

SHORT TAKES

SANGAM DAIRY CASE AFTER VACATION IN HC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 17

Andhra Pradesh High Court heard Sangam Dairy case and posted the next hearing after summer vacation.

The state government fled a petition in the court challenging single judge bench order setting aside state government's order to take over the Sangam Dairy. A division bench held hearing in the case and adjourned the case for the next hearing after summer vacation.

In a related development, Sangam Dairy's former chairman Dhulipalla Narendra Kumar's bail petition was also posted for the next hearing on May 20.

NARSAPURAM MP NEEDS MENTAL TEST: LS MEMBER

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 17

Narasapuram YSRCP MP K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju needs a psycho-analysis test for the irrational behaviour he has been exhibiting towards his friends and parliament colleagues, observed Visakhapatnam Lok Sabha member M. V. V. Satyanarayana.

Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam, the Vijay MP said Ramakrishna Raju's utterances against the state government, Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and other political leaders have peaked in recent times.

"The MP not only needs a physical medical test but also evaluation of his mental faculties at a psycho-analysis test centre. I am sure he has gone mad",

Satyanarayana remarked. In support of his contention, the Vijay MP said he has observed his parliament colleague Ramakrishna Raju from close quarters even since he has taken oath as Lok Sabha member.

Satyanarayana said while every elected representative has kept himself busy with serving people during this pandemic period, the Narsapuram MP has been behaving indifferently, and even fuelling fire between communities and castes. He said Ramakrishna Raju must keep in mind that he has been elected on YSRCP ticket. People voted him with a good majority keeping in mind the integrity and honesty of Jagan Mohan Reddy.

"However, if the Narsapuram MP is in delusion of winning due to his own charisma, he should resign from Parliament and seek a fresh mandate from people," Satyanarayana stated.

DISTRICT ADMIN TO SET UP GERMAN HANGARS IN HOSPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 17

The district administration has decided to set up German Hangars to add more beds in the government hospitals. District collector V. Vinay Chand held a meeting with the officials in Visakhapatnam on Monday and directed them to set up German Hangars in King George Hospital, Government Hospital for Chest and Communicable Diseases and Visakha Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS).

King George Hospital and VIMS will have 100 beds each under the Hangars and Chest Hospital 50 beds. German Hangars are huge tents made of aluminum that can be erected and demolished in hours.

The officials told collector that e-tenders have been invited and would be opened on May 20. The tents would be erected on the same day.

Officer on Special Duty and principal of Andhra Medical College Dr P.V. Sudhakar said all the government hospitals are full to the capacity and patients are waiting for hours to get admission. The CSR block in KGH and VIMS have 600 beds each and they are full with patients who need oxygen.

He said patients having oxygen levels between 90 and 94 are being sent to Covid Care Centres and those below 90 are being admitted into hospitals. If the patients are improving, they are being sent to home isolation four days after the treatment, he said.

● King George Hospital and VIMS will have 100 beds each under the Hangars

Serving the needy



Margam Foundation volunteers pack free food to Covid-19 patients who are in home isolation and family members in Vijayawada on Monday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

AP govt to deposit ₹10L for Covid-19 affected orphans

People infected with black fungus disease to get treatment under Aarogyasri

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 17

Coming to the rescue of children orphaned by the death of both parents due to Coronavirus infection, the Andhra Pradesh government would remit ₹10 lakh for each such children in bank fixed deposit. They can draw the interest on this for 25 years to meet their financial needs.

Health principal secretary Anil Kumar Singhal told the media here on Monday that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has taken the decision. After 25

years, when these children mature, they can use the money as per their will.

An order to this effect would be issued in a day or two.

He also said those who are infected with black fungus disease could get medical treatment under Aarogyasri scheme. The CM has issued a direction to all medical college hospitals. This is not a killer disease. Those suffering from high blood sugar are more vulnerable to getting infected with this. By proper medication, the disease could be cured, he said.

On the state level fever

survey, the health official said so far 91,000 persons were found suffering from fever. After necessary medical tests, they were provided with home isolation kits. District collectors were asked to admit those with high fever to hospitals and also arrange ambulance service where needed.

On the extension of curfew in the state up to May 31, he sounded confident that the number of Coronavirus infections would come down. There already was a slump in the cases in some districts following clamp of curfew in recent days.

38,492 BEDS OCCUPIED BY COVID PATIENTS AT COVID CARE CENTRES

From page 1

Later, the officials informed the Chief Minister that out of 47,825 beds made available at 625 Covid Care Centres, 38,492 were occupied and of them, 25,539 were taking treatment under Aarogyasri scheme.

With regard to medical oxygen, the officials said

More doctors and other health personnel are being recruited on the lines of

that out of 590 metric tonnes of it allotted to the state, they were finding demand for 610 MT per day.

On Covid-19 vaccination, the officials said out of 75.99 lakh doses allotted to the state by the Centre, they had received 62.60 lakh doses of Covishield and 13.39 lakh doses of Covaxin till May 15.

last year to attend to Covid-19 duty in the state, he said.

Ayurveda Covid medicine given under scanner

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 17

Nellore district authorities have deputed a team of officials to Krishnapatnam village for examining medicines being distributed free of cost by an Ayurvedic doctor claiming it prevents and cures Coronavirus. The team of officials landed in Krishnapatnam following media reports about a large number of people making a beeline to the village for these medicines.

The team included District Medical and Health Officer Dr. S. Rajyalakshmi, District Panchayat Officer M. Dhanalakshmi, Nellore Rural Deputy SP Y. Harinath Reddy, Nellore RDO Suvarnamma, and three medical officers of Ayush Department. They collected samples of medicines and ingredients after eliciting information from Ayurveda doctor Bonigi Anandaiah on preparation of medicine, usage and diet restrictions. Interestingly, the team was baffled when oxygen saturation levels of a software professional from Kanyakumari infected by Covid-19 and suffering from breathlessness jumped to 94 percent

from 83 percent within one hour of Anandaiah administering some eye drops.

However, doctors in the team are not convinced. They observed that all eye drops will anyway clear congestion in throat and lungs, paving way for free breathing.

DPO Dhanalakshmi told *Deccan Chronicle* that they found Covid-19 guidelines being violated at the place, with no record being maintained about people collecting the medicine. "How will we know consequences of using the medicine if there is no record of patients," she asked. She said local people are giving a good feedback on the medicine. But they cannot allow usage of any medicine unless its efficacy is proved scientifically.

The DPO said Ayush doctors feel distribution of the medicine should be under supervision of government medical officers after making some changes in preparation and ingredients. A report is being prepared on the findings and will be submitted to the Collector.

In the interim, officials have instructed Anandaiah to stop distributing the medicine until further orders.

TRIAGE CENTRE IN ANANTAPUR

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 17

Triage centre has been established at the general hospital premises. The Alambana organisation provided oxygen concentration units, cylinders and other facilities to build confidence among the Covid-19 patients.

Alambana organisation

chairman Janardhan initiated to provide oxygen concentrators at the OP ward in the view of huge demand for oxygen due to rise of Covid cases. The triage centre was inaugurated by urban MLA Anantha Venkatarami Reddy and appreciated initiative by Alambana organisation and also Guild of Service School.

Vaccination line



People wait in queue to get Covid vaccination at GVMC Primary School at Akkayyapalem in Visakhapatnam on Monday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

FEAR | FACTOR | Nadu-Nedu scheme helped govt schools enrol many children

JVK kits may get delayed due to Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 17

With Coronavirus cases spiking in Andhra Pradesh, there is uncertainty over distribution of school kits to students under Jagananna Vidya Kanuka (JVK) scheme during the forthcoming academic year.

AP Headmasters' Association (APHMA) has pointed out that that collecting, storing and distributing these kits even as Covid-19 cases are peaking will be a risky proposition. It has thus urged the state government to put off distribution of JVK kits temporarily until the virus is brought under control. The call from

APHMA comes in the wake of many teachers losing their lives to Coronavirus and a lot others afflicted by it.

The government has earmarked ₹731.30 crore (including central share of ₹230.68 crore) for procuring JVK kits for academic year 2021-22. Each kit comprises three pairs of uniforms, a set of notebooks and textbooks, a pair of shoes, two pairs of socks, a belt (for boys) and a school bag. About 43 lakh students studying from Classes I to X in government, mandal, municipal and other public schools receive these kits under Jagananna Vidya Kanuka. The state government wants to launch distribu-

● AP HEADMASTERS' Association (APHMA) has pointed out that that collecting, storing and distributing these kits even as Covid-19 cases are peaking will be a risky proposition.

● OUR ASSOCIATION has represented to the CM, education minister and school education commissioner to temporarily put off the programme," said Chittoor district unit president B. Chengal Raju.

tion of JVK kits before or on the day when schools reopen. For the purpose, officials asked all headmasters of government

'Treasure hunter' digs 80-ft tunnel

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 17

Alipiri police late on Sunday night arrested a 40-year-old treasure hunter and six daily-wage earners on charges of illegally digging a tunnel in search of ancient treasure hidden in Seshachalam hillocks near BTR colony in Mangalam area of Tirupati.

Alipiri circle inspector B. Devendra Kumar told *Deccan Chronicle* that treasure hunter Manku Naidu, with the help of workers, had dug an 80-foot tunnel in the Seshachalam hillocks, located deep into the forest, about three kilometres from BTR Colony, in search of hidden treasure. Naidu had been digging the tunnel employing various workers for the past one year.

On Sunday, colony residents late on Sunday night noticed some strangers going towards the hillock. Suspecting their intentions, they alerted Alipiri police. "We immediately rushed to the spot and arrested the gang. We have also inspected the tunnel and collected evidence," the inspector stated.

A senior police officer disclosed that a native of Anakapalle, Naidu had shifted his base to

● Alipiri circle inspector B. Devendra Kumar told *Deccan Chronicle* that treasure hunter Manku Naidu, with the help of workers, had dug an 80-foot tunnel in the Seshachalam hillocks, located deep into the forest, about three kilometres from BTR Colony, in search of hidden treasure.

Tirupati in 2014. He used to paint for a living. He developed interest in hidden treasures after he came across a self-styled guru Ramaiah Swamy. The guru had shown Naidu inscriptions on copper plates and said digging 120 feet at a place in the hillocks near BTR colony would lead to some stone inscriptions and thereafter to two rooms containing treasures of gold.

Naidu believed in the guru's story and they both began digging the tunnel with help from workers and using explosives a year ago. However, the guru died six months ago, but Naidu continued the treasure hunt and dug the tunnel up to 80 of the total 120 feet.

It is a matter of surprise how Naidu could hoodwink police and locals for almost a year despite involving workers in digging of the tunnel.



Police arrests lockdown violators near DCP office on Bandar Road in Vijayawada on Monday. — DC

DCA arrests 2 for illegal sale of drugs

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 17

In a joint operation, officials of Drug Control Administration (DCA) and vigilance and enforcement department posed as decoy customers and arrested two more persons, including a woman, for black-marketing of Tocilizumab and Bevacizumab injections.

The two were identified as Dadi Prasanna Kumar and S. Ramya Krishna. They put the price of tocilizumab at ₹3 lakh.

Officials said drugs inspector (vigilance) along with CI of vigilance and enforcement contacted Prasanna Kumar posing as attendants of a patient. They were told that Tocilizumab was not available but there was a similar drug, Bevacizumab, which would cost ₹75,000 per injection.

When the drug inspector, posing as the patient's daughter, agreed, Ramya Krishna contacted her on phone and told her to wait at Santhipuram in the city.

● A charge-sheet will be filed in the court against Prasanna Kumar, who works as a medical representative, and Ramya Krishna, his accomplice in the illegal sale of injections at exorbitant prices as against the MRP of ₹49,000.

While Prasanna Kumar and Ramya Krishna were handing over two injections to Suneeta, drug inspector (Vigilance), P. Kalyani, drugs inspector Visakhapatnam (sales) and Ch Tirupati Rao, CI (Vigilance and Enforcement) along with the mediators came and seized them from their possession. The illegal sale was in violation of 18(c) of Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

A charge-sheet will be filed in the court against Prasanna Kumar, who works as a medical representative, and Ramya Krishna, his accomplice in the illegal sale of injections at exorbitant prices as against the MRP of ₹49,000.

SHORT TAKES

COMMON PG
ENTRANCE FOR
UNIVERSITIESDC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MAY 17

State Higher Education Council Chairman Professor Hemachandra Reddy said that from the coming academic year, a joint entrance test Andhra Pradesh Post graduate State-level Entrance test (APPG SET) will be conducted at the state level for admission into universities and affiliated post-graduation colleges.

He spoke in a video conference on Monday with the vice chancellors of all the universities in the state. Andhra Pradesh Research Common Entrance Test (APRSET) entrance test will be held for 160 marks and interview for 40 marks. GMAT, GATE, JRF and universities project fellows are given exemption from the examination. However, they will be required to attend the interview through web counseling. Universities are advised to furnish the details of vacancies of research scholars immediately. He said the extra mural system would allow the university to replace up to 10 per cent of scholars. He directed the Vice Chancellors to submit details of students under "Jagananna Vasathi Deevana."

WOMAN KILLS
TWO CHILDREN
AGED 2 AND 4DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MAY 17

In a tragic incident, a mother killed her two sons by slitting their throats with a knife meant for cutting vegetables and slit her throat with the same knife at Uppalapadu village in Podili mandal of Prakasam district on Monday.

The children identified as Mukhesh Kumar, 4, and Dileep Kumar, 2, died while being shifted to the hospital in Ongole after staff manning a government hospital in Chimakurthy refused to admit them.

The mother identified as Kareti Audi Lakshmi, 22, is battling for her life in the government hospital at Ongole. According to Podili CI V. Sriram and SI SK Vadood, the woman had married a man belonging to Singarayakonda about six years back.

She returned to her parent's home in Uppalapadu about 20 days back. She took the extreme step when no one is at home late on Monday evening.

Neighbours rushed the mother and two kids to the government hospital in Chimakurthy.

NAVY RESCUES
410 STRANDED ON
2 BARGES

FROM PAGE 1

The Indian Navy deployed three ships to rescue at least 410 persons stranded on two barges off the Mumbai coast. In the first instance, 273 people were stuck on a drifting barge near the Heera Oilfield at Bombay High Fields of Oil & Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), around 175 km from Mumbai.

Following an SOS from the Barge P305 which was adrift near the oilfields with the crew and ONGC personnel on board, the Indian Navy dispatched two ships INS Kochi and INS Talwar to render assistance.

In the second instance, another stranded barge GAL Constructor, with 137 people onboard, sent an SOS from its location around 15 km in the Arabian Sea off Mumbai. Responding to it, the Navy deployed INS Kolkata to render assistance to the crew and passengers on the second barge. One person died in a rain-related incident in Raigad district, state minister Aditi Tatkare said in a post on Twitter. Neeta Naik, a 50-year-old woman, died in Uran in a wall collapse while selling vegetables by the roadside.

A red alert was sounded in the Raigad district and an orange alert was declared in Mumbai. Over 12,000 citizens were relocated to safer places from the coastal areas. These include 8,380 people in Raigad, 3,896 in Ratnagiri and 144 in Sindhudurg districts.

Gusty winds and heavy rains lashed Mumbai, where the island city and suburbs received 189 mm and 194 mm of rainfall respectively.

The city witnessed water-logging and tree falling incidents at several places across the city.

The sea remained rough throughout the day with huge tidal waves hitting the shore.



Health workers set up the dash board on the availability of vaccine doses at the vaccination centre at AKTP Municipal high school in Vijayawada on Monday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

Pvt schools join hands
to help Covid patients

For students from BPL families, medical expenses borne

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, MAY 17

Some private schools have come forward to render help to their students and their parents, if they are infected with Covid-19. The institutions are providing medicines, toolkits and are even arranging oxygen beds. In case students come from BPL families, the schools are bearing the medical expenses also.

The Private School Management Association (PSMA) has given a call to its members to join in the noble endeavour and many schools have come forward for the purpose.

"We felt it is our responsibility to render medical help to students, parents and staff. Many private school managements have agreed to this proposal and are working on the concept," said PSMA East Godavari district president M. Srivijay.

He said that he has so far helped 39 students or their parents by rendering medical facilities.

He said that there is a difficulty in getting oxygen beds and ventilator facilities.

However, he has been making use of his personal contacts with hospitals, MLAs and other political leaders and garnering their support. He also said that some school correspondents are also struggling for their livelihood due to the lockdown

Dip in fresh Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA MAY 17

Andhra Pradesh has witnessed a fall in fresh Coronavirus infections by registering 18,561 such cases but recording the highest number of deaths at 109 in the last 24 hours.

AP had registered the highest number of C-infections at 24,171 and the C-deaths at 101 on May 15, the spread appeared to be thinning.

State health authorities reported on Monday that out of 73,749 samples tested, 18,561 were found positive.

Out of a total of 1,80,49,054 samples tested in the state so far, 14,54,052 were found C-positive. Of them, 12,33,017 have recovered by treatment while 2,11,554 remained active cases.

Among daily infections, East Godavari topped the list of districts, with 3,152

cases followed by 2,098 in Visakhapatnam, 2,094 in Anantapur, 1,639 in Guntur, 1,621 in Chittoor, 1,287 in Srikakulam, 1,282 in Nellore, 1,185 in West Godavari, 1,115 in Prakasam, 962 in Vizianagaram, 915 in Kurnool, 815 in Kadapa and 396 cases in Krishna.

Among daily cases of death of infected persons, West Godavari reported 16 deaths followed by 10 each in Anantapur, Chittoor and Guntur, nine each in East Godavari and Visakhapatnam, eight in Krishna, Nellore and Vizianagaram, seven each in Kurnool and Srikakulam, four in Prakasam and three in Kadapa. With this, the state's C-death toll soared to 9,481.

State hospitals discharged 17,334 infected persons after recovery in the past 24 hours, officials said.

doctors for treatment. Around 60 persons have benefitted because of those doctors, who have risen to the occasion, he said.

Suresh said that he is providing medical kits and herbal powders, priced at ₹250, to patients and staff members. He said that he is making use of his contacts with labo-

LAMBASINGI
TOPS IN POSITIVE
CASES IN AGENCYDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 17

Tourist spot Lambasingi reported 29 positive cases under the PHC limits, the highest in the Visakhapatnam Agency on Monday. The tiny hamlet has a few hundred households. Lothugadda and Hukumpeta reported 11 cases each and Pinakota 10 cases. All were advised home isolation as they showed no strong symptoms or illness.

There were 83 tested positive under 36 PHC limits. Two persons succumbed to the virus taking the total deaths to 34 in the second wave.

ratories for CT scan.

Another correspondent T.S.V. Narayana said that he was keeping track of those with Covid cases and sending food packets and medicines to them.

M. Sujnan Kumar, correspondent of another school, said that he was counseling families of patients, providing medical help and facilities.

₹6 lakh cash found at dead
beggar's house in TirupatiDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, MAY 17

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) officials have found a cash pile ₹6 lakh from the house of a beggar when they arrived to take possession of his house — a year after his death — at Seshachalanagar in Tirupati on Monday.

Vigilance and security staff along with revenue officials of TTD, who walked into the house of the deceased, S. Srinivas, could not come out for a long time as they had to spend hours counting the cash, which was packed in several laddu covers and kept in two trunk boxes.

According to reports, Srinivas used to beg by

● Vigilance and security staff along with revenue officials of TTD, who walked into the house of the deceased, S. Srinivas, could not come out for a long time as they had to spend hours counting the cash, which was packed in several laddu covers and kept in two trunk boxes.

applying "Tirunamam" to devotees. He was known to the locals since the 1980s and he was allotted a house in 2004, following the implementation of a master plan to decongest the surroundings around

HUMANITY | FIRST

AP allows patients from Karnataka without restrictions

Anantapur serves Karnataka patients

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MAY 17

In an interesting turn, many Covid patients, including some in critical condition, have rushed to hospitals in Anantapur district. This is in sharp contrast to the Telangana government's decision to stop ambulances with Covid patients from Andhra Pradesh on the border.

A retired bank official, settled in Bengaluru, had to get treatment at a super speciality hospital. Instead of depending on corporate hospitals in Bengaluru, he rushed to SS Hospital here and has since recovered. "If I had got admitted in a Bengaluru hospital, I could not have managed the huge expenses. SS Hospital has saved my life and at affordable

● Unlike the private hospitals in Bengaluru, Anantapur hospitals were providing quality services at significantly cheaper rates. Patients from border area cities and towns come to Anantapur

costs," he said.

Another businessman from Gooty had to bring his brother-in-law from Bengaluru. He said

unlike the private hospitals in his city, Anantapur hospitals were providing quality services at significantly cheaper rates. Patients from border area cities and towns like Pavagada, Madhugiri, Challakere and Gowribidanur come to Hindupur District Area Hospital and GGH Super Speciality Hospital and other private nursing homes in Anantapur.

AP arranges
Raju's transport

FROM PAGE 1

Acting fast, the AP government arranged for Raju's transit from Guntur jail to Secunderabad this evening.

The top brass of the state administration adopted a cautious approach on the maverick MP right from his arrest. It left it to the judiciary to decide on the examination of alleged injuries he had, as also his treatment and hospitalisation.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has appointed a three-member medical board headed by Guntur General Hospital superintendent to examine if the MP was inflicted injuries by police during his custody and asked the board to decide on further hospitalisation. Within a few hours, the CID court asked the police to get his injuries examined by the board and a team of doctors of Ramesh Hospitals.

The apex court finally gave a direction to the Army Hospital, Secunderabad to examine and submit a report.

"Except for opposing the examination and treatment at Ramesh Hospitals, which itself is facing several criminal charges, the government did not interfere with the judicial process," a senior police official stressed.

The SC took up two petitions — one filed by Raju himself on medical examination and another by his son Bharat Raju challenging the HC's rejection of bail to his father.

Senior counsels Mukul Rohtagi and Dushyant Dave represented Raju and the state government respectively. At one stage, the bench adjourned the proceedings and sought the opinion of the Centre.

While Raju's counsel wanted the medical examination done at the AIIMS, New Delhi, the AP government suggested the AIIMS, Mangalagiri, or the Manipal Hospital in Guntur. The SC bench decided to entrust the task to the Army Hospital, Secunderabad. On bail, the court directed the state to file counters and posted the case to Friday.

The apex court also said Raju could be admitted to the Army Hospital and kept there for medical care until further orders. The hospitalization will be considered as part of judicial remand and expenses of treatment, if

SECUNDERABAD
MILITARY HOSP
KEPT READYDC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, MAY 17

In pursuance of Hon'ble Supreme Court order on Petition for Special leave to Appeal by bench of Hon'ble Justice Shri Vineet Saran and Hon'ble Justice Shri B R Gavai, Medical examination of Shri Kanumuri Raghurama Krishnam Raju will be conducted at Military Hospital Secunderabad.

The Medical examination shall be conducted by medical board of three doctors of the hospital to be constituted by Commandant, Military Hospital Secunderabad. The proceedings of medical examination will be conducted in the presence of Judicial Officer nominated by Hon'ble Chief Justice of Telangana High Court, which will be video-graphed and submitted to Hon'ble High court of Telangana. Shri Kanumuri Raghurama Krishnam Raju shall be admitted in Military Hospital Secunderabad and kept there for medical care until further orders, which shall be treated as Judicial custody.

Military Hospital Secunderabad has been made ready to Comply with Orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court. All actions will be undertaken under strict Covid medical protocols.

● Senior counsels Mukul Rohtagi and Dushyant Dave represented Raju and the state government respectively. At one stage, the bench adjourned the proceedings and sought the opinion of the Centre.

any, shall be borne by the MP, the bench said. It also ordered that the Y category security would escort Raju till the hospital and need not be present during the medical examination.

CBI SOUGHT
14-DAY CUSTODY

FROM PAGE 1

The CBI sought 14-day judicial custody on the grounds of their influential status and role in the case.

At present, Mr Hakim is state transport minister while Mr Mukherjee is the panchayat minister. Mr Mitra is the TMC MLA from Kamarhati. Mr Chatterjee, who defected to the BJP from the TMC earlier, quit the saffron party ahead of this year's Assembly elections.

The four heavyweight accused were Cabinet colleagues of Ms Banerjee when they, along with seven more TMC leaders, including many MPs.

**FOR SALE
PROPERTY**

**INDEPENDENT
HOUSE**

INDEPENDENT HOUSE: 280 Sq.yds, South Face (Veedhipotu), Old House, 3 Rooms Slab+ 3 Rooms Penku, 30,000/- per Sq.yard, Beside Hayageevachary Compound, Srinivasa Colony, Balasamudram, Hanmakonda, Warangal. Ph:9949424759, 9 9 8 9 7 4 9 3 5 5 . (HYCL/2122/IC0007)

NOTICE

Readers are advised to make appropriate enquiries while responding to advertisements in these columns. Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. does not vouch for any claims made by the Advertisers. The Printer, Publisher, Editor and Owner of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. shall not be held responsible / liable for any consequences, in case such claims are found to be false.

IN BRIEF

COPS SEEK 5-DAY CUSTODY OF KALRA

New Delhi, May 17: The Delhi Police on Monday sought a five-day custody of businessman Navneet Kalra from the court for interrogation in connection with alleged black-marketing and hoarding of oxygen concentrators.

Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal will decide on the police's plea seeking grant of custody.

The Delhi Police arrested Kalra on Sunday night. The businessman was on the run for over a week since the seizure of more than 500 oxygen concentrators from three upscale restaurants owned by him in the national capital.

Oxygen concentrators are a crucial medical equipment used in the treatment of Covid-19 patients and are on a high demand amid the second wave of the pandemic.

The district court had rejected Kalra's anticipatory bail plea on May 13, saying the allegations against the businessman were serious and his custodial interrogation was required to "unearth the entire conspiracy".

Pursuant to this, the accused moved the Delhi High Court, which also declined to grant him interim protection from arrest in the case, agreeing with the reasons given by the trial court while denying him the relief.

PORTALS OF KEDARNATH OPEN IN U'KHAND

Dehradun, May 17: The portals of Kedarnath opened on Monday after a six-month winter break with the first puja being held by priests on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, officials said.

Only a select few people attended the temple's opening ceremony in view of the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic. It is for the second consecutive year that Covid has cast a shadow on the pilgrimage to the temple which has been kept out of bounds for pilgrims in view of rising coronavirus cases.

A Chardham Devasthanam Board official said the first puja was held by priests on behalf of the prime minister as the gates of the famous Himalayan temple were opened at 5 am.

A limited number of temple priests, including Rawal Bhim Shankar Ling and Chief Priest Bagesh Ling, and officials of the administration and Devasthanam Board attended the ceremony.

Expressing happiness at the opening of the temple, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Tirath Singh Rawat prayed for the welfare and good health of the people.

The puja to the temple is temporarily suspended for the sake of people's safety, Rawat said, asking people to have virtual "darshan" of Baba Kedar and perform puja at home.

Tourism Minister Satpal Maharaj said Chardham Yatra will be started soon after the coronavirus pandemic subsides.

The temple was decorated with eleven quintals of flowers on the occasion.

SATAV'S LAST RITES PERFORMED AT NATIVE PLACE

Mumbai, May 17: The mortal remains of Congress MP Rajeev Satav, who died after recovering from Covid-19, were consigned to flames with state honours at his native place Kalamnuri in Maharashtra's Hingoli district on Monday.

Several key Congress leaders, including AICC in-charge of Maharashtra H K Patil, party's Maharashtra unit chief Nana Patole and state ministers Ashok Chavan, Balasaheb Thorat, Vijay Wadetiwar, Aslam Shaikh, Nitin Raut, Varsha Gaikwad, Satej Patil, Vishwajeet Kadam and other party workers were present at the funeral.

Satav (46), considered as a close associate of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, died at a hospital in Pune on Sunday, days after recovering from the coronavirus infection.

The late Rajya Sabha member's family members bid him an emotional farewell as his mortal remains were consigned to flames at his native place on Monday.

Paying tributes to the late leader, Shaikh said, "...he would always talk about the issues concerning the people of Maharashtra...the farmers have lost their leader. He is not among us. I am speechless."

Kadam described Satav as his "big brother and mentor".



A health worker administers a dose of Covid-19 vaccine to an elderly person at a drive-through vaccination camp at a mall in Noida on Monday. - PTI

CoWIN portal in Hindi, other languages from next week

17 more laboratories to be added to INSACOG network soon: Centre

New Delhi, May 17: The CoWIN portal will be made available in Hindi and 14 regional languages by next week, while 17 more laboratories will be added to the INSACOG network to monitor the variants of Covid-19, the health ministry said on Monday.

According to a statement by the ministry, these decisions were announced at the 26th meeting of the high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) on Covid-19, chaired by Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, on Monday.

Vardhan informed his colleagues that 17 new laboratories are going to be added to the INSACOG network to increase the number of samples screened and allow for more spatial analysis, the ministry said.

The network is presently served by 10 laboratories located at different corners of the country.

Speaking on their contribution to the country's achievements today, Vardhan said, "India's new Covid-19 cases have dropped to less than three lakh for the first time after 26 days. Also, a net decline of 1,01,461 cases has been recorded in the active caseload in the last 24 hours."

He lauded the efforts of defence scientists and the leadership of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching the country's first indigenous anti-COVID drug, 2-deoxy-D-glucose or 2-DG (developed by the DRDO in collaboration with the INMAS and the Hyderabad-based Dr Reddy's Laboratories), the ministry said.

The research efforts for the drug started in April last year and ended recently, when the DCGI gave it

Rahul says PM nowhere in sight when needed

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

The Congress on Monday hit out at the Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the PMCares ventilators.

Taking to Twitter Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "There's a lot common between PMCares ventilators and the PM himself: too much false PR, don't do their respective jobs, nowhere in sight when needed!"

The attack comes amidst a row over reports suggesting ventilators bought with PMCares funds and supplied to a hospital in Punjab's Faridkot have been left unused because of technical glitches.

The Centre has hit back at these reports, calling them "unfounded" and alleging it is the lack of infrastructure at the Guru Gobind Singh Medical College and Hospital that is to blame.

the emergency-use approval.

He noted that the Centre continues to help the states under a "whole of government" approach to tide over the pandemic.

Over 4.22 crore N95 masks, 1.76 crore PPE kits, 52.64 lakh Remdesivir injections and 45,066 ventilators were distributed among the states and Union territories, according to the statement.

The Union health secretary apprised the meeting that the CoWIN platform is being made available in Hindi and 14 regional lan-

● The attack by the Congress leader comes amidst a row over reports suggesting ventilators bought with PMCares funds and supplied to a hospital in Punjab's Faridkot have been left unused because of technical glitches.

The ventilators in question were supplied by Bharat Electronics Limited and AgVa. The Central government has ordered an immediate audit of the process of installing and operating the ventilators, and directed healthcare workers be trained in its use, if necessary.

Since its inception last year, the Congress has been critical of the PMCares fund.

It has demanded that proper audit of the fund

guages by next week. Dr Sujeet K Singh, Director, NCDC, presented a detailed report on the mutations of SARS-CoV-2 and the Variants of Concern (VoCs) being reported in India. He showed figures related to the state-wise prevalence of VoCs like the B.1.1.7 and B.1.1.617. The B.1.1.7 lineage (UK variant) was found predominant in the samples collected in Punjab and Chandigarh between February and March, the statement said.

Dr Balaram Bhargava, Secretary, Health

should be carried out.

The party maintained that instead of a new fund, the PM National Relief Fund should have been used to collect donations as it had been done in the past.

Last week, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson Sachin Sawant accused the Central government of providing faulty ventilators and called for a state-level inquiry into the matter.

Several states have red-

flagged the ventilators manufactured by AgVa Healthcare and supplied by PMCares Fund.

Earlier last week, Rajasthan chief minister Mr. Ashok Gehlot complained that the state had received faulty equipment and urged the Union health ministry to launch an investigation into the procurement of defective ventilators using PMCares Fund.

Research and DG, ICMR, made a presentation on the innovative changes in testing policy that would widen its scope of application and help in mass screening for Covid, particularly in peri-urban and rural settings, where the health infrastructure is relatively weak.

Deployment of mobile RT-PCR testing vans and amplification of RAT tests were presented as the way forward. While the present capacity is around 25 lakh (RTPCR 13 lakh, RAT 12 lakh), this is projected to exponentially increase

to 45 lakh (RTPCR 18 lakh, RAT 27 lakh) under the new testing regimen.

The DG, ICMR also informed regarding the home-isolation guidelines, which have been converted into Hindi and other regional languages for a wider reach. Warning signs for hospitalisation, admission to ICU and for potential administration of Remdesivir and Tocilizumab were also highlighted.

S Aparna, Secretary (Pharma) informed that a dedicated cell has been created to coordinate production and allocation of the drugs in demand to treat COVID-19.

Stress was laid on the procurement and allocation of Remdesivir, Tocilizumab and Amphotericin-B. She notified that the demand for Favipiravir too has increased, although the drug is not recommended in Covid medical guidelines. She suggested IEC campaigns for a judicious use of these drugs.

The secretary (pharma) also highlighted that Remdesivir production has more than tripled in the country with government intervention from around 39 lakh to 1.18 crore vials per month.

The demand for Amphotericin-B, which is used in the treatment of mucormycosis, has also increased. Five suppliers have been identified and efforts are being made for an optimal allocation of the drug. The states were given one lakh vials from May 1-14, while avenues for import are being actively explored, the statement said.

The secretary (pharma) emphasised that the states must make an equitable distribution among the government and the private hospitals. - PTI

BJP MP says cow urine can prevent Covid

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 17

BJP's Bhopal MP Pragya Singh Thakur, known for her penchant for sparking controversy, has once again stirred up a row when she said, "cow urine can prevent coronavirus infection".

Ms Thakur told a gathering of party members here late on Sunday that, "If you take *desi gau mutra* (urine of cow of indigenous species) every day, then it cures lung infections from Covid. I take cow urine every day and hence I have been able to ward off Covid so far. I do not take any medicine. Cow urine is a life saver".

She however added that "The urine of cow which grazes in the forest has only medicinal properties".

It may be recalled that she was admitted to Delhi's AIIMS in December 2020 over symptoms of Covid-19.

The Indian Medical Association has already come out with clarifications that there is no scientific evidence to establish that cow urine can prevent or cure Covid-19.

"There is no concrete scientific evidence that cow urine or cow dung boosts immunity against Covid-19," Dr J A Jayalal, president of IMA has earlier said.

She had a couple of years ago claimed that she could fully recover from cancer by taking cow urine mixed with certain cow products.

Her statement on

● Thakur was admitted to Delhi's AIIMS in December 2020 over symptoms of Covid-19.

● The Indian Medical Association has already come out with clarifications that there is no scientific evidence to establish that cow urine can prevent or cure Covid-19.

● Pragya Singh Thakur had a couple of years ago claimed that she could fully recover from cancer by taking cow urine mixed with certain cow products.

Monday drew flak from Congress which demanded action against her for 'promoting superstition' regarding Covid-19.

"The BJP leadership must clarify as to whether Ms Thakur's recommendation has the party's sanction. She should be booked for promoting superstition regarding the virus", Congress spokesman here Bhupendra Gupta said.

Ms Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case in Maharashtra, has often landed her party by making controversial statements.

She had triggered an outrage in the country in 2019 when she made 'offensive' remarks against slain IPS officer Hemant Karkare, martyred in 26/11 Mumbai blast by terrorists, inviting actions from Election Commission then.

Assam extends curfew hours

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, MAY 17

In what has taken many by surprise, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Guwahati Medical College and Hospital at about 2.30 am on Sunday to take stock of the Covid situation.

Informing that the state will start an 'odd-hour management' process in government medical colleges and other hospitals, Mr Sarma told reporters, "I visited GMCH at about 2.30 am to ensure the presence of senior doctors at odd hours. There were reports of some patients coming to hospital at odd hours and after two three hours patients died."

He however expressed satisfaction over the arrangement of the hospital even in odd hours. "I was satisfied with the arrangements. I reiterate my gratitude to doctors and nursing staff for their help," he said.

He said, "We have already discussed odd-hour management where senior doctors have to do duty from 11 pm to 7 am. We have seen that maximum patients died during the night. Some of them came at night time in hospital and after two to three hours the patient died."

Pointing out that most senior doctors do duty during the day shift, Mr sarma said, "Now they

have to do duty during the night also. CCTV cameras have been fixed in every ward and we will monitor everything."

Mr Sarma who also entered the CCTV control room to take the stock of doctors and nursing staff's activities said, "We have an adequate amount of oxygen cylinders till now. No bed scarcity at Government Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) but we will increase bed capacity and the process has been started at Sarusajai sports complex."

Meanwhile, the government has extended curfew timings in the state from 2 pm to 12 noon.

"We have noticed that Covid positive cases decreased from 1,600 to 1,000 in Guwahati after extending curfew timings. So, we have decided to extend curfew timings from 2 pm to 12 pm. We will monitor the positivity rate during one week," said the chief minister who is said to have been keeping a round the clock watch over the Covid scenario.

Even problems pointed out on social media are taken care off by the chief minister himself. The pro-active approach of the new chief minister has alerted the police as well as civil administration which are now keeping a close watch on social media and media reports.

FIGHTING | COVID Essential services staff, those travelling for emergency to be allowed to move outside

Four districts of Kerala under triple lockdown

Thiruvananthapuram, May 17: The boundaries of four major districts in Kerala, which report the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the state, were sealed and restrictions were further intensified on Monday as a seven-day triple lockdown announced by the state government came into force there from midnight.

Majority of sub-roads were closed and police took control of the major roads in Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts as part of efforts to arrest the massive

spread of the virus infection. Only essential services people and those travelling for meeting emergency needs were allowed to move out in all the four districts.

Borders were under the strict surveillance of police who could be seen returning many people while trying to travel without any valid reason in many places. They also warned of stern legal action and seizure of vehicles against those violating triple lockdown norms. In the state capital, police cut down the number of entry points to the

city to just six to force people to stay safe at homes and make them avoid unnecessary travels.

Despite strict instructions, the closing of roads, however, seemed to have caused long queues of vehicles in many places waiting for the police permission to proceed further.

Thiruvananthapuram city police Commissioner, Bahram Kumar Upadhyay, said 100 bike patrolling teams have been deployed here to check quarantine violations.

The public could seek the support of getting essential articles like medicine

in emergency situations, he added. Meanwhile, the district authorities have issued specific guidelines for each district under the triple lockdown.

While Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam, Thrissur and Malappuram districts would be under triple lockdown till May 23, the current lockdown would continue in other 10 districts, authorities added. As per the norms issued by the Thiruvananthapuram district administration, shops dealing with food, groceries, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, meat and fish, animal

fodder, poultry and cattle feed, bakeries were opened Monday. They would be open on alternate days starting from Monday onwards and all shops would close, including for home delivery purposes by 2 pm. Banks, insurance and financial services will function with minimal staff on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 am to 1 pm.

Cooperative Banks will remain open only on Monday and Thursday from 10 am to 1 pm.

According to the guidelines, milk and newspaper distribution shall be com-

pleted before 8 am.

Fair price shops (Ration/PDS/Maveli/Supply co shops) and milk booths are permitted to function on all days till 5 pm while restaurants and hotels will be allowed to function from 7 am to 7.30 pm with home delivery services only. No dine-in and take-away/parcels shall be allowed in any restaurants or hotels, it said. Medical shops, petrol pumps, ATMs, shops selling life-saving equipment, hospitals and other clinical establishments shall be functioning on all days. Authorities have advised

the public to buy provisions and vegetables from shops near their houses and not to travel long distances for the purchase of provisions and vegetables.

The public will be prevented from travelling long distances for purchase of essential commodities, they said.

Police have already informed that all houses with positive and primary contact family members would be sealed and no person from containment zones would be allowed to step out even if he or she belongs to the exempted category of work. - PTI

SHORT TAKES

TUNISIA TROOPS
KILL 5 SUSPECTED
JIHADISTS

Tunis, May 17: Tunisian forces on Monday killed five suspected jihadists in an air and ground operation targeting a rugged mountain hideout of Islamist fighters, the interior ministry said.

The operation launched at dawn was still underway, the ministry said in a statement, adding authorities were working to verify the nationalities and affiliation of the “five terrorists” killed. The operation targeted a jihadist base on Mount Chaambi, near the border with Algeria.

Tunisia has seen a surge in radical Islam since veteran president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was ousted in the country's 2011 revolution.

The army has been battling armed groups since 2012 in the country's central mountains.

They include fighters from Jund al-Khalifa, or “Soldiers of the Caliphate”, linked to the Islamic State group.

SYNAGOGUE
BLEACHER
COLLAPSE: 2 DIE

Jerusalem, May 17: Israeli medics said at least two people were killed and more than 150 injured after a bleacher collapsed at an uncompleted West Bank synagogue on Sunday, the eve of a major Jewish holiday. The bleacher was packed with ultra-Orthodox worshippers and collapsed during prayers at the beginning of Shavuot. A spokesman for Magen David Adom told Channel 13 that paramedics had treated over 157 people for injuries and pronounced two dead, a man in his 50s and a 12-year-old boy.

Rescue workers were on the scene, treating the injured and taking people to the hospital.

The collapse comes weeks after 45 ultra-Orthodox Jews were killed in a stampede at a religious festival in northern Israel.

Amateur footage showed the collapse Sunday during evening prayers in Givat Zeev, just outside Jerusalem.

The ultra-Orthodox synagogue was packed with hundreds of people.

NINE DEAD IN
BURKINA FASO
JIHADIST ATTACK

Ougadaugou, May 17: At least nine people were killed in a weekend attack in Burkina Faso blamed on jihadists in the country's restive north, local and security sources said Monday. A traditional chief and three civilian defence volunteers were among those killed in the attack on Sunday in a village near the town of Pissila, a local official said, adding that another three people remained missing.

He said the “terrorists” who waged the attack were killed, without stating a death toll.

“The attack occurred around 9:00 am when men from the village and volunteers were holding a strategy meeting after a series of incidents and attacks in the area,” he said.

A local elected official said hundreds of people had fled to Pissila in recent days.

Three of the dead belonged to the Volunteers for the Defence of the Motherland (VDP), an anti-jihadist civilian defence force created in December 2019 to help the former French colony's poorly equipped military fight jihadists.

COURT CLEARS WAY
FOR SAMOA'S 1ST
WOMAN LEADER

Wellington, May 17: Samoa appeared set to get its first woman leader after the nation's top court on Monday reinstated the results of a knife-election last month.

Two decisions by the Supreme Court have paved the way for Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa to become prime minister of the small island nation.

Her ascent represents a significant milestone not only for Samoa but for the broader South Pacific region, where there have been few women leaders.

Like many of its neighbours, Samoa tends to be conservative, strongly Christian and deeply traditional.

An advocate for women's equality, Fiamē, who was born in 1957, broke new ground during her campaign by going on the road and robustly criticising the incumbent, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Saialele Malielegaoi, who had been in power for 22 years.

The court's decisions appeared to end what most people viewed as an attempt by Tuilaepa to cling to power. Fiamē had served as his deputy before they had a bitter split.

Israel: Gaza tunnels destroyed in strikes

The UN warns Gaza's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel because of continued aggression



A ball of fire erupts from a building in Gaza City's Rimal residential district during massive Israeli bombardment on the Hamas-controlled enclave. — AFP

Gaza City, May 17: The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Monday, saying it destroyed 15 kilometres (nine miles) of militant tunnels and the homes of nine alleged Hamas commanders. Residents of Gaza awakened by the overnight barrage described it as the heaviest since the war began a week ago, and even more powerful than a wave of airstrikes in Gaza City the day before that left 42 dead and flattened three buildings. There was no immediate word on the casualties from the latest strikes. A three-storey building in Gaza City was heavily damaged, but residents said the military warned them 10 minutes before the strike and everyone cleared out.

They said many of the airstrikes hit nearby farmland. Gaza's mayor Yahya Sarraj told *Al Jazeera* TV that the airstrikes had caused extensive damage to roads and other infrastructure. “If the aggression continues we expect conditions to become worse,” he said.

He also warned that the territory was running low on fuel and other spare parts. The UN has warned that Gaza's sole power station is at risk of running out of fuel. The territory already experiences daily power outages of 8-12 hours and tap water is undrinkable.

The war broke out last Monday, when Hamas fired long-range rockets at Jerusalem after weeks of clashes in the Holy City

between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police. The protests were focused on the heavy-handed policing of a flashpoint holy site during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and the threatened eviction of dozens of Palestinian families by Jewish settlers. Since then, the Israeli military has launched hundreds of airstrikes that it says are targeting Hamas' militant infrastructure.

Palestinian militants in Gaza have fired more than 3,100 rockets into Israel. — AP

Cricket club saves
Indian researchers

Beersheba (Israel), May 17: A cricket club in the southern Israeli city of Beersheba has come to the rescue of several Indian researchers at the Ben-Gurion University in the Negev southern region, who had been struggling for a proper shelter while being under a complete siege with rockets raining over the country's south during the past one week.

The Beersheba Cricket Club building, a two-storey structure close to the University, which is actually a shelter house with an underground floor, opened its door for the local residents immediately after rockets launched by Palestinian militants started to fall on

Israel's southern areas and also extended the kind gesture to Indian researchers at the University who were looking for proper protection during distressed times.

“Some of the Indian researchers also play for the cricket club and are like part of our family. But we told them that anybody looking for a safe shelter is welcome to use our facility,” said Naor Gudker, the Chairman of Beersheba Cricket Club. “There are several Indian researchers staying with us during the past week, both boys and girls, and we have tried to make things as comfortable as possible, extending them all possible help”, he said. — PTI

Court postpones
start of Navalny
extremism case

Moscow, May 17: A Russian court on Monday postponed the first hearing in the “extremism” case against the political network of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, part of a campaign to outlaw the opposition to President Vladimir Putin. As the hearing got underway behind closed doors, the prosecution submitted additional documents and the proceedings were postponed until June 9, according to lawyers representing Navalny's network.

The case is part of a sweeping crackdown on Putin's most prominent critic and his supporters after Navalny barely survived a poisoning with the Novichok nerve agent last summer.

As part of the effort — which comes a few months before parliamentary elections — the lower house is set on Tuesday to begin debating a bill banning members of “extremist” organisations from being elected lawmakers. Navalny's network is being represented by lawyers of Team 29, a Saint Petersburg-based group that specialises in freedom of speech and treason cases.

The lawyers said it was not clear why Monday's hearing was held behind

closed doors.

The Kommersant business daily on Monday cited a source saying the secrecy was because some of the case files contained personal information of police involved in dispersing opposition protests.

But key Navalny ally Ivan Zhdanov said on Twitter that the case materials were kept secret so that “nobody could see the absurdity of what was happening”.

Prosecutors in April requested that Navalny's regional network and his Anti-Corruption Foundation be designated “extremist” organisations, accusing them of plotting to stage a Western-backed uprising in Russia.

Such a court ruling would put Navalny and his supporters and financial backers on par with members of the Islamic State group and Al-Qaeda and threaten them with long prison sentences.

“The opposition will be crushed,” Abbas Gallyaymov, an independent political analyst and former Kremlin speechwriter, said, warning that the official ban on dissent would eventually backfire. “By destroying the opposition, they are destroying their own legitimacy,” he said. — AFP

US asks Israel for proof of
Gaza media building strike

Copenhagen, May 17: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Monday he has asked Israel for any evidence of Hamas operating in a Gaza building housing news bureaus that was destroyed by an Israeli airstrike over the weekend, but hasn't seen any.

Blinken spoke at a news conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, as pressure is increasing on the Biden administration to ask for a ceasefire in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel destroyed a building housing The Associated Press and *Al Jazeera* claimed that Hamas used the building for a military intelligence

office.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called the building a “perfectly legitimate target” and told *CBS* “Face the Nation” on Sunday that Israel passes such evidence through intelligence channels.

“Shortly after the strike we did request additional details regarding the justification for it,” Blinken said Monday.

He declined to discuss specific intelligence, saying he “will leave it to others to characterise if any information has been shared and our assessment that information.” But he said, “I have not seen any information pro-

vided.”

Blinken's comments came after UN Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved. — AP

Calls mount for cease-fire

United Nations, May 17: United Nations Security Council diplomats and Muslim foreign ministers convened emergency weekend meetings to demand a stop to civilian bloodshed as Israeli warplanes carried out the deadliest single attacks in nearly a week of Hamas rocket barrages and Israeli airstrikes.

President Joe Biden gave no signs of stepping up public pressure on Israel to agree to an immediate cease-fire despite calls from some Democrats for the Biden administration to get more involved.

His ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, told an emergency high-level meeting of the Security Council that the United States was “working tirelessly through diplomatic channels” to stop the fighting. But as battles between Israel and Gaza's militant

Hamas rulers surged to their worst levels since 2014 and the international outcry grew, the Biden administration — determined to wrench US foreign policy focus away from the Middle East and Afghanistan — has declined so far to criticize Israel's part in the fighting or send a top-level envoy to the region.

Appeals by other countries showed no sign of progress. Thomas-Greenfi-

eld warned that the return to armed conflict would only put a negotiated two-state solution to the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict even further out of reach.

However, the US, Israel's closest ally, has so far blocked days of efforts by China, Norway and Tunisia to get the Security Council to issue a statement, including a call for the cessation of hostilities. — AP

Shehbaz placed on no-fly list

Islamabad, May 17: The Pakistan government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday added the name of Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif, who has been charged with corruption, to the no-fly list, barring him from leaving the country for medical treatment.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court granted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president Shehbaz — also the younger brother of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif — permission to travel abroad once for medical treatment.

After obtaining bail, Shehbaz, 69, was about to fly to London on May 8

when an Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) team at the airport stopped him from travelling on the grounds that his name had been on the provisional national identification list (PNIL), which impose a temporary bar on someone to leave the country.

Shehbaz was offloaded from Doha-bound flight on May 8.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said that Shehbaz's name was added to the exit control list (ECL) after it was given approval from the federal Cabinet. — PTI

Remarks: Pak pulls
up Kabul's envoy

Islamabad, May 17: Pakistan on Monday served a demarche to Afghanistan's ambassador Najibullah Alihel, protesting against the accusations by the Afghan leadership.

Pakistan's Foreign Office (FO), however, did not specify the statement which angered it. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, in a recent interview, alleged that Pakistan “operates an organised system of support” for the

Afghan Taliban.

“The names of the various decision-making bodies of the Taliban are Quetta Shura, Miramshah Shura and Peshawar Shura — named after the Pakistani cities where they are located. There is a deep relationship with the state,” the Afghan leader said.

The FO said Pakistan was seriously concerned about the statements. — PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

— PTI

Anti-Semitic slur:
London increases
police presence

London, May 17: More police will be deployed to the streets of Jewish areas in London, mayor Sadiq Khan said on Monday, after four people were arrested for allegedly shouting anti-Semitic abuse and threats during a pro-Palestinian protest. “There are a number of things we are doing to reassure Londoners, particularly those from Jewish communities,” Khan told *ITV*, as he announced an “increased police presence”. Officers investigating a video circulating on social media, which appeared to show anti-Semitic abuse being shouted from

a car in north London on Sunday, made four arrests.

The car was travelling in a convoy of vehicles decorated with Palestinian flags, one of several protests held across Britain over the weekend in response to the worst violence in years between Israel and Palestinian militants.

The men were detained on suspicion of racially aggravated public order offences.

“This behaviour was utterly shocking and will not be tolerated,” said Superintendent Jo Edwards. — AFP

BACK ISRAEL
CURBS, TURKEY
URGES POPE

Ankara, May 17: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has asked Pope Francis to support sanctions against Israel, saying Palestinians will continue to be “massacred” as long as the international community does not punish Israel. During a telephone call Monday with the Pope, he also said that “continued messages and reactions” from Francis in support of Palestinians would be of great importance for the “mobilisation of the Christian world and of the international community,” said a statement from the Turkish presidential communications directorate. — AP

AMID CLASH,
ISRAEL BATS
FOR TOURISM

Dubai, May 17: As violence flares within Israel and on a day in which Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City killed at least 42 people, it was business as usual for a senior Israeli tourism official in Dubai as she promoted the country as a must-see destination for Muslim visitors.

At Dubai's Arabian Travel Market on Sunday, billed as the first travel and tourism event to happen in person since the global coronavirus outbreak, a small Israeli booth — tucked behind Slovenia's — marketed the country as the “Land of Creation.” — AP

WRITS SEEKING
FRESH SWEARING
IN OF OLI FILED

Kathmandu, May 17: Four writ petitions were filed in the Supreme Court of Nepal on Monday demanding that Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli be sworn in again as he disgraced the office of the President by refusing to repeat all the words she recited during the oath-taking ceremony. President Bidya Devi Bhandari administered the oath of office and secrecy to Oli as the prime minister at a scaled-down ceremony at Shital Niwas, the presidential palace, on Friday.

During the oath-taking ceremony, Oli, the 69-year-old Chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist), omitted the word vow when the President recited it, besides in the name of God. I will take oath in the name of the country and the people, Oli, who has become Nepal's prime minister for the third time, said, while President Bhandari mentioned God, country and the people. All four writ petitioners have demanded that Oli take another oath of office and secrecy as the one taken on Friday was illegal. *The Kathmandu Post* reported. — PTI

SMART | CITIES

Fourth Industrial Revolution guided Japanese choice models

Mumbai, Medellin: Knowledge networks

Singapore, May 17: Mumbai and Medellin would be the two knowledge sharing regional networks for South East Asia and Latin America respectively to help realise and align smaller cities in the zones to execute their vision to become smart cities in the coming years, a top industrial source has said.

The two World Economic Forum (WEF) selected networks, which would be hosted by India and Colombia respectively to connect leading pioneer cities from the Global

Alliance with smaller cities in the region, will also help them have better cyber security as cyber attacks are becoming more frequent globally.

“Our ready for market approach with solutions for smart cities follows a recent announcement by the World Economic Forum (WEF) to launch two regional networks of cities in South Asia and Latin America with the aim to share knowledge on smart city development, while protecting public interests related to privacy, security and sustain-

ability,” the source, who did not wish to be named, said.

“With cyberattacks on municipalities rising and digital technologies becoming central to economic competitiveness and especially so in India, small cities need to invest in new technologies but have less capacity than their larger global counterparts to implement and ensure effective governance, said the source, who is close to one major technology group which is in talks with several parties to offer its products and

solutions tailored to specific need of each city. Bengaluru, Bhopal, Faridabad, Hyderabad, Indore, Kohima, Mangalore, Raipur, Shillong and Thane are on top Indian cities in the smart city list that would be seeking global best practices to be tech-driven municipalities for growth of local economies, according to the source.

He said global technology companies have positioned their solutions and products to help India realise and align its ambitions with the vision of smart cities in the coming

years.

These networks selected last month as part of the WEF's G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance are designed to help small cities implement new technology policies and will be supported by partners of the WEF and the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (C4IR) Global Network. Going forward, the Japanese cities are their choice models which were guided by the Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution Japan, he noted. — PTI

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	49,580.73	1.74
Nifty 50	14,923.20	1.67
S&P 500*	4,153.43	-0.49
Dollar (₹)	73.21	0.10
Pound Sterling (₹)	103.26	-0.20
Euro (₹)	89.00	-0.29
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	47,547,348	0.73
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	69.45	1.08
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.972	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.645	0.01

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Bharti Airtel posts ₹760 cr profit for Q4

Bharti Airtel reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 759 crore for Q4FY21 and an annual turnover of more than Rs 1 lakh crore for the first time. Airtel had posted a loss of Rs 5,237 crore in the year-ago quarter. Consolidated revenue rose 11.9 per cent to Rs 25,747 crore from Rs 23,019 crore. India revenue increased by 10 per cent in Q4 to Rs 18,337.8 crore from Rs 16,734.3 crore a year ago.

NEFT upgrade to disrupt services on weekend



The National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) system for online transfer of funds will be unavailable for 14 hours from Saturday mid-night till Sunday afternoon. A technical upgrade of NEFT, targeted to enhance the performance and resilience, is scheduled after the close of business of May 22, the RBI said. "Accordingly, NEFT service will not be available from 00:01 hrs to 14:00 hrs on Sunday, May 23," it said.

Federal Bank standalone net jumps 59%

Private sector lender Federal Bank reported nearly 59 per cent jump in its standalone net profit at Rs 478 crore for the March quarter against Rs 301 crore a year ago. Total income on a standalone basis was down at Rs 3,832 crore against Rs 4,108 crore. On a consolidated basis, the net profit for the quarter jumped by 65 per cent to Rs 500 crore. Income fell by 5.4 per cent to Rs 3,996 crore from Rs 4,223 crore.

Poonawalla exits Panacea, Serum picks up his stake

Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla offloaded his entire 5.15 per cent stake in Panacea Biotec for Rs 118 crore through an open market transaction. The shares were picked by Serum Institute of India (SII). As per BSE block deal data, Poonawalla sold 31,57,034 scrips he held in the firm at a price of Rs 373.85 per share, taking the total deal value to Rs 118.02 crore. The shares were picked by SII at the same price.



■ FPIs net sellers by ₹2,256 crore

Market cheers drop in daily Covid cases

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MAY 17

A sharp drop in daily Covid infections to below 3 lakh cases triggered broad-based rally in the market, with investors expecting a return to normalcy sooner than expected before.

The Sensex gained 848 points, or 1.74 per cent, and closed at 49,580 after a bullish start on the first day of a new week. BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices also gained over 1.6 per cent each.

The market capitalisation of all stocks traded on the BSE touched a new all time high of Rs 213.64 lakh crore as investors wealth soared by over Rs 3 lakh crore.

The Nifty-50 index too gained 245 points to close at 14,923.15. The market seems poised to regain earlier highs with NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27 per cent from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021, as it recorded the lowest close of last 87 trading sessions since January 1, said analysts.

"The Nifty rebounded sharply as domestic coronavirus cases fell below the 3-lakh mark for the first time since mid-April. Extended lockdowns by majority states has helped in curbing the cases. Sentiments turned buoyant that soon restrictions/curbs would be eased once cases decline



GAINING STRENGTH

- ▶ Market capitalisation of the BSE touched a new high of ₹213.64 lakh crore as investors wealth soared by over ₹3 lakh crore
- ▶ NSE's India VIX Index, indicator of market volatility, fell 3.27% from 20.26 to the 19.60 levels. India VIX is at the lowest levels of 2021

further," said Siddhartha Khemka, head-retail research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

Domestic institutions were net buyers of equities worth Rs 1,948.48 crore while foreign portfolio investors preferred to book profit and were net sellers of equities worth Rs 2,255.84 crore, as per the provisional data.

"Global cues were weak on the back of poor Chinese retail sales data and resurgence of Covid cases in some Asian countries. Gold scaled to three-month high as global inflation pressure rises," said Khemka.

Bank stocks led the rally on the bourses as the BSE Bankex closed 3.98 per cent up followed by Auto (1.90 per cent), Metal (1.93

per cent), Power (1.86 per cent) and Realty (1.59 per cent).

Barring telecom, all other sectoral indices closed in the green. The market expects the indices to regain earlier highs with financials leading the gainers list.

"It looks like we are going to head higher from hereon," because the authenticity of any move is measured by the quality of participation in it and today the banking space led from the front by giving a humongous intraday rally. When this pocket contributes heavily, the up-move can be considered a genuine one," said Sameet Chavan, chief analyst-technical and derivatives, Angel Broking.

HOTELS' BODY JOINS OYO INSOLVENCY CASE

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 17

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has allowed hotels' body to intervene in the insolvency case against Oyo on behalf of its member hotels.

The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) sought intervention on behalf of its affected members over an outstanding of about Rs 72 crore. Around Rs 200 crore of claims have been registered against Oyo, the FHRAI said.

The NCLAT has permitted it to make its oral submissions on June 2.

"The FHRAI has been receiving several complaints from member hotels with respect to the non-payment of debts by Oyo for years. The FHRAI has presently filed the application before the NCLAT on behalf of aggrieved hotels and restaurants across India who have filed their claims with the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP)," FHRAI vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said.

According to FHRAI, Oyo breached the terms of various kinds of agreement. The NCLAT has been receiving several complaints from member hotels with respect to the non-payment of debts by Oyo for years. The FHRAI has presently filed the application before the NCLAT on behalf of aggrieved hotels and restaurants across India who have filed their claims with the Insolvency Resolution Professional (IRP)," FHRAI vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said.

DOUBLE | LIFE

Companies that made pledges have fewer Black employees

#BlackLivesMatter: An optics play for US firms?

ELLEN HUET & KAREN TOULON
MAY 17

After the murder of George Floyd last year prompted widespread protests, dozens of companies released public pledges to promote racial justice. However, their support of the Black community wasn't reflected in the demographics of their workforces.

A new study of diversity in the technology industry found companies that made statements of solidarity had 20 per cent fewer Black employees on average than those that didn't. The finding highlights a gap between what companies say about social issues and what they do in their own workplaces, said Stephanie Lampkin, the founder and chief executive officer of Blendoor, which conducted the study set to



be published on Monday.

Blendoor, a startup that helps companies recruit a diverse group of candidates, crunched publicly available data on 240 of the most prominent tech companies. Despite the shortcomings of many companies that put out

Vaccine costs to strain already creaking state budgets

ANIRBAN NAG &
VRISHTI BENIWAL
MAY 17

The world's worst coronavirus outbreak is set to stretch the already strained budgets of Indian states, making it more costly to borrow just when they need the money to cushion their economies.

The country's 28 states will have to foot about \$5 billion or more in vaccination costs after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's federal government suddenly made them responsible for inoculating most adults from May 1. Since they hadn't budgeted for the jobs or steps to tackle a second wave, their options to meet the additional expense are limited to cutting capital expenditures, selling public assets and boosting borrowing.

A simple calculation shows it will cost states Rs 35,400 crore (\$4.8 billion) to give two vaccine shots to about 590 million Indians in the 18-to-44 age group, at a combined cost of Rs 600 per person. If vaccinations are extended to those under 18 years old, the expense could rise to 0.25 per cent of gross domestic product, or about \$7 billion, according to Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd economist Madhavi Arora.

The additional burden couldn't have come at a worse time for states, which are facing higher yields on market borrowings this year amid the threat of widening fiscal deficits.

Failure by India's states

We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales"



— Palanivel Thiagarajan, Finance minister, Tamil Nadu

to raise and spend enough money risks holding back the recovery from a rare recession last year. That's because states account for 60 per cent of total government spending on asset creation and infrastructure building, which drive jobs creation and consumption.

In addition, states are having difficulty attracting foreign investors despite paying yields that are typically higher than those on federal government debt. Global funds have used only 1.2 per cent of the Rs 67,600 crore investment limit available to them in notes issued by states as of May 10, down from 4.8 per cent two years ago, data from the Clearing Corp. of India Ltd show.

"Finances are bound to be affected," said T. S. Singh Deo, health and commercial tax minister of Chhattisgarh. "The axe will certainly fall on capital expenditure."

Modi's government has encouraged states to sell assets to fund spending plans in the current year. That's one way to bring down the debt burden,

said Palanivel Thiagarajan, an ex-Wall Street banker and newly appointed finance minister of Tamil Nadu.

"Everything is on the table," he said. "We will cut back on a bunch of spending that we don't think is essential during this time. We will try to raise new sources of funds. We will try to do some restructuring of the debt. We will look at asset sales."

The pandemic has changed states' budgets significantly. The average gross deficit for states that presented their budgets before Covid was 2.4 per cent of output, while after the lockdown it stood at 4.6 per cent in the year ended in March, the Reserve Bank said.

Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, saw the gap widen to 4.17 per cent of the state's GDP in the year ended March 31, compared to the prescribed limit of 3 per cent. Bihar, among the nation's most impoverished states, estimated the gap at almost 7 per cent.

They may miss their goal of narrowing the

budget gap this year. Although there's no national lockdown this time to stem the deadly second wave of the pandemic, several states have imposed local movement curbs that are hurting economic activity and revenue collection. That's nudging many economists to cut their double-digit growth forecasts for the current fiscal year.

There's "renewed uncertainty regarding the near-term economic outlook," said economists led by Aditi Nayar at Ica Ltd. That "may modestly constrain the indirect tax collections of those particular states."

To bridge the gap, Rajasthan is planning to sell or lease out unused properties. Telangana is planning to sell land parcels to raise about Rs 14,500 crore, according to local media reports.

Still, there's no guarantee these deals will come through. Even the federal government has failed to achieve divestment targets for the past two years after failing to sell flag carrier Air India Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp, a state-owned oil refiner. Those sales have been carried forward to the current year.

Punjab plans to cut capital spending to boost health care expenditure, its finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal said. "States have to fend for themselves," he said. "Even though we increased our health budget by 18 per cent this year, I see my health budget going up further."

—Bloomberg

MS BOARD HAD GATES INVESTIGATED FOR RELATIONSHIP

LINUS CHUA
MAY 17

Microsoft Corp's directors started a probe into Bill Gates's alleged involvement with a female employee that was deemed inappropriate and decided that the co-founder had to step down from the board last year, Dow Jones reported, citing people familiar with the matter.

The software giant had received a concern last year that that Gates had



Bill Gates

tried to have an "intimate" relationship with an employee in the second half of 2019, Dow Jones cited a Microsoft spokesman as saying. The

board reviewed the matter with the help of an outside law firm, the spokesman added.

Board members handling the matter hired the law firm to conduct the investigation after receiving a letter from a Microsoft engineer who said she had a sexual relationship with Gates for years, Dow Jones said. Gates left before the probe was completed. A spokesperson for Gates couldn't be reached for comment. —Bloomberg

Siddharth Shriram passes away

New Delhi, May 17: Industrialist and former chairman of Usha International Siddharth Shriram passed away on Monday due to Covid-19, according to people close to the family.

Shriram (76), who served as advisor to the board of Usha International after stepping down from executive role, was admitted to Medanta Hospital in Gurgaon for treatment.

A multi-faceted industrialist, Shriram served as the chairman of Mawana Sugars Ltd besides being the chairman of Usha



Siddharth Shriram

International, known for its sewing machines and home appliances.

He had led the Usha International Group in forming two joint ventures with Japan's Honda for passenger cars and power products.

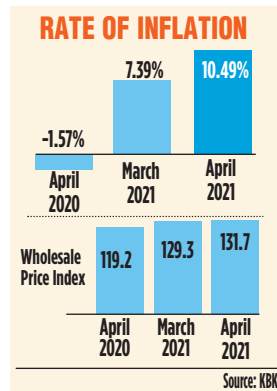
However, in August 2012,

Usha International exited from its then joint venture Honda Siels Cars India, by selling its entire 3.16 per cent stake to the Japanese partner for Rs 180 crore.

Later, last year in April, Honda Motor Co and Usha International terminated their over two-decade old joint venture—Honda Siel Power Products.

Born on January 18, 1945, Shriram was schooled in Welhem School and the Doon School at Dehradun, graduated in English Literature from St. Stephens College, Delhi University. —PTI

WPI INFLATION AT MULTI-YEAR HIGH OF 10.49%



SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, MAY 17

Wholesale price inflation (WPI) climbed to a multi-year high of 10.49 per cent in April from 7.39 per cent in March, on the back of rising commodity prices and a low base. At 10.49 per cent WPI saw the highest level since April 2010.

"The annual rate of inflation in April 2021 is high primarily because of rise in prices of crude petroleum, mineral oils viz petrol, diesel etc, and manufactured products as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year," a government release said.

In April, fuel and power index rose 20.94 per cent year-on-year but contracted 1 per cent over March. Manufactured products inflation rose 9.01 per cent year-on-year and 1.65 per cent over the preceding month. Primary articles inflation rose 10.16 per cent year-on-year and 3.83 per cent over the preceding month and prices of food articles went up 4.92 per cent year-on-year and 3.84 per cent over March.

The core-WPI inflation too moved up to 8.4 per cent on a yearly basis in April, driven by metals, paper, rubber, and chemicals. But retail inflation eased to a three-month low of 4.29 per cent from over 5.5 per cent in March.

"In sequential terms, the WPI-food recorded a sharp 3.8 per cent month-on-month increase in April 2021, as compared to a relatively limited 1 per cent uptick in the CPI-food index, suggesting a greater impact of supply chain disruptions at the wholesale level," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, Ica.

SHORT TAKES

Injured Jofra ruled out of Kiwi Tests

London: England pacer Jofra Archer, who recently returned to action after missing the now-suspended IPL, has been ruled out of the Test series against

New Zealand as his elbow injury has resurfaced. The 26-year-old played a game for his County side Sussex against Kent but had to be pulled out of the game after bowling just five overs. Before this match, the fast bowler had also featured in a game against Surrey last week in a second XI game, bowling 29.2 overs. "England and Sussex seamer Jofra Archer has been ruled out of the est Series against New Zealand starting next month," an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement read. — PTI

Das is women's batting coach

New Delhi: Gutsy former India opener Shiv Sunder Das has been appointed the batting coach of the Indian women's team for the tour of England and he is looking forward to use his coaching stint at NCA to guide the youngsters during the trip. Das, who has played 23 Tests between 2000-02, has a decent average of near 35 with more than 1300 runs, including two hundreds and nine half centuries.

"It will be good experience and I am looking forward to it," the former Odisha skipper said. He has honed his skills as a batting coach at the NCA under Rahul Dravid's guidance and that, he believes, will help him while trying to solve the technical problems of the batters. — PTI

Modric to lead Croatians at Euro

Zagreb: Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic named a 26-man squad for Euro 2020 on Monday, comprising players who won silver at the 2018 World Cup and their younger peers and led by veteran Luka Modric. "Our latest results were not the best, but I'm an optimist. Our first goal is to get out of the group," Dalic told reporters.

Croatia have been drawn in Group 'D', and will play England in London on June 13. Dalic described that opening match as the toughest in the group stage as England "have good quality and we play at Wembley." Croatia then travel to Glasgow where they will face the Czech Republic on June 18 and Scotland four days later. "We have difficult opponents, but I believe in us. We are at our best when the going gets tough," Dalic said. — AFP

Honda's Espargaro comes home 8th

Le Mans, France: Repsol Honda's Pol Espargaro encountered all conditions, while Marc Marquez returned to leading a Grand Prix but was ultimately left disappointed at the French MotoGP on Sunday. Australian rider Jack Miller of Ducati made a great start to overtake pole-sitter Fabio Quartararo and then held him off to win the race. Honda's Marquez who started sixth didn't finish the race, while Espargaro held on to his starting position of eighth. It was a dramatic first lap for Espargaro who threw himself into the heat of battle alongside Marquez and Takaaki Nakagami after a strong launch. Contact with Franco Morbidelli forced the Honda rider to drop back and out of the top five. Alex Marquez took top Honda honours for the LCR Honda Team in sixth.

Curry captures 2nd scoring title

Los Angeles: Stephen Curry scored 46 points and claimed his second NBA scoring title as the Golden State Warriors won their sixth straight by beating the Memphis Grizzlies 113-101 on Sunday in San Francisco. Curry finished the regular season with a 32.0-point scoring average, claiming the league title over Washington's Bradley Beal who scored 25 points earlier Sunday to finish at 31.3 points per game. "I had a lot of good looks all night," Curry said. "We were in sync. The guys set great screens for me." The 33-year-old Curry won his first scoring title in 2016. He and Michael Jordan are the only NBA players to win a scoring title after turning 33. Curry also joins Jordan, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Wilt Chamberlain as the only players with multiple scoring titles, most valuable players awards and NBA championships. — AFP

TWIST & TURN

ICC says fixing allegations 'implausible', concludes investigation

Dubai, May 17: The ICC on Monday dismissed claims made by news channel *Al Jazeera* that India's Test matches against England (2016) and Australia (2017) were fixed, saying the passages of play identified as fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore "implausible as a fix". *Al Jazeera* in a documentary — 'Cricket's Match Fixers' — released in 2018 had claimed that India's game against England in Chennai in 2016 and the one against Australia in 2017 in Ranchi were fixed. The International Cricket Council (ICC) also cleared five people — filmed by the channel — of any wrongdoing saying even as they behaved in a questionable manner but no credible evidence was available to charge them.

During the programme, an alleged bookie Aneel Munnawar was seen making claims about his dubious connections and history of fixing matches including two Tests involving Virat Kohli's Indian team.

The ICC had launched an investigation into the claims. "The programme alleged that two matches were fixed: India v England in Chennai in 2016 and India v Australia in Ranchi in 2017. To assess whether the passages of play highlighted in the programme were unusual in any way, the ICC engaged four independent betting and cricketing specialists to analyse the claims," the ICC said in a release after it concluded its investigation.

"All four concluded that the passages of play identified in the programme as being allegedly fixed were entirely predictable, and therefore implausible as a fix," the release added.

"No charges will be brought under the ICC Anti-Corruption Code," the ICC said. — PTI



A screengrab of *Al Jazeera* documentary in which 'bookie' Aneel Munnawar claimed to have fixed matches.

'Sandpapergate' to be reopened

Melbourne, May 17: As Cricket Australia (CA) on Monday made it clear that it was open to a re-investigation into the 'Sandpapergate', former captain Michael Clarke said he won't be surprised if it comes to light that more players were aware of the ball-tampering plot in 2018. He also accused CA of sweeping the issue under the carpet.

"If you are playing sport at the highest level you know your tools that good it's not funny. Can you imagine that ball being thrown back to the bowler and the bowler not knowing about it? Please," Clarke told *Sky Sports*



Michael Clarke

radio on Monday.

"I love how the articles in the paper are, 'It is such a big surprise that Cameron Bancroft has made a ...'. Actually, if you read his quotes, it is not what he did say as what he didn't say in regards to other people knowing

about 'sandpapergate'," he said.

Following Bancroft's interview, Cricket Australia's integrity team has already approached the pacer for more information.

"What's the surprise? That more than three people knew? I don't think anybody who has played the game of cricket, or knows a little bit about cricket, would know that in a team like that, at the highest level, when the ball is such an important part of the game," Clarke said.

"That's why there's going to be finger-pointing until someone writes

AUSSIE PLAYER CHARGED WITH CHILD ABUSE

Melbourne, May 17: Australian domestic cricketer Aaron Summers, who has also played in the Big Bash League, was produced in a court in Darwin on Monday after being charged with child abuse. The 25-year-old fast bowler was charged with two counts of possessing child abuse material and one count of grooming a minor.

Arrested last week, Summers appeared in the Darwin Local Court, with police alleging that his mobile phone contained child abuse videos.

Summers represented Deccan Gladiators in the Abu Dhabi T10 league and has also played domestic cricket in Pakistan, the first Australian player to do so. He turned out for Southern Punjab in the Pakistan Cup.

— AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates with the Italian Open trophy after defeating Novak Djokovic in the final. — AFP

Nadal the king of Rome, again

Rome, May 17: Rafael Nadal defeated world number one Novak Djokovic to win a 10th Italian Open title on Sunday.

Second seed Nadal won through 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in 2hr 49min against the defending champion to match Djokovic's record of 36 Masters 1000 titles and lay down a key marker two weeks out from the defence of his Roland Garros crown.

"I really wanted this title. This had been one of the first important titles I won in my career. I'd won 10 in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Roland Garros and really wanted this one too," said 34-year-old Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal were facing each other for the 57th time, having last played in the 2020 French Open final which the Spaniard won easily in straight sets.

The pair have won 15 of the last 17 Rome titles between them, while Nadal leads their head-to-head in the Italian capital 4-2.

Despite losing his opening service game Nadal broke back in the third game hitting twice as many winners as the Serb with 21 in the set.

A dip in form in the second set allowed Djokovic, 33, to break twice and get back into the game.

But Nadal got back on track in the third with Djokovic having played nearly five hours on court on Saturday between his rain-delayed quarter-finals and semi-final matches.

The Spaniard saved two break points on his serve in the fifth game and broke for love for 4-2.

Djokovic saved a first match point in the eighth game but Nadal made no mistake on his second chance in the following to seal his 88th career title after winning in Barcelona earlier this month.

SERENA SAILS PAST TEENAGER

Serena Williams brushed aside the challenge of local teenager Lisa Pigato in the opening round of the WTA tournament in Parma on Monday.

Williams, ranked eighth in the world, beat the 572nd-ranked Pigato, making her WTA debut, 6-3, 6-2 in the first meeting between the two players.

The 39-year-old American had been given a wild card to play in Parma after her premature exit from the Italian Open, where she crashed out in the second round in what was her first match in nearly three months since her semi-final defeat in the Australian Open. — AFP

DORTMUND, WOLFSBURG BOOK BERTHS

Berlin, May 17: Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg clinched Champions League qualification, while Hamburger SV's hopes of rejoining the Bundesliga were put on hold for another year.

Dortmund won 3-1 at Mainz and Wolfsburg drew 2-2 at Leipzig to ensure both sides will finish among the top four to qualify for Europe's top club competition. Leipzig, who secured second place behind league champion Bayern Munich, were already assured of playing in the Champions League next season. Leipzig looked tired in their first game after losing the German Cup final to Dortmund on Thursday, but fought back with goals from Justin Kluivert and a penalty from Sabitzer. — AP

GOD PUT HIS HAND ON MY HEAD: BECKER

London, May 17: Liverpool kept alive their dreams of qualifying for the Champions League in remarkable circumstances as goalkeeper Alisson Becker scored a 95th-minute winner at West Bromwich Albion.

The emotional Brazilian, who lost his father in a drowning accident in February, dedicated the first goal of his senior career — a fine, glancing header — to his family as he said: "God put his hand on my head today".

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp claimed a partial assist for "the technically insane" goal that came after Mohamed Salah had cancelled out Hal Robson Kanu's opener for West Brom. — Agencies

OVER 80 PER CENT IN JAPAN OPPOSE OLYMPICS THIS YEAR

Tokyo, May 17: More than 80 per cent of Japanese polled oppose hosting the virus-postponed Olympics this year, a new survey showed on Monday, underlining public antipathy less than 10 weeks before the Tokyo Games.

The latest downbeat poll comes after Japan expanded a coronavirus state of emergency Friday as the nation battles a fourth wave of infections.

The surge in cases has put pressure on the country's healthcare system, with medical professionals repeatedly warning about shortages and burnout.

The weekend poll by the *Asahi Shimbun* daily found 43 per cent of respondents want the 2020 Games cancelled, with 40 per cent wanting a further postponement. Those figures are up from the 35 per cent who backed cancellation in a survey by the paper a month ago and the 34 per cent who wanted a further delay.

"I am one of those in the 80 per cent. I think the Olympics should be postponed. Is it that difficult to postpone it?" passer-by Sumiko Usui, 74, said. — AFP

Aussies home, CA chief lauds BCCI

Melbourne, May 17: Cricket Australia's interim chief executive Nick Hockley on Monday said he was "grateful" to the BCCI for ensuring a "safe and quick" return of Australia's IPL contingent from India following a stopover in Maldives. Australian players, including Pat Cummins, David Warner and Steve Smith, arrived in Sydney almost two weeks after the T20 league was indefinitely suspended following a breach in its Covid-19 bio-security bubble.

"We are delighted. We're really grateful to the BCCI for getting them home quickly and safely. I haven't spoken to them since they've landed, but obviously we've been in text exchange and I'm sure they'll be very relieved and very appreciative to be home," Hockley was quoted as saying in *Sydney Morning Herald*.

A group of 38 Australians, including 14 players, had left for Maldives on May 6 after the suspension of IPL 2021 as their government had banned flights from India till May 15 in the wake of unprecedented surge in Covid-19 cases there. Besides the players, the group included support staff and commentators, who were all flown out of India to the Maldives via chartered planes after the IPL's suspension.

The Australian cricketers, support staff and commentators will undergo a 14-day mandatory quarantine across hotels in Sydney before leaving for their respective destinations.

Chennai Super Kings' batting coach Michael Hussey also headed home on Sunday via Doha after testing negative for Covid-19 on Friday. — PTI

ATLETICO ON TRACK

Suarez's late strike helps Madrid team edge closer to title

Madrid, May 17: Diego Simeone hailed Luis Suarez as "extraordinary" on Sunday after the Uruguayan scored the goal that could win Atletico Madrid La Liga, his late winner snatching a dramatic 2-1 win over Osasuna.

Atletico trailed Osasuna with nine minutes to go at the Wanda Metropolitano and faced a defeat that would not just have postponed their bid to be champions but allowed Real Madrid, who were beating Athletic Bilbao, to go top with one game left.

Instead, Atletico scored in the 82nd and 88th minutes to pull off a stunning turnaround. Renan Lodi smashed in an equaliser before Suarez proved the hero, firing in from eight yards to spark mass celebrations.

"He's extraordinary," said Diego Simeone. "He came here wanting to prove people wrong,

Victory maintains Atletico's two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

wanting to show that he was a forward still at the top of his game. Who better than him to decide a match that seemed to be getting away from us?"

Atletico's players and substitutes piled onto Suarez in the corner and at full-time, some of their players dropped to their knees, not with ecstasy, but relief, the title now just one win away.

"These are moments of happiness," said Suarez. "It was one of the best first halves of the season. We missed a lot of chances, me in particular, but to win the league you have to suffer and today we stepped up."

To be crowned champions with a game to spare, Atletico needed Real Madrid to slip up at San

Mames but Nacho Fernandez put Real ahead in the second half and Atletico's priority quickly became preservation.

Victory maintains their two-point advantage and another win away at Real Valladolid next weekend will guarantee a second league title in 25 years.

MESSI'S FUTURE WITH BARCA DOUBTFUL

With Barcelona's season effectively over, Lionel Messi now has a big decision to make.

Should he finish out his career at the club that helped him become an all-time soccer great?

Or have the team's struggles to keep winning trophies convinced him that he can find more success in Paris or

Manchester?

Barcelona were left without any chance of winning the Spanish league on Sunday, bowing out the title race in demoralizing fashion after letting Celta Vigo overhaul a goal by Messi and rally for a 2-1 victory. Barcelona have one game left on the calendar, but with nothing to play for except third place in the league, the club's attention is now fully on the future of their inscrutable star.

Last summer, Messi had said he wanted to leave Barcelona after a campaign that finished without a title and a humiliating 8-2 loss to Bayern Munich in the Champions League.

When that exit was denied by the club, Messi said that he would focus on this season and put off any decision until this summer when his contract expires on June 30.

— Agencies

