the hospital confirms it can admit the patient, we allow them to proceed."

"The patient can also

Situation under control, say cops

FROM PAGE 1

Kurnool town DSP Mahesh said there was a problem of restrictions on the movement of ambulances from Rayalaseema passing through Pullur for a few hours. The situation has been brought under control and the seriously ill patients were allowed to proceed to Hyderabad.

Ambulances carrying less-serious patients were sent back. Some of them were admitted to Kurnool GGH and others at Anantapur and Kadapa, he said.

When asked how could the police decide on the seriousness of a patient, the DSP said, "We can identify serious and the

less serious patients, and based on our assessment, we took decisions."

An ambulance carrying Covid patients from Mydukuru in Kadapa district was stopped in the early morning hour. Its occupants pleaded that they had confirmed booking at a hospital in Hyderabad. Even then, they were not allowed to proceed.

Alampur circle inspector said they were only checking the vehicles and not stopping them. "There is no problem at the Toll plaza." But the sub-inspector on duty said that they have instructions not to allow vehicles in as there was a shortage of oxygen supply in Telangana.

CM FOR CURBING BLACK MARKETING DRUGS

FROM PAGE 1

He instructed them to give priority to the second dose for people aged above 45 years. He said there should be no compromise on supply of medicine kits to Covid patients staying at home isolation within three hours of getting information at the call centre. He sought an action plan for setting up PSA oxygen plants and said that out of 590 metric tonnes of medical oxygen that has been allotted, they could draw 571 MT only on May 8. He said that they had asked the Centre to allot 10 ISO cryogenic tankers and added that officials were making efforts to get more alloca-

tion of medical oxygen from Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The officials informed that if they could get 60 MT of medical oxygen from Tamil Nadu and 130 MT from Karnataka, it would help meet the state's basic requirements. Reddy called for curbing black-marketing of remdesivir injections. The DGP was instructed to submit a district-wise report every day on implementation of curfew in the state.

The CM said that there was a need for the proper functioning of 104 call centre so that it would help patients to get beds. He also insisted on having an Arogya Mitra at every hospital.

common capital for three more years. Hyderabad is a medical hub. TS must immediately allow ambulances from AP to go to Hyderabad. The CMs from both AP and TS should respond and help patients from AP to reach Hyderabad for treatment."

Indian Medical Association national chairman Dr D. Srihari Rao said, "AP people have been used to visiting

PEOPLE URGED TO COOPERATE WITH POLICE

From page 1

The needy have been advised to visit the citizen service portal - <http://ap.police.gov.in>, twitter @APPOLICE100 and Facebook @ANDHRAPRADESH-STATEPOLICE, to get e-pass.

Assuring the people that the AP police would be there for protection, the DG urged all to be cooperative to the police in the implementation of curfew and in effecting curbs on the movement of people in specific hours. "Please strictly comply with Covid-appropriate behaviour and avoid falling victim to the virus," he said.

FINANCE MIN TO SPEAK TO TS GOVT TO EASE PATIENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL MAY 10

Reacting to the ordeal of patients in ambulances, who were stopped at the Pullur toll plaza from going to hospitals in Hyderabad, AP finance minister Bugganan Rajendranath Reddy said, "It has come to my notice just now."

The minister said he was initiating discussions with the officials concerned to ease the tension on the border.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, the minister said that medical emergency needs to be given utmost importance.

Hyderabad for best treatment in local hospitals for any health issue including the recent Coronavirus infection. Our infected patients are suffering a lot when their ambulances have been stopped at Telangana State borders. It is time the Chief Ministers from the two states hold discussion and help our patients to reach Hyderabad and get treatment."

DRIVER DEMANDS ₹35K FROM PATIENT, AMBULANCE SEIZED

Nellore: The transport department officials booked a case against an ambulance operator under Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act, read with Section 188 of IPC, for demanding ₹35,000 to shift a Covid-19 patient from Chennai to Nellore. The ambulance vehicle

₹16,500 for ALS Tempus. The same for Hyderabad (900 km), the charges are ₹21,000 and ₹40,000. The charges are inclu-

Mine owner ignored mines safety regulations

NAGESWRA RAO
BALLEDA I DC
KADAPA, MAY 10

Officials say the tragedy of 10 workers being killed in an explosion at the Konda Gangamma Thalli mine in Kadapa district was waiting happen, as its owner had been flouting all norms ever since getting permission to extract barytes in 2001.

According to details provided by mines safety officers, barytes was being extracted from this mine since past 20 years. It is mandated that after a lease is granted to an individual or company to extract a minor or major mineral, a representation has to be sent to the Mines Safety Officer concerned in Form-1 before starting mining operations.

Following this, the mines safety official will visit the relevant mine and examine the safety measures put in place for extraction of ore. Only then can mining operations start. However, in case of Konda Gangamma Thalli mine, no Form-1 was submitted or inspection carried out.

This suggests there were no safety measures put in place, though the department of mines approved the lease on November 2, 2001. All the operations at the Konda Gangamma Thalli mine were therefore illegal.

Yejerla Yohan, Deputy Director of Mines Safety in Nellore, speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, said that they had not received any representation regarding safety measures undertaken at the mine involved in the accident. The mine owner had not even sent the Form-1 before commencing mining operations.

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CM, GOV EXPRESS GRIEF OVER DEMISE OF FORMER DGP

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 10

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief over the demise of former director general of police in united Andhra Pradesh B. Prasada Rao.

In a message, the CM conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family members on the demise of former DGP.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan also expressed grief and sadness on the sudden demise of former DG B. Prasada Rao due to ill health in the US. In a release from Raj Bhavan, the Governor parted for his soul to rest in peace and offered heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members.

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they have seized the vehicle and handed it over to Nellore Sixth Town Police for further action. Stressing that the ambulance operators should collect the charges fixed by the collector, he said they will continue the surprise checks to prevent overcharging.

sive of driver batta. But oxygen rates are extra at ₹3 per km. Patients have to pay separately for ventila-

₹10L sanctioned as compensation for victims' families

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 10

The state government ordered ex gratia of ₹10 lakh to the next of kin of each of the 10 deceased and ₹5.00 lakhs to those injured in the gelatin sticks' explosion that occurred at Konda Gangamma Thalli mines, Mamillapalli village of Kadapa district on Saturday. District collector Chevuru Harikiran issued orders on Monday regarding the sanction of ex gratia.

The government directed that the expenditure shall be incurred from the District Mineral Fund (DMF) available in the district and this immediate relief will be in addition to the compensation to be received by the affected persons under any other provision of Law.

Meanwhile, Kadapa police have arrested two accused in the accident in which 10 workers were killed in a massive explosion at a barytes quarry in Mamillapalli village of Kalasapadu mandal on Saturday.

District Superintendent of Police Karur Karunapathi Nagendra Kumar Anburajan, at a press conference on Monday afternoon, said the mine operator Chilekampalli Nageswara Reddy (42) of Chenchaiyah Gari Palli village in B.Mattam Mandal and the explosives supplier Yerragudi Raghunatha Reddy (62) from Pulivendula were arrested. The duo was arrested on Monday near Amagampalle bus stand.

He added that the Deputy Superintendent of Police N. Sudhakar had been appointed as an investigation officer. "So far our investigation has revealed that the mine was using explosives without permits and was running without Environmental

Sajjala slams TD for false acquisition of vax

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 10

State government adviser Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy (public affairs) slammed Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for spreading falsehood on procurement of Covid-19 vaccine doses.

Speaking to the media-persons here on Monday, he said the Centre had made it clear in its affidavit submitted in the Supreme Court on essential supplies and services stating that it was the national task force, which was monitoring alloca-

GORANTLA FOR MSP TO PADDY FARMERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 10

Rajamahendravaram Rural MLA Gorantla Buchaiah Chowdary wants the state government to take steps for purchasing paddy from farmers at the minimum sup-

port price (MSP). He complained that during the Rabi Season, farmers have cultivated Bondaalu variety (2636) of paddy.

But rice millers are purchasing it for ₹1,100 per 75-kg bag, against the MSP ₹1,416.

PROBE COMMITTEE APPOINTED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 10

The state government ordered that an inquiry committee be constituted under the chairmanship of Joint Collector (Revenue) and four other members from Police, Revenue, Mines and Geology, Department of mines safety and Department of Explosives.

As per the directives of the government, the district collector formed the inquiry committee with the Chairmanship of Joint Collector (Revenue) Midde Gowthami, IAS, A d d i t i o n a l Superintendent of Police Devaprasad, Rajampet Sub Collector Ketan Garg, IAS from Revenue, Deputy Director of Mines and Geology of Kadapa M.Balaji Naik, Deputy Director, Mines Safety from Nellore Yohan Yejerla and Deputy Chief Controller of Explosives, V i s a k h a p a t n a m B.Ravikumar as members.

The Director of Mines and Geology V.G.Venkata Reddy requested the committee to conduct a thorough investigation. The inquiry shall cover all aspects of the accident.

The committee has to identify the reasons for the explosion and persons/agencies responsible and identify the persons/agencies responsible for irregularities or lapses.

Penal actions have been proposed against the persons/agencies responsible for the explosion.

Permission." He also added that the mine in the case had given notice to the original lessee and asked him to attend the hearing.

He played the TD for creating panic among the people leading to their mad rush at Covid-19 Vaccination Centres and spread of the virus. He blamed the Opposition TD for trying to distort facts on vaccination, supply of medical oxygen and availability of beds in the hospitals.

He said the CM would write a letter to the Centre with a request to delience Covaxin and to increase its production.

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Referring to DC report of over ₹25,000 collected by an ambulance operator from a patient Siddique for taking him to Chennai for treatment, the officer said they have collected information from the victim to initiate action against the operator.

IN BRIEF

VASANTOTHSAVAM
IN EKANTHAM AT
SRI PADMAVATIDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 10

TTD is organising the annual Vasantotsavam of Sri Padmavati Ammavari temple, Tiruchanoor, from May 25 to 27 with Ankurarpanam on May 24.

The three-day fete will be held in Ekantham in view of the Covid-19 guidelines and the traditional Swarna Rathotsavam slated for May 26 will be replaced with Tiruchi Utsavam.

On all the days, Snapana thirumanjanam will be performed for the utsava idols of Sri Padmavati in the afternoon and processions will take out inside the temple at night.

TTD has cancelled the arjita seva of Kalyanotsavam from May 24-27 and Unjal seva on May 24.

As part of Vasantotsavam celebrations at Sri Padmavati temple, TTD plans to perform the Koil Alwar Thirumanjanam fete on May 18 morning, and allow Sarva Darshan from 10.30 am onwards.

Consequently, the TTD has cancelled the break Darshan in the morning and evening and also the arjita sevas of Kalyanotsavam and Unjal Seva at Sri Padmavati temple on May 18.

80 MORE BEDS FOR
EMERGENCY CARE
AT RIMSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 10

In a bid to ensure the availability of beds for patients needing emergency care, Prakasam district administration is adding 80 beds on a temporary basis at RIMS Hospital in Ongole.

During a review with officials at RIMS on Monday, District Collector Pola Bhaskar said they are already providing medical aid to Covid patients in seven government hospitals and 26 private hospitals in the district.

"In RIMS hospital alone, 1,000 oxygen beds have been allotted to the patients and there are no issues with regard to oxygen supply," Collector said adding that they are conducting patient audit and oxygen audit to further improve the services.

Referring to 1,650 beds arranged at 14 Covid Care Centres, he said that Covid infected with moderate symptoms are being shifted to these centres for treatment under the supervision of medical officers.

YSRC LEADER DR
JYOTHSNALATHA
PASSED AWAYDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 10

YSR Congress leader Dr Bathala Radha Jyothsnalatha 51 succumbed to Covid-19 in a Corporate Hospital in Chennai during the early hours of Monday. She was under treatment for Covid since last 15 days and her condition deteriorated on Sunday night.

Before joining in YSR Congress, Dr Jyothsnalatha was in Telugu Desam and she unsuccessfully contested for Gudur assembly seat in 2014 general elections on TD ticket. She was Chairman of the Development Committee of the Government Area Hospital in Gudur for two years.

Sr citizens desperate
for second dose vax

They are anxious as already 50 to 60 days have passed

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 10

Many senior citizens, suffering from hyper-tension and diabetes and other chronic diseases are having a nightmarish time in their desperation for the second dose of Covid-19 vaccine, particularly with regard to Covaxin.

When the government accorded priority to them in March, many of them got the first dose of Covaxin. But, now, they are anxious as already 50 to 60 days have passed, and they are unsure about when they will get the second dose.

According to sources, supply of Covaxin is limited and officials are unable to cover all those who took it as the first dose. Due to its shortage, those with clout managed to get the second dose while most aged persons have been left in the lurch. After officials announced exclusive Covaxin centres, many have been visiting such vaccine centres but are returning disappointed.

Recently, East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy introduced a 'token system'. Even this has been creating problems for senior citizens.

On being informed by ward volunteers, some senior citizens went to their nearest centres to get tokens. There they were informed by the staff that they would give vaccines only to token

Covid caseload
dips to 14,986DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 10

Andhra Pradesh witnessed steep fall in number of fresh cases of Covid-19 infections to 14,986 in the last 24 hours when the caseload peaked to 23,920 on May 1 during the second wave in the state, giving much relief to the state government.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin on Monday reporting that out of 60,124 samples tested, 14,986 persons were found infected with Covid-19 and 84 deaths. However, out of 1,14,299 samples tested, 23,920 persons were found infected with the virus on May 1. The difference between the caseload

holders.

"The staff told us that tokens would be issued by ward volunteers. When we contacted volunteers, they replied that nobody had given tokens to them and their only duty was to inform people about the availability of the vaccine," said a senior citizen, M. Narayana Rao. He said that it has been 55 days since he took his first dose. It would be rendered

reported on May 1 and 10, was 8,934.

With regard to daily Covid-19 cases, East Godavari reported the highest at 2,352 followed by 1,618 in Visakhapatnam, 1,575 in Guntur, 1,543 in Chittoor, 1,432 in Nellore, 1,298 in Srikakulam, 1,224 in Kadapa, 948 in Kurnool, 666 in Krishna, 639 each in Anantapur and Prakasam, 629 in Vizianagaram and 423 in West Godavari.

East Godavari was found to be the worst affected with regard to the cumulative active cases with 24,903 followed by 20,021 in Chittoor, 19,120 in Visakhapatnam, 18,923 in Srikakulam, 17,575 in Guntur, 16,000 in Nellore, 14,694 in Prakasam.

dered useless if he does not get the second dose within the stipulated time.

They have appealed to joint collector Keerthi Chekuri, who is supervising the vaccination programme. Some senior citizens said that if Covaxin is sold in hospitals or health centres, they would shell down the price that has been prescribed by the government.

16 remdesivir vials seized, 11 arrested

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR MAY 10

In a massive crackdown, Anantapur One Town police arrested 11 persons over black marketing of remdesivir injections on Monday. Police seized 16 remdesivir vials and ₹94,000 in cash.

Two MNOs of a super specialty hospital and some owners of medical stores and two outsourcing women employees at the General Hospital were among the arrested. Seven of these had been detained a couple of days ago while four others were arrested on Monday in follow-up investigation.

● **DSP V. Raghava Reddy** told the media that the police teams led by CI Prathap Reddy and also vigilance teams were on the alert over sale of remdesivir injections in black market.

DSP V. Raghava Reddy told the media that the police teams led by CI Prathap Reddy and also vigilance teams were on the alert over sale of remdesivir injections in black market.

Among the arrested, Rajesh of Kesepalli, Viswanath Reddy of Ramachandra Nagar and

Rajednra of Adarsha Nagar in Anantapur were working as outsourcing employees at the GGH while Kishor Naidu and Satyanaryana were in the marketing field. Two more women outsourcing employees at General Hospital formed into a gang and engaged in the sale of remdesivir vials following the huge demand for it in treatment of the Covid-19 patients.

Forming into gangs, they were selling injections at huge prices through the medical stores. After they were detained and interrogated,

four more persons were found involved in the black marketing of injections. Sheik Mansur and Sheik Shameer Bhasha who were MNOs at the Super Specialty Hospital in Anantapur, Life Care Hospital Medical Stores owner Gangachari, Sri Lakshmi Medical Stores owner Ambati Venkateswara Prasad were among the arrested.

Instead of treating the patients at the hospital, they were creating fake documentation and selling injections at huge prices. Police said, "We also seized a total 16 remdesivir vials.

Agonising wait



People take rest under the shade of a lobby near CSR Block of King George Hospital as they wait for their relatives who were undergoing Covid treatment at KGH in Visakhapatnam on Monday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Covid-19 hits lives
of auto driversDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 10

Lives of autorickshaw drivers have been severely threatened by the second wave of Coronavirus. They had been devastated during the first wave of Covid-19 itself, but breathed a sigh of relief after lockdown was relaxed and later removed. But the second wave of the virus has pushed them back into serious financial difficulties.

According to transport department officials, there are about 28,000 autorickshaws plying in Kadapa district; 8,645 of them in Kadapa city alone and the rest in Rajampet, Railway Kodur, Badvel, Raya-choti, Jammala-madugu, Mydukur, Pulivendula and Proddatur constituencies.

Most villagers have autorickshaws as the best alternative for travelling to nearby villages.

Prolonged curfew in wake of second wave means there is traffic between villages or from villages to towns only between 6 am and 12 noon. However, due to fear of contracting Coronavirus, people are avoiding autorickshaws too. With no income, auto drivers are finding it difficult to even pay the rent for their vehicles. Nearly 40 per cent of drivers plying autorickshaws in the district take them on rent.

Sheikh Moulana, an autorickshaw worker in

● **ACCORDING TO** transport department officials, there are about 28,000 autorickshaws plying in Kadapa district; 8,645 of them in Kadapa city alone and the rest in Rajampet, Railway Kodur, Badvel, Raya-choti, Jammala-madugu, Mydukur, Pulivendula and Proddatur constituencies.

Kadapa, says he used to earn ₹800 to ₹1,000 only if he worked throughout the day and night. As they are now plying autos only from 6 am to 12 noon, he is finding it difficult to get even ₹300 to ₹400, as people are not coming out like in the past. Sheikh Moulana says after paying rent to auto owner and bearing petrol expenses, he is hardly left with any money. Staying in rented houses is making life all the more difficult, he rued.

Autorickshaw workers in Railway Koduru, Rajampet, Kadapa, Jammalamadugu and other towns stay in rented houses before returning to their villages with their earnings. Raja Naik, another auto driver, says he is facing severe financial difficulties. So is Janardhan from Chennai who says it is difficult to manage his family after paying for rent and for diesel, particularly as prices of essential commodities too have risen.

BATHYMETRIC SURVEY
FINDS 14.6 MN CUBIC
METRES OF SANDDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 10

East Godavari district collector D. Muralidhar Reddy disclosed that a bathymetric survey conducted by Irrigation Department has found 14.6 million cubic meters of silt in the Dowleswaram reservoir. He said that if this sand is mined, it could be used in various construction projects or by people in building their houses.

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COVID | HELP

Hospitals to treat without any charges

Pvt hosps warned over Aarogyasri

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 10

West Godavari district administration has initiated urgent steps to streamline the functioning of private hospitals, particularly with regard to treatment given to Aarogyasri card holders.

District collector Karthikeya Mishra said that private hospitals should provide treatment without collecting any charges. Those found guilty would be subject to

● **KARTHIKEYA MISHRA** said that private hospitals should provide treatment without collecting any charges. Those found guilty would be subject to stringent punishment, he cautioned. He was interacting with district officials through a video conference at Eluru on Monday.

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He was interacting with district officials through a video conference at Eluru on Monday. He was told that some hospitals have not allotted ICU beds to Aarogyasri patients. He said this would be taken as a seri-

ous offence.

He instructed Eluru and Jangareddygudem RDOs to ensure that private hospitals will earmark 50 per cent of ICU and oxygen beds to Aarogyasri patients. If any negligence is found on this count, criminal cases would be

booked against them, he warned.

He said that 42 hospitals have been given permission for Covid-19 treatment out of which 16 private hospitals are no empanelment and three have temporary Aarogyasri empanelment. He said that the remaining 13 hospitals should also be given temporary empanelment. Mishra said that there was a need to increase vaccination centers and tahsildars should supervise it.

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SHORT TAKES

U.P. MAN HELD FOR DUPING COVID-HIT PEOPLE

Noida (UP): The Noida Police on Monday arrested a Ghaziabad resident accused of duping people by taking exorbitant amounts of money in advance from them for providing oxygen cylinders or concentrators and crucial medicines needed for Covid-19 patients.

The accused had floated his phone numbers on social media sites on pretext of providing these resources amid their shortage due to increased demand, officials said. "When approached by needy people, accused Vishal alias Nishant Singh would ask them to make an advance payment online for oxygen cylinders or concentrators or the medicines, as per the requirement. He would charge them anything between Rs 20,000 to Rs 1,00,000 but not deliver the product," a police spokesperson said.

After the money was transferred to his account, Singh would go inaccessible by either changing phone numbers or blocking them, leaving the people hit by the pandemic in the lurch, the official added.

The Noida Police said they had got several complaints regarding the matter and an FIR was lodged at the Sector 20 police station after which the accused was tracked down and arrested from his residence in Ghaziabad's Vaishali on Monday.

COVID BODIES FOUND FLOATING IN RIVER GANGA

NAYEAR AZAD | DC PATNA, MAY 10

Several bodies of suspected Covid-19 victims were found floating in river Ganga near Chausa village in Buxar district of Bihar. Sources from Buxar said that officials rushed to the spot after local people raised alarm on Monday.

Local officials believe that the bodies may have floated from neighboring Uttar Pradesh and belong to Covid patients. According to a social activists here, "The long queue and exorbitant cost of cremation may have compelled the relatives of victims to immerse the bodies in the river."

Officials were informed about the incident by the local people and chowkidars. Reports suggest that around 15 bodies have been recovered and none of the deceased belongs to the district.

"It is not yet confirmed whether or not the bodies belong to those who died due to Covid-19 infection. Uttar Pradesh is just across the river. It seems that the dead bodies found floating in the river could be three or four days old. We are trying to dispose them of properly," district administration said in a statement on Monday.

Later the video of dead bodies and stray dogs roaming around them went viral on social media which sparked outrage and panic in the area.

"The officials also believe that several bodies could be of those who may have died due to Covid-19. They have assured us to conduct an inquiry into the matter and we have also asked the officials to ensure that cremation is done properly", sources from Buxar said.

COVID +VE WIFE NOT ADMITTED FOR 3 HRS: MLA

Firozabad (UP), May 10: An Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA has claimed that his coronavirus positive wife was not admitted to an Agra hospital for over three hours, with officials citing non-availability of a bed.

Upset over this, Firozabad's Jasrana MLA Ramgopal Lodhi made a video over the issue and posted it on social media.

His wife was given a bed at the hospital following the district magistrate's intervention, the MLA claimed.

Lodhi, however, alleged that his wife was not given medicine and water on time.

The MLA's video had surfaced on social media on May 8 when his wife was referred Agra's SN Medical College.

"What would happen to a common man when an MLA's wife cannot be given proper care," Lodhi said in the video, alleging that his wife had to lie on the floor and was not admitted to the hospital for over three hours.

Lodhi had too tested positive for Coronavirus and had returned home after recovering from the infection on May 7.

Home ministry rules out national lockdown

Official says each state can decide on what kind of lockdown it needs, based on ground situation

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 10

Home Ministry has ruled out any possibility of a nationwide lockdown saying only "local lockdown and containment" zones will be identified and imposed by respective State Governments. Sources said the issue of nationwide lockdown was discussed at the highest level but Govt decided against it as it would have dealt a severe blow to the economy. Instead, it was decided to let State Governments decide on the issue.

Sources said apart from the economic considerations it was also felt that Corona situation in every region or State was different from the others. Thus, in areas where positivity rate was less there was no pointing in disrupting the economic activity. In fact, officials added, even with one particular States there was lot of variation in Corona rate from one region to another.

Hence, officials added, after lot of deliberations at the "highest levels in the Government" it was decided that this time during the second wave it would be best to leave the decision on lockdown or local containment zones to the States. Each State can decide on what kind of lockdown or restrictions they need to impose keeping in view their local ground situation.

Apart from local considerations, Centre was also keen that economic activity should not be disrupted this time unlike the nationwide lockdown last year. At a time when economic activity was beginning to expedite again, a complete lockdown would have "wrecked havoc" with the economy affecting almost all sections of the society.

Home Ministry officials also argued that last year the nation-wide complete lockdown was necessitated as no one had any clue about the Corona virus, how it would react or spread and further there was no vaccine available also. So this time Centre has tried strike a "fine balance" between economic activity as well as localised lockdowns or restrictions.

India sees 3,05 L cases, 3,494 deaths

VINEETA PANDEY | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 10

India on Monday recorded 3.05 lakh fresh cases of Covid-19 and 3,493 deaths. The numbers were less than the previous days, possibly due to fewer testing on Sunday. But Union health ministry officials said some places have started seeing a decline in new cases.

Delhi, which has been reporting very high daily cases for the past several weeks, recorded a positivity rate of less than 20 per cent (19.10 %) while its new cases too came down to 12,651. Delhi had increased testing on Sunday than the previous day.

With oxygen supply from the Centre more or less

stable, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government is increasing oxygen beds on a daily basis and the challenge is to upscale health infrastructure in the city to tackle the "third wave" as and when it comes.

"The scale at which we are creating infrastructure, we will be able to deal even if 30,000 daily cases are reported in the next wave," Mr Kejriwal said. Delhi in the second wave had the highest 28,000 cases in a day.

However, a bigger challenge for the Delhi government is to vaccinate its younger population. The Delhi government said there is a shortage of vaccines and several people in the 18-plus and even 45-

plus categories are struggling to get vaccine slots. The Delhi government accused the Centre of allotting lesser vaccines compared to the high requirement of the city.

"We are left with vaccine stock for 3-4 days. We have placed orders with companies but I think the Central government too is allocating the vaccines. We request the Centre to give us more vaccines," Mr Kejriwal said.

However, the BJP accused the AAP government of placing lower orders for vaccines. Responding to this Delhi's deputy CM Manish Sisodia said, "Today BJP alleged that Delhi government ordered only 5.50 lakh doses of vaccine. The

Government of India decided in April that the two companies can sell vaccines to states directly, states were also told the same. We ordered 1.34 crore doses for Delhi for people above 18 yrs. Right after our order, the Centre sent us a letter that Delhi can get only 92,840 doses of Covaxin and 2,67,690 doses of Covishield in May. The vaccines companies we wrote to had not responded by then." He alleged that the Centre was cutting short the number of vaccines demanded by the states and selling that to foreign countries. "In what greed were 6.50 crore vaccines supplied to foreign countries when people in our own country are dying?" Mr Sisodia said.

Huge rush for vaccines was seen in several other states like Andhra Pradesh and Odisha too.

The National Task Force set up by the Supreme Court to manage the Corona crisis at its first meeting on Sunday held discussions for increasing oxygen production and availability. It also discussed how to manage the demand for medical oxygen, and the parameters on which healthcare centres and hospitals could use medical oxygen.

Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan has sent a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying his state cannot afford to send out oxygen to others as their own demand is increasing.

NCP DEMANDS 'ONE NATION ONE POLICY'

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MAY 10

Alleging that the Narendra Modi Government has failed miserably to tackle Covid pandemic, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has called for a 'one nation one policy' for the eradication of coronavirus from the country.

If the entire country doesn't have a uniform policy, the coronavirus will not be eradicated. For this, the Modi Government should convene an all-party meeting to chalk out the policy, said senior NCP leader Nawab Malik on Monday.

"There is no doubt in everyone's mind that the Centre is not being able to handle the Covid situation in the country. The various high courts have acknowledged this by giving diverse verdicts. The Supreme Court too has decided to form a task force. The courts are giving directions because the Centre has failed to perform its duty," said Mr Malik, who is also a minority affairs minister in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra.

The Supreme Court has constituted a 12-member National Task Force of top medical experts to formulate a methodology for oxygen allocation to states and Union Territories and to facilitate a public health response to pandemic.

MP MULLS PAEDIATRIC, ICU WARDS IN HOSPS

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MAY 10

The Madhya Pradesh government has stepped up efforts to strengthen health infrastructure on war footing to tackle a possible third wave of Coronavirus pandemic.

State medical education minister Viswas Sarang on Monday announced his government's decision to set up 366 paediatric ICU wards in district hospitals following the apprehensions that the children may be affected in the third wave of pandemic.

The paediatric ICU wards would be centrally air conditioned and provided with facilities of ventilator, and oxygen points, he added. The government has also decided to establish 1,100 more ICU wards in different government hospitals. It has started building 1,000-bed make-shift Covid care centres in Bhopal and Bina in MP.

A 2,000-bed make-shift Covid care Centre has already started functioning in Indore. Meanwhile, the government has cleared the proposal to build a 20-bed balloon ICU wards, made of PVC tarpaulin with plywood and aluminum frame, each in Bhopal, Jabalpur and Sehore. The make-shift ICU ward being built by a private company is said to be cost-effective and is stated to last eight years.

Sr Indian diplomat dies of Coronavirus

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 10

India's Consul General in northern Afghanistan Vinesh Kumar Kalra has died of cardiac arrest there after contracting Covid. Mr. Kalra, who was posted at the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, is the first Indian diplomat posted abroad to die after being infected with the deadly virus, sources confirmed.

Expressing his condolences, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar tweeted, "Deeply grieved at the passing away of Shri Vinesh Kalra, Consul General, Mazar-e-Sharif. A conscientious and dedicated colleague, he will be missed by us all. Sincerest condolences to his family."

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted, "@MEAIndia sincerely condoles passing away of Shri Vinesh Kalra, Consul General,

Mazar-e-Sharif. A sincere, hard working & reliable officer, he showed exemplary commitment & dedication to the national cause by volunteering for a posting under difficult conditions to Afghanistan. He will be remembered fondly and missed by one & all. @MEAIndia will extend all possible support to his family."

Mr. Kalra had earlier served in various Indian Missions abroad in Muscat (Oman), Hanoi (Vietnam), Pretoria (South Africa), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Beijing (China). During "his stints at the Headquarters in New Delhi and Missions abroad, he has gained wide work experience in various fields like Administration, Establishment, Finance, Commerce, Consular, Political, etc". He also "underwent his Chinese language training while serving at Embassy of India, Beijing".



A Covid-19 patient, on oxygen support, being taken to a government hospital in Jammu, Monday. — PTI



Police officers seize a vehicle violating Covid-induced lockdown norms in Hubballi, Karnataka. — PTI



Family members mourn the death of a Covid-19 patient at Patna Medical College and Hospital (PMCH), in Patna. — PTI



Health workers give a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to a man and a woman during drive through vaccination at Sardar Patel cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. — PTI



Naval vessel INS Trikand carrying a shipment of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) cryogenic containers from Qatar's Hamad Port, as part of Samudra Setu II, arrives at the naval dockyard in Mumbai. — PTI

INDIAN NAVY BRINGS MEDICAL SUPPLIES FROM ABROAD

New Delhi, May 10: Three Indian Navy warships are bringing to India on Monday 80 tonnes of liquid oxygen, 20 cryogenic oxygen tanks, 3,150 cylinders and a large amount of other medical supplies from abroad as the country reels under a severe second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The medical supplies being brought by the ships included 900 oxygen-filled

cylinders and 10,000 rapid antigen Covid-19 test kits, 54 oxygen concentrators, 450 PPE (personal protective equipment) kits, Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said. Indian Navy ship Airavat is reaching Visahapatnam from Singapore carrying eight cryogenic oxygen tanks each having a capacity of 20 metric tonnes of oxygen and other supplies.

Another warship, INS

Kolkata, is arriving at New Mangalore port carrying 40 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen, 400 Oxygen cylinders and 47 oxygen concentrators from Qatar and Kuwait, Commander Madhwal said.

INS Trikand is reaching Mumbai with 40 tonnes of oxygen from Qatar, he said. Last week, the Indian Navy deployed nine warships to bring liquid medical oxygen and other supplies. — PTI

Maha vax unit to produce Covaxin: HC

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MAY 10

The Bombay High Court has permitted Biovet Private Limited, an associate company of Bharat Biotech, to take possession of a fully operational and ready-to-use vaccine manufacturing plant on a 12-hectare plot in Pune to produce Covaxin. The HC directed the concerned state authorities to handover peaceful possession of the ready-to-use vac-

cine manufacturing facility. The state had earlier refused to transfer the facility on the ground that the said land was reserved for forest.

The unit was being used by Intervet India Pvt Ltd, a multinational and subsidiary of Merck & Co, after land was granted to it in 1973 to manufacture vaccine for Foot and Mouth Disease.

Intervet is exiting business operations in India and entered into an agree-

ment with Biovet to transfer the land and manufacturing unit to the latter.

When Biovet sought the government's approval for the transfer, the deputy conservator of forests (Pune division) pointed out that it was a reserved forest and the initial 1973 grant itself was bad.

Biovet then approached HC in challenge and, in an interim application, also sought direction to the government to grant it licences and permissions

to enable the manufacture of vaccine for Foot Mouth Disease as well as Covaxin.

A division bench of Justices K.K. Tated and N.R. Borkar on May 6 heard an application filed by Karnataka's Biovet Private Limited, which produces Covaxin, a vaccine against Covid, seeking direction to the government to hand over possession of the manufacturing unit at Manjari Khurd village in Pune.

Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni told the court the Maharashtra government had no objection if the company used the unit for manufacturing life saving vaccines, including Covaxin, but it should not claim any right, title and interest in future. Mr Kumbhakoni further told the court if the company filed applications seeking permissions, the state government shall consider the same expeditiously.

COVID | BLUES

Opposition party slams Centre for going ahead with Central Vista project

Country needs breath, not PM's residence: RG

New Delhi, May 10: Hitting out at the Centre for continuing the construction work for the Central Vista redevelopment project amid the raging Covid-19 pandemic, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said the country needs breath and not the prime minister's residence.

The redevelopment project of the Central Vista — the power corridor of the country — envisages a new triangular Parliament building, a

common Central Secretariat, the revamping of the three-km-long Rajpath from the Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate and new residences for the prime minister and the vice president.

The government has brought the construction work for the ambitious project under the ambit of "essential services" to ensure smooth movement of labourers during the ongoing lockdown in Delhi.



Rahul Gandhi

"The country needs breath, not the prime

minister's residence," Gandhi said in a tweet, sharing pictures of people standing in a queue for refilling oxygen cylinders and the construction work for the Central Vista project on Rajpath.

Amid rising Covid-19 cases, several states have been facing a crippling shortage of oxygen, leaving hospitals and family members of patients scrambling to ensure a steady supply.

Gandhi and his Congress party have been

asking the government to shelve its plans on the Central Vista project and give priority to improving the country's medical infrastructure amid the Covid-19 pandemic to save people's lives.

The opposition party has also criticised the Centre for according the construction work for the Central Vista project the "essential services" tag and accused the government of having its priorities wrong.

In another tweet,

Gandhi said the pandemic is spreading fast in rural areas.

"After cities, now villages are also dependent on God," the former Congress president tweeted in Hindi.

On Sunday, India recorded 4,03,738 fresh Covid-19 cases that pushed the tally to 2,22,96,414 while 4,092 more fatalities took the death toll to 2,42,362, according to the Union health ministry.

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

MAN KILLS 6, THEN SELF, AT BIRTHDAY PARTY

Colorado Springs (US): A gunman opened fire at a birthday party in Colorado, slaying six adults before killing himself Sunday, police said.

The shooting happened just after midnight in a mobile home park on the east side of Colorado Springs, police said. Officers arrived at a trailer to find six dead adults and a man with serious injuries who died later at a hospital, the Colorado Springs Gazette reported.

The suspected shooter was the boyfriend of a female victim at the party attended by friends, family and children. He walked inside and opened fire before shooting himself, police said. The birthday party was for one of the people killed, police said.

Neighbor Yenifer Reyes told The Denver Post she woke to the sound of many gunshots. "I thought it was a thunderstorm," Reyes said.

MAN HURLS SLUR, KICKS INDIAN WOMAN IN S'PORE

Singapore: In an apparent incident of hate crime, a man hurled racial slurs and kicked a 55-year-old Indian-origin woman in Singapore for not wearing a mask while she was brisk walking.

Hindocha Nita Vishnubhai, a private tutor, was brisk walking on Friday morning when a man approached her and asked her to pull her mask up from her chin, her daughter Parveen Kaur was quoted as saying by the Channel News Asia on Monday. Nita was walking along Choa Chu Kang Drive when the man came up to her near a bus stop outside Northvale condominium, according to the Channel report.

"She explained that she was brisk walking but he didn't care. He hurled vulgarities and racial slurs at her," Kaur said in a widely circulated Instagram post. "My mum responded with a 'God bless you' and the guy kicked her in the chest. My mum landed on her back and hurt herself," she said. The man, whose identity is not yet known, ran away while the woman was left bleeding.

5 MIGRANTS DROWNED OFF LIBYA, SAYS UN

Cairo: At least five people, including a woman and a child, drowned when a boat carrying at least 45 Europe-bound migrants capsized off Libya, a UN migration official said on Monday.

The wreck was the latest disaster in the Mediterranean Sea involving migrants seeking a better life in Europe.

Safa Msehli, a spokeswoman for the International Organisation for Migration, said the wreck took place on Sunday. She said fishermen rescued 40 migrants and returned them to the shore. Msehli said the boat was among nine others carrying more than 700 migrants intercepted Sunday by the Libyan coast guard off the coast of the North African country.

The migrants were taken to overcrowded detention centers, where the UN migration agency fears more threats to their lives and violations of their rights, she said.

Libya has in recent years emerged as the dominant transit point for migrants fleeing war and poverty in Africa and the Middle East.

S.KOREAN POLICE SUMMON ACTIVIST OVER LEAFLETS

Seoul: South Korean police on Monday summoned an activist who said he flew hundreds of thousands of anti-Pyongyang propaganda leaflets toward North Korea in defiance of a new law that criminalises such activities.

The questioning of Park Sang-hak came hours after President Moon Jae-in in a nationally televised speech issued apparent criticism toward Park without naming him, saying it's "never desirable" to dampen relations with the North by violating inter-Korean agreements and South Korean laws. While South Korea has faced criticism over the anti-leafleting law, which some human rights advocates see as an attack on democratic freedoms and efforts to break the North's information blockade, Moon stressed that his government has "no choice but to strictly enforce laws."

Police had searched Park's office last week after he announced that his group launched balloons carrying 500,000 leaflets, 5,000 one-dollar bills and 500 booklets about South Korea's economic riches across the border during April 25-29.

China opposes Taiwan joining WHO meeting

Beijing, May 10: China's government criticised U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday for urging the World Health Organisation to invite Taiwan, the island democracy claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, to participate in a meeting this month.

Blinken's statement on Friday adds to a similar joint appeal by foreign ministers of the Group of Seven major economies this month in London. That irked the Communist Beijing government, which insists Taiwan has no right to conduct foreign relations or join global bodies.

Blinken's appeal "seriously violates the one-China principle" and joint US-Chinese declarations, said a Foreign

Ministry spokesperson, Hua Chunying. "China firmly deplores and rejects it."

Taiwan split with the Chinese mainland in 1949 after a civil war. The two sides have extensive trade ties but no official relations. The US and other major governments have no official ties with Taiwan, but Washington and some others have expressed growing support for Taiwan during the Coronavirus pandemic and in response to Beijing's increasing assertiveness abroad. Blinken called Taiwan a "force for good in the world" and said it should be invited as an observer at the meeting of the World Health Assembly, the WHO decision-making body. — AP



Palestinian man runs away from tear gas during clashes with Israeli security forces in front of the Dome of the Rock Mosque at the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem's Old City on Monday. — AP

305 Palestinians injured in clash with Israeli police

Jerusalem, May 10: Israeli police firing tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets clashed with stone-throwing Palestinians at a flash-point Jerusalem holy site on Monday, the latest in a series of confrontations that threatened to push the contested city toward wider conflict.

More than a dozen tear gas canisters and stun grenades landed in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites, as police and protesters faced off inside the walled compound that surrounds it, said a photographer at the scene. Smoke rose in front of the mosque and the iconic golden-domed shrine on the site, and rocks littered the nearby plaza. Inside one area of the compound, shoes and debris lay scattered over ornate carpets.

More than 305 Palestinians were hurt, including 228 who went to hospitals and clinics for

treatment, according to the Palestinian Red Crescent. Seven of the injured were in serious condition. Police said 21 officers were hurt, including three who were hospitalized. Israeli paramedics said seven Israeli civilians were also hurt.

The confrontation was the latest after weeks of mounting tensions between Palestinians and Israeli troops in the Old City of Jerusalem, the emotional center of their conflict. There have been almost nightly clashes during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, already a time of heightened religious sensitivities.

Most recently, the tensions have been fueled by the planned eviction of dozens of Palestinians from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of east Jerusalem where Israeli settlers have waged a lengthy legal battle to take over properties. — AP

New military letter warns Prez over France's survival

Paris, May 10: A group of serving French soldiers has published a new open letter in a conservative magazine warning President Emmanuel Macron that the "survival" of France is at stake after he made "concessions" to Islamism.

The letter published in the conservative Valeurs Actuelles magazine published late on Sunday

echoes the tone of a similar letter printed in the same magazine last month which also warned a civil conflict was brewing.

The previous letter, signed by a handful of officers and some 20 semi-retired generals, sparked a furore in France with the prime minister calling it an unacceptable interference and France's top general vowing those behind

it would be punished.

It is not clear how many people are behind the current letter or what their ranks are.

"We are not talking about extending our mandates or conquering others. We are talking about the survival of our country, the survival of your country," said the letter, which was addressed to Macron and his cabinet. — AFP

TURNING POINT

46-member scientific integrity task force to meet for first time

White House panel to split science, politics

Washington, May 10: Eager to the turn the page on the Trump years, the Biden White House is launching an effort to unearth past problems with the politicisation of science within government and to tighten scientific integrity rules for the future.

A new 46-person federal scientific integrity task force with members from more than two dozen government agencies will meet for the first time on Friday. Its mission is to

look back through 2009 for areas where partisanship interfered with what were supposed to be decisions based on evidence and research and to come up with ways to keep politics out of government science in the future.

The effort was spurred by concerns that the Trump administration had politicised science in ways that put lives at risk, eroded public trust and worsened climate change.

We want people to be able to trust what the fed-

eral government is telling you, whether it's a weather forecast or information about vaccine safety or whatever, said Jane Lubchenco, the deputy director for climate and environment at the White House Office of Science

and Technology Policy. People need to know "it's not by fiat, somebody's sort of knee-jerk opinion about something, added Alondra Nelson, the science office's deputy director for science and society. Nelson and Lubchenco said ahead of a Monday announcement about the task force's first meeting and part of its composition. It stems from a January 27 presidential memo requiring evidence-based policy-making. Scientists and others

● SCIENTISTS AND others have accused the Trump administration of setting aside scientific evidence and injecting politics into issues.

have accused the Trump administration of setting aside scientific evidence and injecting politics into issues including the Coronavirus, climate change and even whether Hurricane Dorian threatened Alabama in 2019. Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard University historian said politicisation of science undermines the nation's ability to address serious problems that affect Americans' health, their well-being and the economy. — AP

● VACCINES IS one of them but there are other ways too, like shutting down the government. I have advised them in the past that you really need to do that, said Dr Fauci.

London, May 10: The leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party shook up his top team after disappointing election results, moving his economy spokeswoman and chief whip in an attempt to exert control over a fractious membership. But the moves by Labour leader Keir Starmer spurred new recriminations in a party that has not been able to

make a breakthrough against Prime Minister Boris Johnson's governing Conservatives. Starmer late on Sunday fired deputy party leader Angela Rayner from the post of party chairwoman and named Rachel Reeves his new Treasury spokeswoman, replacing Anneliese Dodds. Long-serving chief whip Nick Brown was replaced by Alan Campbell. — AP

London, May 10: An Australian court in Sydney on Monday dismissed the legal challenge filed by a 73-year old citizen stranded in Bengaluru against the federal government's controversial decision to temporarily ban the return of its citizens from Covid-19 stricken India. In its first hearing, Justice Thomas Thawley, who presided over the case, said the law was drafted with an appreciation that biosecurity emergencies might take a wide variety of forms and the

precise nature of future threats could not be known. "It is tolerably clear that the chief medical officer thought further relief would come to Australia's quarantine endeavour by preventing further entry, even for those travelling indirectly through transit hubs," the judge said. The application was filed by lawyers acting for Gary Newman last week, seeking to overturn an emergency declaration made by Health Minister Greg Hunt last month under the Biosecurity Act. Newman,

who is stranded in Bengaluru since March last year, has said that the ban was "unconstitutional". The declaration had taken into effect last Monday making it punishable with a maximum USD 66,000 fine, five years' jail term, or both, for those who tried to return back to Australia and have been in India in the past 14 days. The temporary suspension was aimed to reduce the public health risk posed due to massive Covid-19 cases in India, the government said. — PTI

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DECCAN
Chronicle

11 MAY 2021

Himanta faces a new test, but choice is no surprise

Few are likely to be surprised at Himanta Biswa Sarma being officially chosen by the BJP as Assam’s new chief minister and his taking the oath of office on Monday. The BJP is where it is today in Assam, and in the Northeast as a whole, due to Mr Sarma’s tactical and organisational skills in political affairs, and indeed his ability to play the communal card with a rare deftness in the Assamese context, surpassing by far master tacticians like Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

Back in 2014 when Mr Modi was on the stump, hoping to be Prime Minister, he would speak of letting in Hindu Bengali migrants from Bangladesh while leaving the Muslim migrants out. Herein lay the seed of the Citizenship Amendment Act. This particular aspect of Mr Modi’s campaign was with an eye on capturing West Bengal in future, but he felt it had its uses in Assam too and used it in his Assam speeches as well.

When the CAA did eventually come and led to an anti-BJP backlash among caste Hindu society in Assam, on which the BJP based its political ambitions, it literally ran up against a wall. Assamese Hindu society did not want even Bengali Hindu migrants, unlike the BJP. But the skills of Mr Sarma, who left Congress in 2015 to join the BJP, managed to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the saffron party.

Mr Sarma worked on two tracks. He harped on Assam’s neo-Vaishnavism linked to the great personality of Srimanta Sakardev as being the essential Assamese identity, and pitched this against the “miyan”, the derogatory name for Muslim migrants from erstwhile East Bengal (later East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh). This became an instant hit in an already somewhat polarised world.

It was communal to the core, of course, and yet its emphasis was on the so-called Assamese identity and not on the Hindu-Muslim binary that the BJP usually pitches. In defining this identity, those not from Assam’s Hindu society are wholly overlooked — such as the various tribal people, and Bengalis. But this worked as an election strategy to blunt Assam’s intense anti-CAA movement.

Mr Sarma took no chances. The second prong of his strategy was to split the anti-CAA vote by being somewhere instrumental in encouraging the Rajior Dal and the Assam Jatiya Party.

Mr Sarma has so far displayed political energy, political savvy and ambition of a very high order — qualities that will be an asset to any party he may be in. He has by now also gained considerable administrative experience, having been the most important minister in his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal’s Cabinet and earlier in the Cabinet of stalwart Congress chief minister Tarun Gogoi.

However, in Assam this has not exactly been in play in the past five years which were consumed by the politics of the NRC/CAA and the agitations around these themes. As chief minister, Mr Sarma will have to wrap his mind around development, and the first charge on him cannot but be the pandemic that is ravaging every part of India. Even so, the NRC remains a live issue. Its consequences have brought this country the condemnation of the world and impacted ties with neighbouring Bangladesh in some measure. Mr Sarma will be on a different kind of test than previously.

Afghan terror: Little hope ahead

The last vestiges of civilisation are fast disappearing from Afghanistan. The Taliban and other insurgents attack maternity hospitals, ambulances and kill innocent schoolchildren as they leave the citadels of learning. Inured to a life of fear, they may live on not knowing where the crazed militants will strike next. There is no rationale for the Afghan terror, invariably stemming from Afghans taking aim at Afghans, especially at the ethnic Hazaras, who are Shias and thus invariably the target of avowed Islamic State affiliates. Barbarous attacks on girls who attend school in the afternoons after the boys are done with their classes lays bare the barren conscience of the attackers.

Truth to tell, the attack on the Darst-e-Barchi neighbourhood of Afghan capital Kabul is only a precursor of the “bad possible outcomes” of the planned withdrawal of 2,500 to 3,500 American and Nato troops. The foreign soldiers will be leaving the “forgotten war” that has raged over decades without clarity on what the Taliban or other Afghan rebels expect to gain from the savagery of their brand of terror in attacks not only on Afghan troops and policemen but also on the civilian population. If the foreign troops aiding the Afghan forces in ensuring security pull out by September 11, the target date set by President Joe Biden and the US government, they will be leaving behind a land that will be open for exploitation by militants.

The families of the 70 schoolgirls who were killed on Saturday by blasts from three bombs are turning against the Afghan government as well as its international backers for their failure to put an end to the violence. The fear is over security levels that the government can guarantee when Afghanistan is left to the mercy of the Taliban, waiting to try and take the reins of power after 20 years. With the United States not inclined to even leave a small counter-terrorism force in Afghanistan, it would be solely up to the Ashraf Ghani government to end the violence, though multilateral talks may go on in search of a peaceful solution. The history of Afghanistan holds out little room for optimism.

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Check India’s corruption, or insurgencies will go up



Mohan Guruswamy

Corruption is India’s favourite conversation topic. We love discussing it and bemoan it’s all-pervasiveness. Whenever two or more Indians meet, the conversation inevitably moves to corruption. Sometimes I wonder what we would say to each other if there were no corruption to talk about. We are all near experts at it and have all experienced it in one way or another and at all levels. Yet, with so much collective experience, it is an elusive topic to write about. Like our gods, it takes so many myriad forms. It defies a simple definition. But we all know what it is.

Economists prefer to bandy about a different term when referring to corruption. They call it “economic rent”. According to the International Monetary Fund, “it is the extra amount paid (over what would have been paid for the best alternative use) to somebody or for something useful whose supply is limited either by nature or through human ingenuity”. Quite clearly, this definition excludes the moral dimension. But then our problems get even more compounded when we realise that morality itself is very elastic and varies depending on time, place and context.

Economic rent takes other forms, which tax the common good much more. High import duties, for instance, meant to restrain imports, actually serve to increase prices and profits for domestic manufacturers. Did you notice how all car tyres or batteries cost about the same? Or how all similar sized air-conditioners and refrigerators cost about the same? Or, till recently, how all air tickets cost

the same and an arm and a leg at the same time? Adam Smith explained it best by noting that: “People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public.”

Opinion polls show that there are some professions that are believed to be entirely corrupted. Politicians and policemen top this list. Much of the corruption we see in everyday life is a result of their unnecessary exertions. Some years back I had the opportunity every morning to contemplate a vacant plot of land in the Gurgaon neighbourhood I lived in. Roads bound the plot on all four sides and naturally people walking take a short cut across it. Some soul with a penchant for orderliness has taken upon him to put an end to this practice. First a sign came up demanding that people not do the most rational thing, which is taking a short cut. The sign was ignored, and my dog Charlie has been using the signpost to leave his signature. Then a small length of barbed wire pegged between two poles appeared astride the path at both ends. The people who use the path still find it convenient to go around the poles and take the not-so-short shortcut. Good old Charlie just slips under the wire and seems quite happy that he has two more poles to leave his daily markers on.

The nature of most of our lawmaking is just like this. They are irrational and people will respond rationally to them, by circumventing them if not completely ignoring them. Now the only way that plot can be prevented from being used as a short cut is to build on it. If the empty

plot is just walled up, the walls will encourage another use, which will be odious to boot. Laws that conflict with common sense just do not work. Which brings me to another aspect. We have laws that prohibit urinating in public and on walls, private and public. Urinating is meant to be a private business. But where are people to urinate when you just don’t have enough urinals? Therefore, a law against urinating in public makes sense only when you have enough public urinals.

Thoughtless laws corrode a state thoroughly. This is why states built around tight regulation and appeals to a higher human ideal always fail. Corruption is all-pervasive and a worldwide phenomenon. It comes built in with nature. Animals steal food from each other just as humans extort from others. But human beings live in organised societies and societies are simply systems based on laws. For laws to work, it must be clear that if caught, the trial will be swift, and if found guilty the retribution will be commensurate.

That’s where we have serious problems. Who makes the law? Politicians. Who enforces the laws? The police. Both are believed to be overwhelmingly corrupt. And can we expect anything better from the courts? Corruption in the judiciary and the need to uproot it were intermittently discussed in the past few years. Judges themselves have provoked these discussions. Former Calcutta high court judge Soumitra Sen became the first judge in the

A relatively honest society requires a system that inflicts swift and commensurate retribution on transgressors. It is apparent that we quite clearly do not have that and will not have in the foreseeable future.

country to be impeached by the Rajya Sabha for misappropriation of funds in 2011. P.D. Dinakaran, the former chief justice of the Sikkim high court, had to resign in July 2011 in the wake of graft allegations. The next year, former Chief Justice of India and National Human Rights Commission chief K.G. Balakrishnan faced allegations that his family members had amassed wealth disproportionate to their known sources of income.

In 2003, the CBI arrested Shamit Mukherjee, a former Delhi high court judge, for his alleged involvement in a land scam. In 2008 the Punjab and Haryana high court was rocked by a different type of controversy after a bag containing ₹15 lakhs was delivered at the residence of Justice Nirmaljit Kaur on August 13, 2008. The money was allegedly meant for another judge, Nirmal Yadav. Justice Yadav, who had to quit later, is still facing trial. The judicial process seems to be working for her, as it works for most of the well connected by lingering endlessly.

A just and relatively honest society requires a system that inflicts swift and commensurate retribution on transgressors. It is apparent that we quite clearly do not have that and will not have in the foreseeable future. The only way we can get that for ourselves is a vigilant media that relentlessly probes, investigates and informs the public. The fellows who still call the shots in our media businesses are the ones who have turned a calling into a business, like the fellows who got themselves farmhouses in Mehrauli. That then leaves the people to fend for themselves. Which is what they are doing in many parts of the country that are increasingly being gripped by insurgencies.

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

SC TASK FORCE

The National Task Force created by the Supreme Court is going holistically into the pandemic issues of second and third waves, availability of oxygen, hospital beds, drugs and the related scams by the unscrupulous people. This move is clearly a blot on Modi government for its inefficient dealings. But the situation being dynamic, it’s hard to understand its efficacy and may finally prove to be a futile exercise.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

MINING MISHAP

While Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has been harping on corruption-free and transparent governance from Day One, the report of Kadapa district Collector proves that there is hardly any change. The Chief Minister himself should step in and take suitable action against all concerned and send a clear message that he means what he says. Otherwise, it would be construed that the CM too is in cahoots with the “criminals” who circumvent rules, manage things at higher level and put lives of innocent workers at risk.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Weight of rare gold coins

HYDERABAD, MAY 10.

The City Crime Branch officials investigating the discovery of 200 rare gold coins by 45-year-old Yelliah a waddar in Mubarakpur village, in Vikarabad, said normally ancient coins of copper and brass were found. Hence the finding of gold coins which is very rare, is a great and important discovery. The coins belonged to the periods of Sri Krishnadevaraya, Achuta-devaraya and Sadasivaraya.

A team of State and Central Archaeologists are likely to proceed to Mubarakpur and examine the spot for further investigations and excavations, if necessary.

The total weight of the button-sized gold coins and the gold ingots was determined to be about 50 tolas.

The rare gold coins are worth lakhs of rupees considering its historical importance, according to official sources.

Aakar Patel



Don’t fudge Covid data, that’ll make crisis worse

The world is worried about its “Vishwa Guru” as our mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic has turned into a global story. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, an independent research centre in the United States, has estimated that by September 2021, which means in just four months, another million Indians will die. And this is based on the official numbers, which are anyway difficult to accept given what has been revealed by the scenes in the crematoria across states and in our major cities, and also by the numbers that the newspapers have put out. A newspaper in Gujarat reported on May 6 that 17,822 bodies had been cremated or buried with Covid-19 protocols in one month in the state’s seven major cities – Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Baroda, Surat, Rajkot, Jamnagar and Bhavnagar. But the government had acknowledged only 1,745 deaths officially from Covid-19, or 10 per cent. And remember that these cities are only about a third or less of the state’s total population. In the

villages, the chances of those being tested and treated are even fewer.

This is, of course, not only about Gujarat. On May 3, a newspaper had reported that Bhopal had acknowledged only 104 deaths from Covid-19 while reports from the crematoriums and cemeteries spoke of 2,557 Covid patients among the total of 3,811 who were cremated or interred.

That is a ratio of 1:25. A report on May 4 from Haryana said that the difference between the official death toll and the number from crematoria was 1:2. This is similar to the number reported for Bengaluru for the last one month (1,422 official toll; versus 3,104 cremated with Covid-19 protocols). In Uttar Pradesh, a report from Meerut said the difference was 1:7.

If we remove the outliers and look at the data, it seems like a figure of twice and perhaps three times the official one is not unreasonable. If we take that into account, our official death toll of 2.3 lakhs, the third highest in the world, actually looks like 5.6 lakh or more than seven

lakh and easily the highest in the world. This will not surprise anyone and has been borne out by the sad-denning and shameful and horrific visuals that the entire world has now seen from India.

I should clarify that the fudging of the numbers is not entirely because of governmental fraud. It has happened in part because most people are dying at home, unable to access medical facilities or unable to afford them and they have not been tested. Second, how a death is classified depends a lot on the state government and the people making out the certificate. A person who has Covid-19 but also has another disease can be classified either as a Covid death or as something else. It serves the immediate purpose of the government to pretend that the official number is low because it makes it appear less incompetent and helpless than it really is. But hiding the number and not actively promoting the fact that things are much worse is dangerous for us all.

The first reason why the government should come clean and say

that its numbers are an undercount is public safety. If people are fed nonsense like “recovery rate” (a meaningless number for a disease that has no cure), then they will be less alert and more prone to carelessness about masking and social distancing. If they knew that many more people are dying after being infected, especially because the government cannot manage hospitals at this point in time, they would not think they were personally safe.

The second reason is our shortage of oxygen. After Delhi, now two BJP-run states, Gujarat and Karnataka, have said that they are not getting enough oxygen from the Narendra Modi government. Gujarat has said it needs 1,400 tons a day and will need 1,600 tons a day by May 15 but is currently getting only 795 tons. Karnataka had asked for 1,200 tons instead of the 962 tons allocated by the Centre. The Central government says that it has enough oxygen but this is untrue. We do not. And we will make our jobs more difficult if we continue to be in denial.

The third reason is credibility.

The world is reporting the Indian numbers and saying that these cannot be believed. And the world cannot be blamed for feeling this, because it is true – based on what our own media is reporting. The damage to India has already been considerable in terms of reputation, but that is not important. What will happen is that more countries will ban the entry of Indian travellers. Already that list is quite large. In time the wave will recede, but another one is likely to come. At that point, the world will look at our official numbers and try and add a factor of their own to arrive at the real number if they think that we are still fudging. This will harm Indians on work visas, families who are separated and Indian business in general.

That is why in our self-interest we should actively make attempts to find out the real fatality rate as the first step towards trying to curb this deadly Covid-19 pandemic.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,502.41	0.60
Nifty 50	14,942.40	0.80
S&P 500*	4,229.49	-0.07
Dollar (₹)	73.35	0.23
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.35	-1.01
Euro (₹)	89.22	0.49
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,452▲179	0.37
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	68.35	0.10
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.014	-0.02
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.568	-0.011

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Ahluwalia settles dispute with A2 Interiors

Ahluwalia Contracts Ltd has entered into a settlement agreement and resolved the payment issues with its operational creditor, A2 Interiors Products Pvt Ltd, and is filing an application to withdraw the insolvency proceedings. On May 5, the Delhi bench of the NCLT had allowed the insolvency plea filed by A2 Interiors against Ahluwalia Contracts claiming default of Rs 14.10 crore and had appointed an interim resolution professional.

Eli Lilly in ties with Sun, Cipla & Lupin for baricitinib



US drug firm Eli Lilly and Company said it has inked voluntary licensing agreements with Indian drug firms Sun Pharma, Cipla and Lupin to expedite availability of its arthritis drug baricitinib for treatment of Covid-19 patients in India. The company "has issued royalty-free, non-exclusive voluntary licences to established Indian pharmaceutical manufacturers of generic medicines,"Eli Lilly said.

RBI appoints Kattoor as exec director

The Reserve Bank of India has appointed Jose J. Kattoor as executive director (ED). Prior to this, Kattoor was heading the Bengaluru Regional Office as RBI's regional director for Karnataka. He will look after human resource management, corporate strategy, budget department and Rajbhasha departments.

IOC converts LNG tankers to carry oxygen

Indian Oil Corporation is converting 14 liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers into medical grade oxygen carriers. It had diverted high-purity oxygen used in its monoethylene glycol (MEG) unit to produce medical-grade liquid oxygen at its Panipat refinery complex. It is supplying 270 tonnes of LMO per day to the hospitals in Delhi, Haryana and Punjab. IOC is also converting 14 LNG tankers of 17 tonnes each.



Govt expects prices to soften soon Cooking oil prices rise 50% in a year

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10

Edible oil prices have shot up more than 50 per cent in a year's time on supply constraints. Production shortages, delay at the ports and lower imports have led to cooking oil burning a hole in consumers' pockets. However, the government is hopeful that the prices would soften in the days ahead.

According to government data, retail prices of edible oils have shot up by 55.55 per cent in over a year.

The retail price of vanaspati has increased by 55.55 per cent to Rs 140 a kg on May 8 this year from Rs 90 per kg a year ago. The retail price of palm oil has risen by 51.54 per cent to Rs 132.6 per kg from Rs 87.5 per kg, soya oil by over 50 per cent to Rs 158 per kg from Rs 105 per kg, while that of mustard oil by 49 per cent to Rs 163.5 per kg. The retail price of groundnut oil has gone up by over 38 per cent to Rs 180 per kg from 130 per kg during the one-year period.

"The global demand-supply situation has been leading to price rise. Production has been down last year due to the pandemic. However, the demand started improving with the progress of vaccination," said Ajay Kedia, managing director, Kedia Commodities.

Further, the labour issues in Malaysia and Indonesia have been



Oil price change compared with year-ago period			
Items	Price last year	Current price	% increase
Vanaspati	90.00	140.00	55.55
Palm oil	87.50	132.60	51.54
Soya oil	105.00	158.00	50.00
Mustard oil	110.00	163.50	49.00
Groundnut oil	130	180.00	38.00

Price per kg

Oil price change compared with year-ago period

Items Price last year Current price % increase

Vanaspati 90.00 140.00 55.55

Palm oil 87.50 132.60 51.54

Soya oil 105.00 158.00 50.00

Mustard oil 110.00 163.50 49.00

Groundnut oil 130 180.00 38.00

Prices in the coming days. According to food secretary Sudhanshu Pandey, there was holding of some stock at Kandla and Mundra ports due to delay in clearances. Before clearing, tests were done by various agencies as part of the general risk analysis in view of the Covid situation.

"That problem has been addressed along with customs and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. With that stock getting released in the market, we hope to see the softening impact on the oil prices," he said in a virtual press conference on Monday.

ISUZU DRIVES IN D-MAX V-CROSS

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 10

The Japanese carmaker Isuzu Motors on Monday launched its BS VI compliant D-Max V-Cross, the lifestyle pick-up. Prices of the passenger versions of Isuzu D-Max start from Rs 16.98 lakh for the Isuzu Hi-Lander and go up to Rs 24.49 lakh at Tamil Nadu showroom for the V-Cross 4x4 automatic in top-spec X Prestige guise. The base 4x2 automatic V-Cross starts from Rs 19.98 lakh.

JAPAN AND UNDP TO SUPPLY O2 TO N-E

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, MAY 10

The Government of Japan and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) India have partnered to provide oxygen generation plants to the North Eastern Region. "The support from the people of Japan has enabled UNDP in procuring and installing eight Pressure Swing Absorption oxygen generation plants in the States of Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura," said a joint release.

Iron ore turns 'very, very hot' as prices jump 10% in minutes

May 10: Iron ore futures leaped higher as trading opened on Monday, extending a record run amid rampant Chinese demand and a wider surge in commodity prices as the global economy recovers.

Futures in Singapore jumped more than 10 per cent to hit a fresh record high of \$226 a tonne. The steel-making raw material is surging as strong demand from top buyer China leaves supplies stretched. Prices breached \$200 for the first time only last week.

"This sector is very, very hot, and just when China's steel demand impulse will

ease is perhaps the biggest question of 2021," Vivek Dhar, commodities analyst at Commonwealth Bank of Australia, said in Bloomberg Television interview. "Supply is still not able to meet that strong demand."

Iron ore is just one of a sweep of materials from copper to crops that have marched higher in recent months. Bloomberg's gauge of spot commodity prices finished last week at its highest in nearly a decade. Copper also extended its record rally Monday, soaring to \$10,500 a tonne in early trade.

Steel prices have jumped

in China as heavy users like the construction and manufacturing sectors enjoy a busy period, as well as enjoying tailwinds from stimulus measures. Steel-makers in the rest of the world such as ArcelorMittal SA are also enjoying a boom as markets bounce back from the pandemic.

"There is a chance that ex-China demand can come back to such an extent that we still see steel demand pick up globally and that will see iron ore demand remain at these elevated levels," CBA's Dhar said.

—Bloomberg

BLACKSTONE ACQUIRES EMBASSY INDUSTRIAL PARKS IN ₹5,250-CR DEAL

New Delhi, May 10: Global investment firm Blackstone on Monday announced the acquisition of Embassy Industrial Parks from Warburg Pincus and realty firm Embassy group in a big ticket deal estimated to be worth Rs 5,250 crore.

Blackstone and Embassy group did not disclose the value of the deal, which is one of the largest in the Indian logistics and warehousing segment.

In 2015, the Bengaluru-based Embassy Group had formed a joint venture with private equity firm Warburg Pincus to build industrial parks.

Warburg Pincus had a 70 per cent stake while Embassy has a 30 per cent shareholding in the joint venture, Embassy Industrial Parks.

NYSE-listed Blackstone said funds managed by Blackstone Real Estate have acquired Embassy Industrial Parks from Warburg Pincus and Embassy Group. Sources said the deal will be concluded in two stages.

In the first stage, Blackstone is buying Embassy Industrial Parks, having a portfolio of nearly 11 million sq. ft., at an enterprise value of around Rs 1,750 crore.

In the second stage, Blackstone, through its newly acquired firm Embassy Industrial Parks, would buy few land parcels directly from the Embassy group comprising another 11 million sq. ft. area, the sources said. —PTI

Mall footfalls reduce, recovery seen in Q3

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10

After recovering to 75 per cent, footfalls in malls are once again down to nil. The mall revenues had declined around 40 per cent last year. This time the industry expects a full recovery by the third quarter.

"After the lockdown, different states started opening up in different months—some in July, some in August and some others later. Overall, in FY21, the mall business would have been 60 to 65 per cent of FY20," said Mukesh Kumar, chairman, Shopping Centres Association of India and CEO of Infiniti Malls. By Diwali time, there was a quick recovery in mall businesses.

For mall owners the impact of the pandemic in FY21 was around 50 per cent, mainly due to loss of rent, and operational costs, says Shubhranshu Pani, MD (retail services), JLL India. Revenues from multiplexes, which contribute 15 per cent to the overall rental income of mall owners, were almost wiped out.

From nil levels during the lock-down, footfalls had recovered to 75 per cent by March 2021. However, after March 15 once again footfalls started dwindling.

On an average during pre-Covid days, the industry was clocking a revenue of Rs 15,000 crore per month and had reached the same during mid-March 2021, but, with the local restric-



DECLINE IN MOBILITY HITS RETAIL

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 10

India had high levels of mobility decline in the first week of May in places such as retail and recreation, groceries and pharmacies, parks, transit stations, workplaces, says a Google survey.

According to the Google Community Mobility Report, when compared to a pre-Covid baseline, the movement of people on May 5, 2021 was far less. The mobility in retail and recreation was down 59 per cent, groceries 20 per cent, parks 44 per cent, transit stations 44 per cent and workplaces 48 per cent. At the same time in residential places it was 24 per cent up.

Mobility of people has been affected the most in India among the top 10 countries with Covid caseloads, the report said.

"Mobility has fallen by high rates in five of the six parameters for India and was the highest on the one relating to being at home. Mobility has been impacted across the world, but India has probably witnessed the sharpest decline due to the recent restrictions imposed by various states," says Care Ratings.

For grocery, India is the only country which had a decline in mobility, indicating that the restrictions put by the government on shopping for just four hours a day had hit visits to the stores.

tions, almost 50 per cent revenue got reduced.

"April has been a wash-out. We don't expect much from the first quarter. By the second quarter, things will start improving and we expect footfalls to return to FY20 levels in the third quarter," said Kumar.

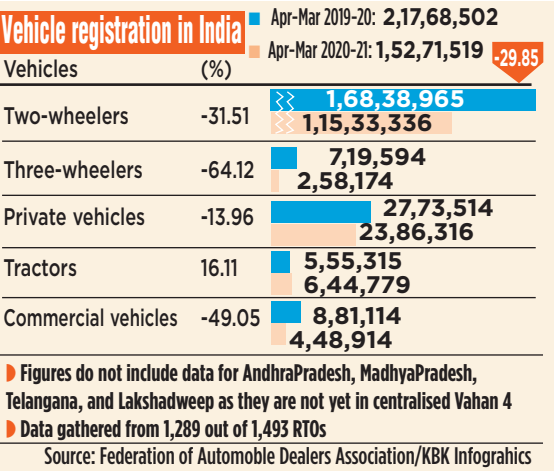
By then, vaccination would cover a large section of the society and provide people the confidence to venture out.

Moreover, some of the states have started using malls as vaccination centres.

While last fiscal revenues were severely affected, this year the impact is expected to be lower. "Last year, there were massive job losses and salary cuts. This time the incomes have not been affected much and the GST collections also are at record high," he added.

Passenger vehicle sales dip 14% in FY21: Dealers body

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, MAY 10



Passenger vehicles (PV) sales declined 13.96 per cent at 23,86,316 units last fiscal, compared with 27,73,514 units sold in FY20 while total vehicle registrations in the country fell by 29.85 per cent to 1,52,71,519 units in FY21, the lowest in the last eight years, impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, or Fada, said on Monday.

Total vehicle registrations were at 2,17,68,502 units in fiscal year 2019-20. All categories of vehicles, except tractors were in the red in FY21 with two-wheeler (2W), three-wheeler (3W), commercial vehicles (CV) and passenger vehicles (PV) falling by 31.51 per cent, 64.12 per cent, 49.05 per cent and 13.96 per cent respectively, the lowest in last eight years and way below the FY13 levels, Fada said in a statement.

Sales of two-wheeler also dipped 31.51 per cent to 1,15,33,336 units as compared to 1,68,38,965 units in the previous fiscal.

Three-wheeler registrations in FY21 were down 64.12 per cent at 2,58,174

units, as compared to 7,19,594 per cent in FY20, while CV registrations were at 4,48,914 units as against 8,81,114 units, a decline of 49.05 per cent.

Tractor registrations, however, grew by 16.11 per cent last fiscal at 6,44,779 units as compared to 5,55,315 units in 2019-20, it added.

As for April 2021, FADA said since India was under complete lockdown in April 2020 and not a single vehicle could be sold, a year-on-year comparison is not possible.

When compared to the previous month of March, Fada said in April 2021

total vehicle registrations were down 28.15 per cent at 11,85,374 units versus 16,49,678 units.

PV registrations were down 25.33 per cent at 2,08,883 units in April, as against 2,79,745 units in March this year, while those of 2W declined by 27.63 per cent at 8,65,134 units, as against 11,95,445 in the previous month.

Registrations of CV were at 51,436 units in April as compared to 67,372 units in March, down 23.65 per cent. Tractor registrations also witnessed a dip of 44.58 per cent last month at 38,285 units.

HUL'S SITAPATI MAKES WAY FOR SUNDARAM



New Delhi, May 10: F M C G major HUL on Monday said its executive director (foods and refreshment) S u d h i r Sitapati is leaving the organisation and will be replaced by Srinandan Sundaram as part of top level management changes.

"Srinandan Sundaram replaces Sudhir Sitapati, who is leaving the organisation to pursue an external opportunity," HUL said in a statement.

Sundaram is currently executive director (customer development) at HUL.

The changes in the Management Committee would be effective from July 1, 2021, it added.

"I would like to thank Sudhir for his immense contributions to the company over the last two decades.

"We cherish iconic ad campaigns like Daag Acche Hain and Swad Apnepan Ka that were created under his leadership," HUL CMD Sanjiv Mehta said.

—PTI

HALTING DEFECTIONS Bank to pay sign-on bonus to associates

UBS promotes get \$40,000 bonus

CATHY CHAN MAY 10

UBS Group AG will pay a \$40,000 one-time bonus to its global banking analysts when they are promoted, doubling what some competitors are offering, as lenders seek to reward and retain younger employees weighed down by a surge in business and a prolonged work-from-home grind.

Starting as soon as this month the Swiss bank will pay the sign-on bonus to analysts promoted to associates on top of any regular salary increases, said people



familiar with the move who asked not to be identified because the information is private. The amount represents about 30 per cent of the annual base pay of a newly promoted associate, one of the people said.

Banks are raising pay for junior employees to prevent defections and ease discontent amid a jump in deals and an intensifying focus on work-life issues sparked by the pandemic. Wall Street was set abuzz earlier this year by a leaked presentation from junior analysts at Goldman Sachs Group Inc that detailed their grueling workload and punishing hours.

A Hong Kong-based spokesman at UBS declined to comment.

UBS is upping the stakes, offering one-time bonuses that are double the amount that Credit

Suisse Group AG and Wells Fargo & Co have agreed to give their junior bankers. Other lenders such as HSBC Holdings Plc are also moving to raise pay and shortening the path to promotion, while Houlihan Lokey Inc has even offered some workers all-expenses-paid vacations.

Banks are also beefing up staff to avoid burnout. JPMorgan Chase & Co said last month it plans to add almost 200 staff, joining Goldman Sachs and Jefferies Financial Group Inc in boosting headcount.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Pakistan sweep Zimbabwe series

Harare: Pakistan quickly took the one wicket it needed Monday for another innings victory over struggling Zimbabwe in the second Test and a 2-0 series sweep. It took only five overs on Day 4 for Shaheen Shah Afridi to end it by having Luke Jongwe caught behind by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan for 37. Pakistan won by an innings and 147 runs at Harare Sports Club to go with the innings and 116-run win in the first test at the same venue. Pakistan also claimed a slice of history with Afridi's 5-52 making him the third Pakistan bowler in the Test to take a five-wicket haul. He and Nauman Ali took five each in the second innings after Hasan Ali's five in the first. It's the first time Pakistan has had three bowlers with five wickets in a match, and the first time it has happened in tests since 1993. — PTI

Chawla's father dies of Covid-19

Mumbai: Experienced India leg-spinner Piyush Chawla's father Pramod Kumar Chawla on Monday died after battling COVID-19. He was around 60 years old.

"With deepest grief, we announce that my beloved father, Mr Pramod Kumar Chawla, left for the heavenly abode on 10th May 2021. He was suffering from covid and post covid complications," Chawla wrote on his Instagram account. "We invite your kind thoughts and prayers in this difficult times. May his noble soul rest in peace."

Chawla's latest IPL team Mumbai Indians too offered their condolences. — PTI

Zverev clinches 2nd Madrid title

Madrid: Alexander Zverev continued his impressive form going into the French Open by winning his second Madrid Open title.

After beating top-seeded Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals and fourth-ranked Dominic Thiem in the semifinals, Zverev rallied to defeat Matteo Berrettini 6-7 (8), 6-4, 6-3 for his second title this season. The sixth-ranked German also won the Mexican Open in Acapulco in March. Zverev won his first Madrid title in 2018 in a final against Thiem. The win on Sunday gave him his fourth Masters 1000 title, and first in three years. Zverev will be trying to improve from his fourth-round exit last year at the French Open. "To do well at the French Open, you need to be playing well during the clay court season," Zverev said. — PTI

Former footballer Franco no more

New Delhi: Fortunato Franco, one of the pillars of India's last Asian Games gold-winning football team in 1962, died in Goa on Monday. He was 84. The AIFF confirmed the news of his death but did not specify the cause of his demise. Franco is survived by his wife, son and daughter. One of India's finest mid-fielders, Franco was a part of Indian football's golden era between 1960-64. He was a part of the 1960 Rome Olympics squad but didn't get a game. However, he was an integral part of the 1962 Asian Games winning team in Jakarta. — PTI

Shafali set to play for Birmingham

New Delhi: India's teen batting sensation Shafali Verma is set to play for Birmingham Phoenix in the inaugural edition of The Hundred and might also turn up for a Sydney franchise in the Women's Big Bash League later in the year. The 17-year-old, who is the world number one in ICC women's T20I rankings, thus will join her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, vice captain Smriti Mandhana, Jemimah Rodrigues and Deepti Sharma in the 100-ball tournament involving eight men's and women's teams. "Shafali was approached by Birmingham franchise and the deal is about to be closed. She will be replacing New Zealand's Sophie Devine in the team," a BCCI source said. "She is also in talks with the Sydney franchise to play in the women's Big Bash," the source added. While The Hundred, which was postponed last year, is scheduled to start on July 21 with the women's match between the Oval Invincibles and Manchester Originals in London. — PTI

PINNED TO MAT

WFI says murder case against Sushil tarnished wrestling's image

New Delhi, May 10: At the peak of his prowess, Sushil Kumar single-handedly lifted Indian wrestling to unprecedented heights but as police looks for him in relation to a murder case, the sport's image has taken as much a beating as that of the trailblazing grappler.

Sushil's international success triggered a revolution and created an inspirational legacy. The reserved grappler from Najagarh's Baprola village is till date India's only world champion (2010) in the sport. He is also the only one to claim two individual Olympic medals, an exceptional feat for a country which has seen very limited success at the Games.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is concerned that the good reputation built over the years with stupendous international performances, many of them given by Sushil himself, has been ruined.

"Yes, I must say that the image of Indian wrestling has got hurt badly by this. But we have nothing to do with what wrestlers do away from the mat. We are concerned with their on-mat performance," WFI Assistant Secretary Vinod Tomar said.

Sushil's bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics ended India's 56-year-long wait for an Olympic medal in wrestling.

The achievement had a tremendous impact as Indian wrestling witnessed the rise of Yogeshwar Dutt, Geeta and Babita Phogat, their cousin Vinesh, Rio bronze medalist Sakshi Malik and World medallists Bajrang Punia, Ravi Dahiya and Deepak Punia after that.

However, the fraternity is now shell-shocked as the police on Monday issued a 'Look-out Circular' (LOC) against the champion wrestler, who is untraceable since the brawl that led to the death of a young wrestler.



The Delhi Police has issued a lookout notice against two-time Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar in connection with the Chhatrasal Stadium brawl.

The incident has come at a time when Indian wrestling is celebrating its highest number of quotas — eight — for the Olympics. The anticipation of a best ever performance at the Tokyo Games is hard to miss.

The police is ascertaining the role of Sushil in a May 4 brawl that led to the death of 23-year-old Sagar Rana outside the Chhatrasal stadium.

"Not only this, but the incident that happened in February had also tarnished the image of Indian wrestling. The sport has struggled hard in earning a reputation because for long wrestlers were known only as a bunch of goons," Tomar lamented.

The WFI official was referring to coach

Sukhwinder Mor's involvement in the murder of five people, including a fellow coach Manoj Malik, in Jaat College in Rohtak district of Haryana.

Sukhwinder had allegedly gunned down five people due to his personal enmity with Malik and was arrested from New Delhi in a joint operation by Delhi and Haryana police.

Asked if WFI will remove Sushil from the annual contracts list, Tomar said they "were not mulling any such move as of now."

Sushil was handed an A grade contract in December 2018 along with four others for an annual financial support of ₹30 lakh.

However, he has not par-

ticipated in any international event since his first round defeat in the 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan.

The image of Chhatrasal stadium, which has given India its finest wrestlers like Sushil, Yogeshwar, Bajrang and now Tokyo-bound Ravi Dahiya and Deepak Punia, has also taken a beating.

A source at the stadium said prominent wrestlers like Yogeshwar and Bajrang left the facility because "they were targeted by Sushil's camp for not toeing their line."

The 1982 Asian Games champion Satpal Singh, Sushil's coach and father-in-law, was in charge of the stadium till 2016 before he retired as additional director.

After that Sushil was

appointed an OSD and it is believed that the move was aimed at keeping the stadium in the tight grip of the family.

"Sushil, who is employed there on Railways' deputation, calls the shots. If you won't listen to him or do as he suggests, he would quietly start harassing you," the source said.

"People are scared to say anything. They come to make a career, not to indulge in politics. So they found it convenient to leave than tolerate the stadium politics," the source said.

The gravity of the current situation is enormous but Sushil is no stranger to controversy either.

In 2016, when WFI had chosen Narsingh Pancham Yadav to represent India at the Rio Games. He later failed a dope test and accused Sushil of having a role in spiking his food, a charge which was found to be false.

During the 2018 Commonwealth Games trials when Sushil beat Praveen Rana in the final, the supporters of the two camps traded blows outside the stadium.

Rana had later alleged that the bout was interrupted many times at the behest of Sushil and the officials were also threatened and finally it was awarded to the 2010 World Champion.

Sushil is also the President of the School Games Federation of India (SGFI), which was in news for all the wrong reasons.

He had alleged that SGFI secretary had forged his signature to change the by-laws of the organisation and also committed irregularities.

He filed an FIR against the secretary in December last year and was re-elected President of the body in March after fresh polls were held on the direction of the Sports Ministry.

— PTI

KOHLI GETS A JAB



Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli gets vaccinated in New Delhi on Monday. — Twitter

Recovered KKR duo back home

New Delhi, May 10: Kolkata Knight Riders' leg-spinner Varun Chakravathy and pacer Sandeep Warrier, who were the first to test positive for Covid-19 in the currently-suspended IPL's bio-bubble, have returned to their respective home cities after completing 10 days of mandatory isolation.

Tamil Nadu's Chakravathy was officially the first player in this edition of the IPL, who contracted the infection after going for some medical scans.

Subsequently, two of his teammates, Warrier and Prasidh Krishna, were also infected by the virus.

The Chennai-based Warrier's interaction with Delhi Capitals veteran Amit Mishra led to the veteran being found positive as well, causing ultimately

the league's suspension. "Yes, Chakravathy and Sandeep have gone home. They have completed 10 days of mandatory isolation. However, KKR as a franchise will keep monitoring their health," a BCCI official said.

CARIBBEANS RETURN

All the Caribbean players have reached home following concerted efforts by the BCCI and their respective franchises. Cricket West Indies CEO Johnny Grave has said.

Top West Indies players like their white-ball captain Kieron Pollard, Jason Holder, Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Dwayne Bravo, Nicholas Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer, and Fabien Allen were a part of the league. In all, nine West Indies cricketers competed in the event. — PTI

TRIBUNAL GIVES CLEAN CHIT TO GUNAWARDENE

Dubai, May 10: An independent anti-corruption tribunal of the ICC on Monday cleared former Sri Lanka player Avishka Gunawardene of corruption charges, allowing him to resume participation in cricket-related activities with immediate effect. Gunawardene was facing two charges under the Emirates Cricket Board's Anti-Corruption Code.



Avishka Gunawardene

The tribunal upheld one charge (2.4.6) against Sri Lanka's Nuwan Zoysa but dismissed the other three charges. "The detailed decision will be announced to the parties in due course and remains subject to appeal," an ICC released said.

Gunawardene was charged with Article 2.1.4 that relates to — Directly or indirectly soliciting, inducing, enticing, instructing, persuading, encouraging or intentionally facilitating any Participant to breach Code Article 2.1.

He was also charged with Article 2.4.5 that relates to, "Failing to disclose to the ACU (without unnecessary delay) full details of any incident, fact, or matter that comes to the attention of a Participant that may evidence Corrupt Conduct under the Anti-Corruption Code by another Participant." — PTI

SURGE IN COVID CASES

IOC chief puts off trip to Japan

Tokyo, May 10: IOC President Thomas Bach has cancelled a trip to Japan because of surging cases of COVID-19 in the country, the Tokyo Olympic organising committee said on Monday in a statement.

Bach was to visit Hiroshima next Monday and meet the torch relay and then probably travel to Tokyo.

Organising committee president Seiko Hashimoto said last week that the trip would be "tough" for Bach to make, which was interpreted in Japan as meaning it was cancelled.

The trip was made impossible because of a state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country that has been extended until May 31. The state of emergency was to have ended on Tuesday.

The statement said Bach's visit would be made "as soon as possible."

The postponement is an embarrassment to the IOC and local organisers with the Olympics opening in just over 10 weeks.

The trip was made impossible because of a state of emergency in Tokyo and other parts of the country that has been extended until May 31.

Organisers and the IOC have repeatedly said the Olympics will not be cancelled, and will be "safe and secure." Japan has attributed 11,000 deaths to Covid-19, better than many countries, but poor for Asia. Variants of the virus are spreading with reports of public health systems coming under pressure.

Public sentiment in Japan continues to run against holding the Olympics in the middle of a pandemic. Between 60-80% of Japanese people in polls have said the Olympics should be cancelled or postponed.

An online petition calling for the Games to be canceled gained 300,000 signatures in three days. — AP

Neesham doubts IPL re-start

ENGLISH WON'T RUSH THEIR IPL STARS: GILES

London, May 10: Team director Ashley Giles says England have no plans to "rush" their Indian Premier League stars back for next month's Test series against New Zealand and could introduce new faces to cope with a packed schedule.

Among those currently serving quarantine periods are Jos Buttler, Chris Woakes and Sam Curran, all of whom have Test contracts with England.

They could be available for County Championship matches starting on May 20 before joining the England "bubble" ahead of the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's, which begins on June 2.

"We need to look after them, with the amount of cricket they've got coming up. We're not going to rush or force them back into cricket. Chris Silverwood (England coach) will them, as will our medical teams on what's best for their progress," Giles said. — AFP



New Zealand's Jimmy Neesham represents Mumbai Indians in IPL.

teams were travelling across the country.

"Even though we were flying on chartered planes, we have to go through customs, hand your details over to people, walk through terminals, so there were always going to be pinch-points there," he said.

Neesham said that it is difficult to comprehend how the bubble was breached.

"We obviously don't know yet exactly how teams were infiltrated, but... it's such a difficult

prospect to keep everything perfect and when you've got so many guys that are close to each other, there are going to be social interactions after games.

"Once one team has it, you start looking back through your last week at who you talked to and who you shook hands with. It certainly gets your mind racing."

However Neesham isn't averse to the idea of going back to India again and playing the IPL if it resumes. — PTI

Returning Serena could miss Olympics

Rome, May 10: Serena Williams raised doubts over her participation at the Tokyo Olympics on Monday, ahead of her return to the limelight this week at the Italian Open.

The 39-year-old, still ranked eighth in the world, has been absent from the courts since her semi-final defeat by eventual champion Naomi Osaka at the Australian Open in Melbourne in February. Williams remains uncommitted about

whether she will join up with Team USA in Japan this summer, especially if it means time away from her three-year-old daughter Olympia.

"I haven't spent 24 hours without her (Olympia) so that kind of answers the question itself," said the American, who has won four Olympic gold medals, a record she shares with her sister Venus.

"I haven't really thought much about Tokyo, because it was supposed to be last year and now it's this year, and then there is



Serena Williams

this pandemic and there is so much to think about.

"Then there are the

Grand Slams. It's just a lot. So I have really been taking it one day at a time to a fault, and I definitely need to figure out my next moves."

Williams says she is "ready" to get started again in Rome as preparation for the French Open which starts in Paris on May 24.

"It's good to start fresh but it's also hard to start fresh," she told a press conference on Monday.

"I feel like I'm good. I'm in Rome. I'm going to have some good matches here

