

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

CHENNAI | SATURDAY 8 | MAY 2021

WEATHER



Max: 33°C
Min: 25°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Pilava: Chithirai 25
Tithi: Dhuvadhasi
Star: Uthratadhi
Rahukalam:
9 am to 10.30 am
Yamagandam:
1.30 pm to 3 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 4.31 am
Luhar: 12.11 pm
Asar: 3.19 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 7.40 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.26 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.45 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 3.35 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 4.37 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+3,95,200)	(+4,055)
2,18,80,583	2,38,129

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+26,465)
TN: 13,23,965 15,171

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

15,72,88,046

DEATHS

32,77,639

COUNTRIES
AREAS WITH
CASES 219

worldometers.info

BJP to boycott Bengal speaker's election

Kolkata: West Bengal Bharatiya Janata Party president Dilip Ghosh on Friday said that party legislatures will boycott the election for the speaker in West Bengal assembly and its newly elected lawmakers will not attend the House till the post-poll violence in the state is controlled. The Speaker's election is slated for Saturday. The BJP lawmakers will not attend the assembly in protest against the post poll violence, he said.

2-week total lockdown in Karnataka from May 10

Bengaluru: Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Friday announced a complete lockdown in the state for two weeks from May 10, Monday. "As Covid-19 cases are surging in the state, corona curfew was not successful. So, a complete lockdown will be imposed from 10th May 6 am to 24th May 6 am. "All hotels, pubs and bars will remain closed. Eateries, meat shops and vegetable shops can operate from 6-10 am," the Karnataka CM announced.

COUNTER POINT



He is staying in a bio-bubble these days!

Whataspp drops privacy norm deadline

New Delhi, May 7: WhatsApp has scrapped its May 15 deadline for users to accept its controversial privacy policy update and said not accepting the terms will not lead to deletion of accounts.

WhatsApp had faced severe backlash over user concerns that data was being shared with parent company Facebook.

A WhatsApp spokesperson said that no accounts will be deleted on May 15 for not



"No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either."

accepting the policy update.

"No accounts will be deleted on May 15 because of this update and no one in India will lose functionality of WhatsApp either. We will follow up with reminders to people over the next several

weeks," the spokesperson said in an emailed response to a query on Friday.

The spokesperson added that while a "majority of users who have received the new terms of service have accepted them", some people have not had the chance to do so yet.

However, the company did not clarify the reason behind the decision and did not divulge the number of users who have accepted the terms so far.

In January this year, WhatsApp had informed users about the changes in its terms of service and public policy through an in-app notification. Users were initially given time till February 8 to agree to the new terms in order to continue using the platform.



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Namassivayam likely to be Pondy Deputy CM



WORLD | 5

US braces for cicada wave after 17 years

SPORT | 8

Jadeja returns to India Test squad



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Vol. 17 No. 42 Established 1938 | 8 PAGES| ₹3.00

Stalin sworn in, makes travel free for women in city buses

■ Issues orders to implement 5 promises made in poll manifesto

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR, D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, who was sworn in along with his ministers on Friday, passed five orders relating to people's welfare on the first day in office, thus setting in motion the process of honouring the promises given during the elections, besides appointing a chief secretary to the state and four secretaries in his office.

Paying a relief of Rs 2000 as first instalment to families holding ration cards, reducing the price of Aavin milk by ₹3 a litre, making travel free for women in city buses, launching a department to look into the complaints of people collected during the campaign and providing insurance cover for those taking treatment in private hospitals were the orders passed.

All the measures were promised to the electorate as part of the DMK's manifesto unveiled during the hustings. Accordingly, family card holders will be paid ₹2000, the first installment of the total relief amount of ₹4,000 to ameliorate their livelihood problems wrought by the continuing Coronavirus crisis. Aavin milk, produced by the government milk cooperative, will cost ₹3 less a litre from May 16, thus lessening the financial burden of families. All women, those working and studying included, would be able to travel free of cost in ordinary fare city buses all over the state from Saturday.

Shilpa Prabakar Satish was appointed special officer for the newly-launched department, 'chief minister in your constituency,' which will address the grievances of the people, received through complaints dropped in the boxes kept at various places across the state during the 'Stalin in your constituency' election campaign.

The department coming directly under the chief minister will make efforts to solve the problems of the people as mentioned in the complaints within 100 days. Stalin had assured the people that their grievances would be redressed in 100 days after he assumed office when collecting the complaints.



Governor Banwarilal Purohit greets M.K. Stalin after swearing him as Chief Minister at Raj Bhavan in Chennai on Friday.

— DC

V. IRAI ANBU IS NEW CHIEF SECY

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

The government on Friday appointed additional chief secretary Dr Irai Anbu as chief secretary to government in place of Mr Rajeev Ranjan.

Mr Anbu is at present director, Anna Institute of Management and director-general of training.

Mr Ranjan is transferred as chairman and managing director of Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Papers Limited.

The fifth order passed related to the government settling the medical bills of people undergoing treatment for Covid-19 under the Tamil Nadu Government Insurance Scheme. This would help those going to private hospitals during the pandemic.

The Chief Minister's office will now have IAS officers T Udhayachandran as Secretary - I, P Umanath as Secretary - II, M S Shannmugam as Secretary - III and Anu George as Secretary - IV.

Rift in AIADMK over LoP post

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Thiruvudaimarathur MLA Govi Chezhan was on Friday appointed government chief whip on Friday.

The selection of Mr Chezhan may assuage the sentiments of DMK members from Thanjavur district which has no representative in the ministry.

Meanwhile, the legislative parties of the AIADMK and the Congress that met in Chennai on Friday could not decide on electing a leader.

While the AIADMK honchos claimed that they would be able to decide on the name in a couple of days, the TNCC entrusted the job with party president Sonia Gandhi. Both the meetings were reportedly stormy with the members taking sides and unable

to come to a conclusion.

The AIADMK's legislative party leader will also be the leader of the opposition in the Assembly and hence a prestigious post having some privileges akin to ministers.

In the AIADMK, it was learnt that one camp wanted coordinator O. Panneerselvam to be the leader and the other camp wanted co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami as the leader, bringing to the fore the traditional rift that has been simmering for a long time.

The meeting of the 18 MLAs of the Congress, despite being held under the supervision of AICC representatives, could not arrive at a conclusion since two MLAs from Kanyakumari district - Prince from Colachel and Vijayadharini from Vilavancode - claimed seniority and wanted the post.

THE FIRST

5

1 Cleared payment of ₹2000 as first instalment of a total of ₹4,000 as relief to families holding ration cards



2 Reduced price of Aavin milk by ₹3 a litre



3 Made travel free for all women, including students, in city buses

4 Launched a department to look into the complaints of people collected during the campaign

5 Ordered insurance cover for those taking treatment for Covid-19 in private hospitals

NR TAKES OVER AS PONDY CM, TEAM TO FOLLOW

Puducherry, May 7: All-India NR Congress leader N. Ranganasamy was on Friday sworn in as Chief Minister of Puducherry at a brief ceremony held at Raj Nivas here on Friday.

Lt Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr Ranganasamy, who has become Chief Minister for the fourth time.

He took the oath in Tamil and in the name of God. Mr Ranganasamy alone took oath on Friday. The BJP will be part of the NDA government.

The swearing in of the other ministers belonging to the AINRC and BJP would be held in next few days, AINRC party sources said. Chief secretary Ashwin Kumar read out the presidential notification appointing Ranganasamy as chief minister.

— PTI

We can stop third wave, says expert

DC CORRESPONDENT
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

● **"It all depends on how much the guidelines are effectively implemented at local level."**

Principal scientific adviser to the Union government K. VijayRaghavan on Friday said India will be able to avoid a third wave of the pandemic Covid-19 if strong steps and measures are taken.

"If we take strong steps and measures, the third wave may not happen in all the places or indeed anywhere at all," Dr VijayRaghavan said, addressing a press briefing of the Union ministry of health. "It all depends on how much the guidelines are effectively implemented at local level."

Dr VijayRaghavan had on May 5 said as the virus mutates further, a third wave of Covid infection is inevitable and it is necessary to be prepared for new waves.

He said the "insidious asymptomatic transmission" can be stopped if the guidance about precautions, surveillance, containment, treatment and testing is followed. "This sounds difficult, it is difficult and we can and must do it," he said.

He had said it was not expected that the second wave would hit the country with such ferocity. "Phase three is inevitable

given the higher levels of circulating virus, but it is not clear on what time-scale this phase three will occur," he had said.

He said the second wave, which has already infected lakhs and killed thousands, will ebb. "It has already started declining in some places," he said. The number of cases and the positivity will decline and there will be a lag in hospitalisation and mortality, he added.

"There are other places of great concern all over the country. We must watch out and make sure that we take all steps to reduce and go up to the levels which are difficult to manage," he cautioned.

In the briefing, Additional Secretary in the health ministry Arti Ahuja said the Covid-19 case positivity is more than 15 per cent in more than 24 states and union territories including Goa, West Bengal, Karnataka, Delhi, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh, while it is between 5 to 15 per cent in nine states.

Modi, not system, failed India: Sonia

New Delhi, May 7: Amid rising Covid-19 cases, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Friday said it is not the system but the Modi government that has failed the people by not being able to channelise resources, and demanded an all-party meeting be convened immediately.

Addressing the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) meeting virtually, she said the party's performance in the just-concluded assembly elections was very disappointing and MPs must draw "appropriate lessons from this setback in the spirit of humility and honesty".

Noting that the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic transcends political differences and everyone has to fight it together, Ms Gandhi launched a

fierce attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging that India is crippled by a political leadership that has no empathy for the people.

She demanded that a meeting of the parliamentary standing committees be convened to ensure collective action and accountability to combat the pandemic better.

"Let us be absolutely clear -- the system hasn't failed. The Modi government has been unable to constructively channelise India's many strengths and resources. I say this categorically -- India is crippled by a political leadership today that has no empathy for the people. The Modi government has failed the people of our country," Ms Gandhi said.

LARGEST CARGO PLANE BRINGS UK AID TO INDIA

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Britain loaded the world's largest cargo plane (Russian-make Antonov 124) through Thursday night to dispatch a flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators for India on Friday from Belfast, Northern Ireland, the British high commission said here on Friday.

The British high commission said: "A flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators due to leave Belfast today in support of India's fight against Covid-19...Each oxygen generator produces 500 litres of oxygen per minute and is the size of a 40ft shipping container."

It said these are expected to reach India on Sunday morning, and the Indian Red Cross will help transfer them to hospitals.

New Delhi, May 7: The Supreme Court on Friday made clear to the Centre that it will have to keep supplying 700 MT of oxygen to Delhi every day till its order is modified, saying it meant "business" and non-compliance may force it to go "firm".

Two days ago, the top court had stayed the contempt proceedings initiated by Delhi High Court against central government officials for non-compliance of direction to supply 700 MT of oxygen for Covid patients to Delhi, saying "putting officers in jail" would not bring oxygen and efforts should be made to save lives.

A bench comprising Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah had said however that the Centre will have to ensure supply of 700 MT of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) to the national capital daily.

In the proceedings conducted via video conferencing, the bench on Friday was told by senior

SC talks tough, asks Centre to supply oxygen to Delhi

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APEX COURT REFUSES TO HEAR PIL SEEKING STAY ON CENTRAL VISTA

New Delhi, May 7: The Supreme Court on Friday told petitioners to go back to the Delhi High Court if they want a speedy hearing on the public interest litigation seeking a stay on the construction of the Central Vista amid the raging Covid pandemic, but agreed that the situation is indeed grim.

"When we are sitting in closed rooms with face masks, itself shows the situation is grim. We

would not like to make any further comments on the Covid situation as other benches are seized of the matter, otherwise our remarks may be misinterpreted," Justice Vineet Saran observed.

The bench refused to entertain a plea by senior advocate Siddarth Luthra who had wanted the apex court to force the Delhi High Court to hear immediately the PIL against the construction.

made for a day then so many caveats like "containers are not there" and there are difficulties in transportation are being put. Justice Chandrachud, speaking for the bench, said that he has consulted Justice Shah on the issue before the hearing on Friday.

— PTI

OTHER STORIES

RSA-PK founder greets Stalin

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MAY 7

Rettamalai Srinivasanar Arakkattalai and Parayar Kootamaippu (RSA-PK) congratulated DMK president M.K. Stalin for becoming the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Addressing a press conference here on Friday, founder of RSA-PK, Radha, said that more than 1.5 crore Parayar community people in the state were congratulating Stalin, and appealed to Stalin to give two cabinet berths, and the speaker's post to members of the Parayar community.

IUML chief hails Stalin's poll win

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MAY 7

Prof. K.M. Kader Mohideen, national president, Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), on Friday congratulated DMK president M.K. Stalin on his assuming office as the Chief Minister.

In a release here on Friday, Kader Mohideen, while thanking Stalin for giving two cabinet berths for Muslims, lauded Stalin's Socialistic Vision (Samuga parava), by giving representation to almost all majority communities members in his cabinet. Kader further said the entire Muslim community hailed Stalin for his gesture towards the Muslims, and hoped that Stalin and his cabinet colleagues would provide overall good governance to the state and its people.

Prince of Arcot greets CM, cabinet colleagues

Chennai: In his congratulatory message to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his Cabinet colleagues, the Prince of Arcot, Nawab Mohammed Abdul Ali on Friday extended his warm and hearty greetings over their taking charge as the new government of the state.

The Prince said Mr Stalin and his democratic party, DMK have achieved spectacular success to form a secular government in the state. The Prince of Arcot urged the Chief Minister to keep secularism on the top of his agenda. The state is confident that the government, under the Chief Minister's able and dynamic guidance, will defend and protect the minorities, religious, linguistic or any other, he added.

Four secretaries to CM named

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

The Tamil Nadu government appointed four IAS officers as secretaries to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin with immediate effect on Friday.

According to the order passed by the government on Friday, the IAS officers T. Udhayachandran, P. Umanath, M.S. Shanmugam and Anu George will be Chief Minister's secretaries.

T. Udhayachandran, who was the Commissioner of Archaeology, has been posted as the Principal Secretary 1.

The state government also created three temporary posts in the grade of secretary to the government and appointed Dr P. Umanath, M.S. Shanmugam and Anu George to these posts.

P. Umanath, managing director, Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation has been appointed as secretary 2.

M.S. Shanmugam, the Commissioner of Museums, who had earlier occupied the post of managing director, Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board, has been appointed as secretary 3.

Anu George, Industries Commissioner and Director, Industries and Commerce, has been appointed as secretary 4.

Swearing-in ceremony and after

Love, respect, admiration in full throttle

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

The swearing in of M. K. Stalin as Chief Minister on Friday at the Raj Bhavan, along with his team of 33 Ministers, though a simple function, turned out to be a momentous occasion for his family, party and stalwarts of the Dravidian movement.

Stalin, who left his home at around 8.30 am, was at the Raj Bhavan by 8.40, where he was welcomed by his party colleagues, family members and other select invitees.

When the Governor Banwarilal Purohit reached the well decorated pandal erected for the purpose of holding the ceremony in the Raj Bhavan lawns, Stalin introduced him to his colleagues, important guests and family members, including his grandchildren.

Stalin's wife Durga Stalin turned emotional as the Chief Minister uttered the words 'I, Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin,' plucking a filial chord, and was seen wiping her tears



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin turns emotional while paying floral tributes to the portrait of his father and late DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi at Gopalapuram. —DC

over the mask. After the swearing in, Stalin drove straight to his parents' Gopalapuram, where he grew up amidst politicians

and Dravidian leaders. While paying floral tributes to his father's portrait in the house, Stalin turned emotional and his sister

Selvi kindly led him away from the place. He paid respects to the senior relatives who had come over there to greet him and also

sought the blessings of his mother Dayaluammal.

Later he visited the house of Rajathi Ammal and sought her blessings. Sister Kanimozhi was there to receive him and take him to her mother with sisterly affection.

Then, the newly sworn in Chief Minister drove to the Marina to pay respects at the samadhis of M Karunanidhi and C N Annadurai, the first and second Chief Ministers of the DMK party.

His next destination was Periyar Thidal, where he visited the memorial of Periyar E V Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement. DK President K Veeramani welcomed Stalin and also presented him with a book on Periyar.

Then, before reaching the Secretariat to assume office at around 12.15 pm, Stalin went to the residence of former DMK general secretary K Anabalan and paid tributes at his portrait there.

After taking a guard of honour, presented to him by the police as he entered

the Secretariat premises as Chief Minister for the first time, Stalin sat down in his office to sign the five files relating to the welfare schemes for the people, thus honouring the first set of poll promises.

Later in the day, Stalin visited a newly constructed Covid Care Centre, which is to be opened soon for the public, and also held a meeting with district collectors through video conference.

His swearing in ceremony saw almost all the senior party leaders and coalition party leaders attending it, besides AIADMK coordinator O Panneerselvam, who was seated in the same table, along with the Governor, Chief Minister and a few DMK leaders when tea was served after the function.

Among the senior political leaders who attended the event were Veeramani, MDMK general secretary Vaiko, VCK's Thol Thirumavalavan, Congress leaders K S Alagiri, Dinesh Gundu Rao, P Chidambaram, Thirunavukarasar, PMK's G K Mani, BJP leader L

Ganesan, MMK leader M H Jawahirullah, MNM's Kamal Haasan and ASMK's Sharat Kumar.

Stalin took his oath of office and oath of secrecy 'in the name of conscience' following the traditions of the DMK and all the Ministers who followed him to the stage too took it in the 'name of conscience.'

Since Stalin had urged his party cadre to watch the swearing in on television from their homes, in view of the coronavirus threat, supporters sitting before the television sets across the state turned sentimental and started celebrating in their own spheres.

Lighting of fire crackers, distribution of sweets and dancing on the streets were reported from all over the State with small groups of DMK cadre, breaking into celebrations. A group of supporters who tried to visit the DMK headquarters was advised by the police to go home and watch the proceedings on TV.

Greens laud separate minister for water resources management

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Environmental activists have welcomed the appointment of a separate minister for handling matters on water resources, which were incorporated in the public works department (PWD) so far. Durai Murugan, former PWD minister, took oath as water resources minister after a long-pending demand by various organisations and activists for separating water resources from the PWD.

V. Subramani, general secretary, Exnora International (water bodies), said they had been demanding the same over a decade for the better development and control of water bodies. "We were pointing out the model in the union government which has a separate ministry for water resources. There are 17 major river basins in the state with 61 reservoirs and about 41,948 tanks. The total surface water potential of the state is 36 km³, he said.

The state has got as many as 39,000 tanks, out of which around 10,000 are being controlled by the PWD. Of 10,000 tanks, about 5,000 tanks are system tanks fed by riverine channels. The rest 5,000 tanks are enriched by rainfall. The rest of the water bodies, like tanks and Oorani, are maintained by various departments including railways, universities and local bodies

V. Rama Rao, a social activist and chairman, Sabari Green Foundation, said that PWD was so far overburdened by various matters not getting focus on water resources. The PWD had ignored small streams and tanks, busy building dams. Moreover, there were many stakeholders like local bodies, railways, defence, university and fisheries. Setting up a separate portfolio will help to get all of them onboard', he said.

Dr Shekhar Raghavan, Chennai's Rain Man and founder of Rain Centre, said it was a step in the right direction. "Appointment of Durai Murugan, who has experi-

ence in handling PWD, is expected to make some progress in the water resource management in the state especially in urban areas. We had studied this matter post 2015 flood and suggested the government for the creation of a 'rainwater department' to manage the water predominantly received through seasonal rainfall. I hope there would be a separate department for rainwater harvesting," he said.

V. Prabhakaran, of 'Poovulagin Nambargal', said a separate agency would help to expedite measures for restoring and protecting the fast-depleting water resources

in the state especially in urban areas. "Various studies have pointed that Chennai was one of the major cities in the country which exploit groundwater tables indiscriminately. Industries, bottled water companies and agriculture are main reasons for that. Now a separate minister can look into these matters without pressure from the PWD," he said.

It may be recalled that on last July 30 a division bench comprising M.M. Sundresh and R. Hemalatha passed directions while hearing a plea of S. Kalaiyarasi that there should be a separate ministry in the government to deal with encroachments, preservation of water bodies and replenishing natural resources.

Earlier this year, the National Green Tribunal, southern zone, Chennai, had ordered the district administration to constitute a "task force" to protect the water bodies in the city from pollution and encroachments.

Rare show of bonhomie



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, Governor Banwarilal Purohit, O. Panneerselvam and Duriamurugan having tea together at Raj Bhavan on Friday. — DC



Durga Stalin, Udhayanidhi Stalin and other family members at the swearing-in ceremony in Raj Bhavan on Friday. — N. Sampath



MNM president Kamal Haasan gestures at the ceremony. — DC



Political leaders N. Balakrishnan, Vaiko, Tirumavalavan seated together. — DC



Lyricist Vairamuthu greets BJP's Ila. Ganesan. — DC

Coonoor MLA gets forest min portfolio

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC
OOTY, MAY 7

A Nilgiri politician has been given ministerial berth after a decade as K. Ramachandran, Coonoor MLA, has become a cabinet minister for a second term as minister of forests. Hence, 'Greens' here have urged him to show full commitment on addressing conservation issues.

K. Ramachandran, a Badaga resident, hailing from Elithorai village, was minister in M. Karunanidhi cabinet in 2006 and 2011. Now, he has been accommo-

N. Sadiq Ali, founder, Wildlife and Nature Conservation Trust, said that Ramachandran should give top priority to evict encroachments in forest lands and evolve plans to manage the man-animal conflict, besides taking steps to restore the lost habitats to make the Nilgiris 'The natural Oxygen bank', in the state

dated in the M.K. Stalin cabinet. Though M. Budhichandran of AIADMK, who won in Ooty in 2011 polls, found his way

to the J. Jayalalithaa cabinet in 2011, he lasted there for only about five months. Since then, for nearly a decade, Nilgiris did not get representation in the TN cabinet.

Now, K. Ramachandran, who won all three elections he contested, created another record of sorts by becoming the first Nilgiri resident to become minister for a second term.

Green activists here wanted Ramachandran to give high priority for conserving forest and hill ecology of the Nilgiris.

B.K. Kumaran, president,

Nilgiris Ecology and Animals Protection Samithi, said that Ramachandran should himself become a conservationist, and lead by example. "Nilgiris is the first biosphere reserve in the country. The DMK government in 1996 and in 2006, resisted many challenges in conservation issues in the Nilgiris. In fact, the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve came into being during the DMK regime in 2008. Likewise, the DMK government gave its nod for creating the elephant corridor in Segur valley, and turned down the proposed contro-

versial neutrino project in the Nilgiris. As forest minister, K. Ramachandran should work towards expanding the forest cover and conserving the ecology," urged Kumaran.

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IN BRIEF

'PF near you' on Monday

Chennai: The Nidhi Apke Nikat/ PF near you will be conducted by the Regional Office of Employee's Provident fund Organisation Tambaram on May 10, Monday, for members/employers who are having their Provident Fund Account /who are drawing pension/ who are registered at RO Tambaram through virtual meet.

The persons who have not got resolution for their grievances shall register their grievances by sending email to tam-grievances@epfindia.gov.in

Members can join the programme virtually through Google Meet by following the link <http://meet.google.com/zji-jujh-uks> on 10.05.2021 from 11.00am to 01.00 pm.

Pension Adalat to be held

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Pension Adalat will be conducted by the Regional Office of Employee's Provident fund Organisation Tambaram on May 10, for Pensioners under EPS who are drawing their pension at Regional Office, Tambaram through virtual meet. The persons who desire to get their pension related grievances redressed are requested to register their grievances by sending email to tam-grievances@epfindia.gov.in quoting the subject "Pension Adalat".

Members can join the programme virtually through Google Meet by following the link <http://meet.google.com/zji-jujh-uks> on 10.05.2021 from 02.30p.m to 04.30 pm.

Namassivayam likely to be Pondy Deputy CM

Puducherry May 7: A. Namassivayam was elected unanimously as the leader of the legislature wing of BJP at a meeting of the party's legislators held in the party office here on Friday.

In the meanwhile, Union minister of state for home affairs Kishan Reddy, who attended the swearing-in of Rangasamy as Chief Minister, told newsmen that BJP and AINRC would have three minis-

ters each and they would be sworn in the next few days.

The three BJP ministers would include a Deputy Chief Minister.

The six Ministers are likely to be sworn in in the next couple of days and this would ultimately bring the strength of the Puducherry Ministry to seven, including the Chief Minister.

A BJP source told PTI that Namassivayam would be Deputy Chief

Minister and this would be first time in the history of Puducherry to have a Deputy Chief Minister. BJP national general secretary C. T. Ravi, party observer Nirmal Kumar Surana and party's in-charge for Puducherry Rajiv Chandrasekar and Independent legislator from Yanam Gollapalli Srinivas Ashok, who defeated AINRC leader N Rangasamy in the April 6 polls, were among those present. —PTI

11 of 183 people at CM's swearing-in test positive

Puducherry May 7: A mobile team of the health department of Puducherry examined each of the 183 people at the venue of swearing-in of Chief Minister N Rangasamy on Friday and found 11 of them were infected with Covid-19. Of the 11, nine were police personnel and the remaining two invitees to the function, a press release said.

The 11 were denied permission to enter the venue and were sent to a hospital. The territorial administration observed safety protocols and examined all who turned up for the function. Admission to the venue was restricted to a limited number of people. —PTI

Heroin worth ₹100 crore seized from 2 Tanzanians

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

In one of the biggest drug busts of heroin/narcotics at any international across the country, the officials at Chennai International airport seized 15.6 kg of heroin, worth ₹100 crore from two Tanzanian nationals on Friday.

According to the department of air customs, based on the information that narcotics from African countries are likely to be smuggled into India, a high alert was maintained at the airport.

A couple, who arrived by Qatar Airways flight 528 from Johannesburg via Doha were intercepted at the exit on suspi-

cion of carrying narcotics. On questioning, they appeared to be nervous and gave evasive replies.

They were identified by the official as Deborah Eliah (46) and Felix Obadia (45) of Tanzania from their passports. They both were carrying two stroller bags each as their check-in baggage.

On examination, it was noticed that there was a false bottom in which plastic packets were concealed. In each stroller, five plastic packets were found and on opening it, the white coarse powder was found inside. The plastic packets were sprinkled with some spicy powder to camouflage the smell.

The powder tested posi-

tive for heroin with a drug testing kit. Total, 15.6 kg of white coarse powder suspected to be Heroin valued at Rs. 100 crore were recovered and seized under The NDPS Act 1985, read with Customs Act.

On questioning, it was learnt that Deborah Eliah was travelling to India for medical treatment along with her attendant Felix at a Super Speciality Hospital at Bengaluru on a visa granted to them on basis of communication from the Hospital. As they could not get any direct flight to Bengaluru, they landed in Chennai. Both have been arrested under NDPS Act. Investigations are in progress.

Two die, five hurt as vehicles collide near Karur

DC CORRESPONDENT
KARUR, MAY 7

Two persons were killed and five others including a woman were injured in a multi-vehicle collision involving a minivan, two-wheeler and a lorry, at Pavithiram, falling within the K. Paramathi police limits near here, on Friday.

Police identified the dead as Senthilkumar (41) of Nedunur village, driver of the minivan and Ramanathan (55) two-wheeler rider from Pugalur, who died at a private hospital in Karur.

The injured, Srinivasan (car driver), Dinesh and Brindha, occupants of the car, Rajendran, occupant of the minivan and lorry driver Duraisamy, were admitted to a private hospital here. K. Paramathi police are investigating.

Snag hits three TTPS units, work halted

ARULOLI M | DC
THOOTHUKUDI, MAY 7

Power generation in the 5x210MW Thoothukudi Thermal Power station (TTPS) drastically fell to 420MW on Friday, following the breakdown of three of its units.

On May 6, the TTPS was found functioning much below half its capacity against its full capacity of producing 1,050 MW. A Southern Regional Load Despatch centre (SRLDC) report said, the fourth unit was kept in standby mode for the past two weeks due to a condenser problem. The total generation in the rest of the four units (Units 1,2,3 and 5) on May 6, was 432 MW.

But power generation fell further on May 7, as two more units, unit 2 and 3, broke down.

Only first and fifth units were operational, said a senior engineer, who added that the functioning two units have been presently put on its full operating capacity of producing 210MW each.

The nuclear power station near Kudankulam in Tirunelveli district generates 1,851MW under a joint venture project of NLC and TANGEDCO.

The snag-hit three TTPS units are expected to become operational in a day or two.

Is MNM disintegrating?

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Expressing anger over the humiliation allegedly meted out to Makkal Neethi Maiaam (MNM) vice president R Mahendran by party founder Kamal Haasan, four district secretaries from Dindigul put in their papers on Friday, portending a collapse of the party structure.

In their letter to Haasan, the senior functionaries, Jaffar, Sivasakthivel, Omkumar and Karupasamy, said that they were unhappy about his remarks against Mahendran, who, they said, had spent a lot of money during the elections for the party.

Mahendran, too, gave interviews to media channels accusing Haasan of behaving in a tyrannical manner. Even the Dindigul functionaries said that there was no inner party democracy.

Earlier, eight executive committee members submitted their resignations en masse when the committee met on Thursday at the party headquarters to discuss a slew of issues.

The members, R Mahendran, M Muruganantham, A G Mourya, Thangavel, Umadevi, C K Kumaravel, Sekar and Suresh Iyer, however, left it to the party president Kamal Haasan to take a call on their resignations, a press release from MNM had said.

The disenchantment over the leadership of Haasan has started rearing its ugly head after the party drew a blank in the Assembly elections, which it contested in an alliance with Sarathkumar's All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi.

Other than Haasan, who came a close second in Coimbatore West constituency, none of the candidates polled enough votes to get their deposit back.

Both Haasan and Sarath Kumar subsequently met Chief Minister elect M K Stalin individually at his residence, ostensibly to greet him on his winning the elections. They were also present at the swearing-in of Chief Minister on

Friday. Kameela Nazar, who held a post in the party and also contested the Lok Sabha elections in 2019 from Central Chennai, left the party some time back. She too called on Stalin after the elections.

Though the MNM press release did not mention the name of V Ponraj, former advisor of A P J Abdul Kalam, in the list of those who have resigned, some reports said that he too has quit. Ponraj had also contested the Assembly elections. So, did Mahendran.

Mahendran has reportedly complained about the style of functioning of Haasan, which he had described as anti-democratic. It is said that functionaries were peeved over Haasan's recent statement, accusing the party leaders of slackness during the elections which contributed to its abysmal loss.

Launched in 2018, MNM drew to its fold several educated persons. Mourya, who has now resigned, is a former IPS officer. There were successful entrepreneurs like C K Kumaravel and young people among those who wanted to join hands with Haasan and bring about a change in politics.

Backed with a high profile public relation exercise, the party was projecting itself as an alternative to the Dravidian parties in the State and as one that would usher in a new political culture and climate and contested the 2019 elections.

Even after the party failed to make a mark in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Haasan ran the party, in which he was elected as the life-time president, and also fought it out in the Assembly elections, projecting him as the Chief Ministerial candidate.

Now that the leaders who formed the mainstay of the party have resigned, it is not clear how the founder is going to restructure the party and give it a new focus as he had told the functionaries. Or will he prevail upon the functionaries to take back their resignations and continue in the posts?



A.R. Gladstone Pushparaj, District Collector, along with SP Sivakumar and other officials check if lockdown guidelines are being followed at Walajah in Ranipet district on Friday. —DC

HC rejects plea against appointment of Justice Baskaran as chairperson of TN State Human Rights Commission

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

The Madras high court has dismissed a petition, which sought to declare as unconstitutional and illegal, the appointment of Justice S. Baskaran, a retired judge of the Madras high court, to the post of chairperson of Tamil Nadu State Human Rights Commission and further direct the state government to invite all eligible and suitable persons to offer their candidature and consider their merit on a rational basis and appoint the most suitable person.

The first bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice Senthilkumar Ramamoorthy dismissed the Public Interest Litigation filed by advocate Logeshwar.

The bench said the petition is utterly misconceived and no further time be wasted thereon. These frivolous matters tend to take up substan-

tial court time and, more often than not, counsel furthering hopeless causes tend to dilate and seek to rely on judgments that may have no bearing on the issue at hand, the bench added.

The bench said the principal grievance of the petitioner appears to be that the post was not advertised. Apart from the fact that the statute does not require any advertisement, in this case, there was an exalted Selection Committee which was ordained by the statute and it was not an ordinary process of selection. The Chief Minister of a State, in consultation with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Home and the Leader of the Opposition would choose an appropriate person to be appointed as Chairperson or others as Members of the State Commission. As long as the appointee fulfils the eligibility criteria, that would suffice. This was because unlike ordi-

nary appointments, these were crucial posts where appointments were primarily made by invitation. The Selection Committee may discuss such names as they may choose and even if there was no advertisement issued, the process cannot be flawed. From the counter affidavit of the State, it appears that the selection was made from a list of two retired Chief Justices and 39 retired judges of this court, all of whom fulfilled the eligibility criteria, the bench added.

The bench said since the best arguable case of the petitioner appears to be contrary to the provisions of section 21 and 22 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, the present incumbent need not be disturbed as he has not been issued notice. The State was represented and Advocate general has justified the appointment challenged by the petitioner, the bench pointed out and dismissed the petition.

In the reply, the BDO and the district social welfare officer failed to send any notice to the complainant to produce the educational certificates for sanctioning the marriage assistance and Ramya is a fully qualified person to receive marriage assistance. The commission directed the government to pay a compensation of ₹50,000 to Ramya.

SHRC asks govt to pay ₹50K as damages to woman

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 7

The State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) has directed the government to pay a compensation of ₹50,000 to a woman for rejecting her application seeking assistance from the government six years ago.

In the complaint, S. Ramya of Kavalagudi, Kattumannarkoil, Cuddalore district stated

that she completed B.Sc.-IT course and approached the government in 2015 seeking assistance under the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammayar Ninaivu Marriage Assistance Scheme for her marriage. She submitted all relevant documents. But the district social welfare officer, Cuddalore rejected her application for not producing certificates. She sought the SHRC to take suitable action against

block development officer, Nallur, and district social welfare officer, Cuddalore.

In the reply, the BDO and the district social welfare officer stated that Ramya did not produce educational certificates along with the application.

SHRC member D Jayachandran said Ramya had categorically established the fact that she is a BSc.(IT) graduate and married one Selvakumar and the compe-

tent officer had issued the marriage registration certificate. The BDO and the district social welfare officer failed to send any notice to the complainant to produce the educational certificates for sanctioning the marriage assistance and Ramya is a fully qualified person to receive marriage assistance. The commission directed the government to pay a compensation of ₹50,000 to Ramya.

MADURAI CELEBRATES



After M. K. Alagiri congratulated his younger brother Stalin, the former's supporters put up posters with messages like 'Inayum ullangale' in Madurai.

(Far above) DMK cadres cut cake near Goripalayam in Madurai, after DMK leader M. K. Stalin was sworn-in as the Chief Minister of the state on Friday. —DC

And the bronze goes to....

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MAY 7

Which is the third largest political party in the state, now, going by the performance in the just concluded elections to the Assembly?

Seeman's Naam Tamizhar Katchi (NTK) says the media and no, it is us, says the Congress.

While some media houses handed over the bronze to NTK by just counting the total number of votes polled, with the gold and silver automatically going to the DMK and AIADMK, the Congress staking its claim has led to a sort of playoff for the third place in knockout sports tournaments.

While NTK supporters and also many in the media point to the close to 8 per cent votes polled by the party that contested in all the 234 constituencies, winning or coming runner-up in none, and con-

clude that it is indeed the third biggest vote getter, TNCC president K S Alagiri begs to differ.

His argument was that the grand old party that contested in 25 seats, winning 18 of them, had polled a total of 20 lakh votes, which comes to an average of 80,000 per constituency. He also refers to the MPs from the state to claim that it is a party that has more supporters than the NTK.

In the case of NTK, Seeman polled the most number of votes - 48,597 or 24.3 per cent of the total votes - in Thiruvottiyur constituency. Otherwise only 14 of NTK candidates polled 10 per cent votes in their respective constituencies and the average vote of its candidates was just 13,000 votes.

Alagiri wondered as to how a party that has not won a single seat ever in its history could be in the reckoning for the third place. He accused Seeman

of espousing anti-national policies and said his party has no intention to win and contested elections only to lose.

Blaming the media that endowed the third place to NTK of covering up the political reality on the field, he alleged that it was not fair to give twisted interpretations to the election outcome when the fact was that the NTK or the other parties like Kamal Haasan's Makkal Neethi Miam were unable to even win a single seat.

Apart from the accusations of the Congress, the NTK has also been flayed by many for dishing out lies and unrealistic promises and luring youth, mostly first time voters, to its fold. Seeman's unsubstantiated claims about his proximity to the LTTE leaders, particularly Velupillai Prabhakaran, and his false claims on every other issue have regularly come under attack

from many quarters.

Even some media houses had gone to the extent of propounding that it was the NTK that took away the votes of the AIADMK, leading to its fall in the elections, getting carried away by its nearly 7 per cent vote share.

Some other activists saw in the younger generation's preference for Seeman as a leader a dangerous trend as he unabashedly declares that his would be a dictatorial government, if elected to power. The lack of democratic values among the youth was not a healthy trend, they point out.

If so many youth had voted for the party that did not have a professed political ideology and did not even come out with a manifesto for the elections, it showed the next generation's lack of collective political aspirations and their tendency to get carried away by bombast.

SHORT TAKES

TRIPURA: INPT TO MERGE WITH TIPRA

Agartala: A month after their alliance won the state tribal council polls, the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra (INPT), the oldest tribal party in the state, has merged with the Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) to achieve their "common goal of Greater Tripaland".

The merger was announced by TIPRA chairman Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman here on Thursday.

The TIPRA and the INPT had contested the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADDC) polls as alliance partners on April 6 and won 18 out of the total 28 seats.

The BJP secured nine seats and the other seat was won by an independent candidate.

In the 30-member tribal council, elections are held for 28 seats, and representatives in the remaining two seats are nominated by the governor on the advice of the state government.

TIPRA chairman Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman told reporters, the merger was a "post-poll unification to achieve the common goal of forming Greater Tripaland."

This merger is for the unity of the entire tribal community of the state. We want other tribal parties also to unite to achieve their common goal."

U.P. POLL: WRONG CANDIDATES DECLARED WINNERS

Gorakhpur (UP): An FIR has been registered against a government official deputed as additional returning officer (ARO) in the Uttar Pradesh panchayat polls for allegedly giving winning certificates to candidates who lost, an official said on Friday. Additional returning officer (ARO) Virendra Kumar has been booked for cheating, forgery and fraud on a complaint from Returning Officer Sunil Kumar, a senior police official said.

On Wednesday night, there were incident of arson in Nai Bazar police outpost by the supporters of the candidates who alleged that they was not declared winner due to fraud committed by the official. Police have arrested 18 people and lodged four separate FIRs in connection with vandalism and arson of the police outpost.

After the counting of votes on Tuesday, Ravi Nishad, a candidate of district Panchayat ward number 60, and Kodai Nishad, of ward number 61, claimed they have won the election with over 2,000 votes, but the administration didn't give them certificate. On Wednesday morning, certificates of victory was given to Gopal Yadav for ward number 60 and Ramesh for ward number 61.

The supporters of Ravi and Kodai held a demonstration at Nai Bazar crossing, pelted stones, and also set ablaze the police post there.

LION AT ETAWAH SAFARI PARK TESTS COVID-19 POSITIVE

Bareilly (UP): A lion at the Etawah Safari Park has tested positive for Covid-19 and another was suspected to have caught the infection, days after eight Asiatic lions in Hyderabad were found infected with the virus.

"Sixteen samples of 14 Asiatic lions at the Etawah Safari Park had been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) for RT-PCR tests for Covid-19. On Thursday, one lion tested positive for the virus, while another was considered as a suspected case. The remaining 12 lions have tested negative," IVRI Joint Director Dr KP Singh said.

He said the sample of a lion was also received from the Delhi zoo and its report came out negative on Friday.

He said the report of the samples of the lions is being sent to the government besides the safari park management.

The chain of transmission of the virus could have taken place through any asymptomatic human carrier, probably caretakers, working at the park, Dr Singh said. He said the safari park authorities have been advised to shift the infected animals in isolation.

The safari park has already been shut for public.

The CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology had on Tuesday said eight Asiatic lions in the Hyderabad zoo have tested positive for Covid-19.

Karnataka, Kerala, Goa go under lockdown

All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs, bars to remain shut in K'taka

Mamata writes to PM for more O₂

Bengaluru, May 7: Karnataka Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa on Friday announced lockdown like restrictions with more stringent curbs from May 10 to May 24 in view of alarming rise in Covid cases.

There was already a curfew in place in the state from April 27, which was to end on May 12.

"The second wave of Covid-19 is creating havoc across the state as the Corona curfew imposed in the state has not yielded the expected result in reducing the infection and death rate," the chief minister said.

"Therefore, the government has decided to impose a stringent measure to check the spread of the disease and death. Restriction will be imposed in the entire state from 6 am of May 10 to 6 am of May 24," he said.

All shops and commercial establishments, hotels, pubs and bars will remain closed during this period, Yediyurappa said. Essential goods and services like food, medicine, milk, fruits and vegetables, etc will be available from 6 am to 10 am, he added.

The Karnataka government has decided to cap the price of CT-scan and digital X-ray in private hospitals and labs at Rs 1,500 and Rs 250 respectively. Health Minister Sudhakar K. said on Friday. The Minister warned that strict action would be taken against hospitals and labs which violate rules and charge high prices.

The Goa government on Friday announced a 15-day curfew in the state from May 9 to contain the spread of coronavirus infection. In another decision, carrying negative Covid-19 test report or a vaccination certificate has been made mandatory for visitors from other states.

During the curfew period, grocery shops can remain open from 9 am to 1 pm while there would be no restrictions on pharmacies and other medical facilities, said Chief Minister Pramod Sawant.

Major temples in Kerala including the famed Lord Ayyappa shrine in Sabarimala will not be opened for devotees during the time of nine-day lockdown in the state, being imposed by the government from Saturday morning to curb the Covid-19 surge.

The Travancore Devaswom Board, the apex body which manages over 1,200 temples, said shrines under its management would not permit devotees in its premises for darshan during the lockdown period.

—PTI

17,188 FRESH CASES, 73 DEATHS IN AP

Amaravati, May 7: Andhra Pradesh's cumulative coronavirus tally shot up to 12,45,374 as 17,188 fresh cases were added in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday.

The total recoveries went up to 10,50,160 after 17,749 more infected persons got cured, according to the latest bulletin.

With 73 fresh fatalities reported in a day, the gross toll touched 8,519, the bulletin said.

Only Chittoor district reported 2,260 fresh Covid-19 cases in 24 hours while seven districts added between 1,300 and 1,900 each. Five districts reported less than 1,000 new cases each.

Vizianagaram reported the highest of 11 deaths, Visakhapatnam ten, East Godavari eight, Chittoor seven, Krishna and Guntur six each, Kurnool, Prakasam and West Godavari five each, SPS Nellore and Srikakulam four each and Anantapuramu two in a day.

Meanwhile, Telangana reported 5,892 fresh cases taking the tally to over 4.81 lakh while the toll stood at 2,625 with 46 more casualties. With as many as 9,122 patients being cured, the total number of recoveries is over four lakh. —PTI



A family member mourns after the death of a relative due to Covid-19 at LLR Hospital, during the second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, in Kanpur, on Friday.

India seeks Australia support for vaccine patent waiver

New Delhi, May 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison on Friday as the two leaders agreed on the importance of ensuring equitable access to vaccines and medicines, and discussed possible initiatives for it.

Mr Modi and Morrison also reiterated the importance of working together for a rules-based international order and a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

During his telephonic conversation with Mr Morrison, the prime minister conveyed his appreciation for the prompt and generous support extended by the government and the people of Australia for India's fight against the second wave of Covid-19, according to a Prime Minister's Office (PMO) statement.

The two leaders agreed on the need to ensure an affordable and equitable access to vaccines and medicines for containing Covid-19, globally, it said. "Spoke with my friend @ScottMorrisonMP to thank him for Australia's solidarity and support for India's fight against the pandemic," Modi tweeted after speaking with the Australian prime minister.

"We agreed on the importance of ensuring affordable and equitable access to vaccines and medicines, and discussed possible initiatives in this regard," he said.

RSS slams Bengal violence

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Condemning the "gruesome post-poll violence" in West Bengal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) on Friday said it appears to be "well conspired" and is against the spirit of democracy. The RSS also asked the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress to "effectively establish rule of law", act against the culprits and instill a feeling of safety and confidence among the affected people.

The RSS also reminded the ruling party of its duty in containing the post-poll violence unleashed against the Opposition party members, in particular the BJP.

It claimed that the state administrative machinery was "completely passive" and "remained mute spectators" during the violence and the "rioters seemed not to be afraid of anything".

In Bengal, the anti-social elements active in this abhorring violence, "misbehaved with women folk in the most barbaric and despicable manner, brutally killed innocent people and torched houses", the Sangh's general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said in a statement.

He also claimed that as a result of unabated violence, thousands of people, including a large number from the scheduled

NO CONGREGATIONAL PRAYERS IN J&K MOSQUES ON LAST FRIDAY OF RAMZAN

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MAY 7

Jumat-ul-Vida or the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramzan was observed on a subdued note in Jammu and Kashmir, with no congregational prayers held in Srinagar's historic Grand Mosque, the Hazratbal shrine or any other major place of worship of the

Union Territory (UT) in view of the worsening Covid-19 situation.

The namaz was restricted to the residences or small gatherings took place in locality mosques with the worshippers maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks and following other Covid-19 necessitated Standard Operating Procedures and guidelines.

In their telephonic conversation, Modi and Morrison also took note of the progress made in the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership since the virtual summit held on June 4, 2020 and discussed ways to further strengthen cooperation and foster people-to-people ties.

"The leaders also discussed regional issues and reiterated the importance of working together for a rules-based international order and a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region," the statement said.

—PTI

RAHUL BLAMES CENTRE FOR 2ND LOCKDOWN

New Delhi, May 7: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the government's alleged failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable, and called for providing financial and food support to the most vulnerable.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he suggested that the government should not be concerned about the economic impact of the lockdown as the human cost of the spread of of the virus would have tragic consequences for the people. "Your government's lack of a clear and coherent Covid and vaccination strategy, as well as its hubris in declaring premature victory as the virus was exponentially spreading, has placed India in a highly dangerous position: today the disease is growing explosively."

"It is currently on the verge of overwhelming all of our systems. GOI's failures have made another devastating national lockdown almost inevitable," he told the prime minister. India has seen a record number of 4.14 lakh fresh Covid cases and around 4,000 deaths in the last 24 hours. Gandhi said it is critical that our people are prepared for such an eventuality of a lockdown. He has been demanding that the government provides Rs 6000 in the accounts to each poor family to tide over the crisis.

—PTI

Kolkata, May 7: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking increased supply of medical oxygen for Covid-19 treatment.

Ms Banerjee also said that the Centre hiked oxygen allocation for other states out of the total production in Bengal, despite its enhanced requirement.

The Chief Minister said daily consumption of oxygen in her state has gone up to 470 MT in the last 24 hours and is expected to increase to 550 MT per day in about a week.

"I would request you to kindly have the allocation of medical oxygen reviewed and instructions issued for an immediate allocation of at least 550 MT per day of MO," she said in the letter to Mr Modi.

Any allocation less than the requested amount will not only adversely affect the supply, but may also result in loss of lives of patients in the state, Ms Banerjee said.

Meanwhile, with Ms

Banerjee seeking a uniform vaccination policy for the country, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Friday assured her that the Centre was firm in its resolve to help the state fight the pandemic, but also flagged more than 40 per cent positivity rate in some districts of the state.

Dr Vardhan also asked the Chief Minister to focus on conducting more tests to detect infections in the state.

In a four-page letter addressed to her and posted on his Twitter timeline, the health minister congratulated Banerjee for her victory in the recently held assembly elections.

Referring to her letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on "further requirements for Covid-19 management in West Bengal", the minister said the Centre has been supporting each and every state "not just financially, but also through requisite diagnostics, therapeutics, medical devices and other essential materials and services". —PTI

MP to provide free treatment for poor

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, MAY 7

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Friday launched 'Mukhyamantri Upachar Yojana' providing free treatment to Covid-19 patients belonging to the economically weaker section of society.

As per the scheme, the Ayushman Bharat card holders would be provided free corona treatment in both government and private hospitals.

The state government has designated some private hospitals to treat such patients free of cost. The government would bear the cost of treatment.

The state government has prepared a package for the private hospitals to treat the Covid-19 patients who are beneficiaries of Ayushman Bharat Yojana. The economically backward people who are not included in the Ayushman scheme can also avail the free treatment facility by producing their income certificates certified by a

gazetted officer.

Around 2.42 crore people in the state would be benefited by the free Covid treatment scheme. The state government has designated 579 hospitals as Covid hospitals in MP.

The state government has appointed nodal officers for each private hospital in the state to facilitate admission of the Covid-19 patients belonging to poor families under the free treatment scheme.

As many as 395 ICU beds, 13,224 oxygen beds and 20,601 isolation beds are currently available in government hospitals in the state.

Similarly, total 3,760 beds have been reserved for Covid-19 patients in the private hospitals in the state.

Twenty percent of beds in government and private hospitals have been reserved for Ayushman card holder Covid-19 patients.

Madhya Pradesh on Friday reported 11,708 fresh coronavirus positive cases taking the tally of cases to 6,49,114.

NIA seeks uranium details from ATS

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, MAY 7

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has sought detailed information from the Maharashtra ATS about the seizure of over seven kg of natural uranium worth about Rs 21.30 crore. The ATS had arrested two persons on Wednesday night and seized 7.100 kg uranium from them.

According to an NIA officer, the agency has not yet taken a decision on whether it will take over the investigation or not. However, since the matter is sensitive the central probe agency has sought

details of the case from the ATS.

Following this the ATS on Friday gave a copy of the FIR to the NIA and provided necessary information related to the case.

After the two arrests, the DIG ATS Shivdeep Lande had said that in order to ensure if the seized substance was uranium it was sent to Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) at Trombay for analysis and after examination the officials there had confirmed that the seized material was natural uranium of more than 90 per cent purity and it was highly radioactive.

HELP IN | NEED

PM Modi thanks world leaders for aid extended to combat Covid-19

UK dispatches largest Covid relief for India

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

Britain loaded the world's largest cargo plane (the Russian-made Antonov 124 aircraft) through Thursday night to despatch a flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators for India on Friday from Belfast, Northern Ireland, the

British High Commission said on Friday, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke to his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison to thank him for Australian aid to India to battle pandemic.

PM Modi has already thanked several world leaders including US President Joe Biden, British PM Boris Johnson and Russian President Vladimir Putin among

others for the aid extended by their respective countries to India which is currently being battered by a ferocious Covid second wave that is claiming thousands of lives every day.

In a statement, the British High Commission (BHC) said, "A flight carrying three surplus 18-tonne oxygen generators and 1,000 ventilators due to leave Belfast today in support of India's fight

against Covid-19. The World's largest cargo plane loaded through the night with life-saving oxygen equipment from UK. Each oxygen generator produces 500 litres of oxygen per minute and is the size of a 40ft shipping container."

Giving details, the BHC said, "The world's largest cargo plane will leave Belfast this morning, carrying three 18-tonne oxy-

gen generators and 1,000 ventilators as part of the UK's latest response to India's Covid-19 crisis. Airport staff worked through the night to load the life-saving kit, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, aboard the massive Antonov 124 aircraft."

The BHC added, "Each of the three oxygen generation units – the size of 40ft

freight containers - produces 500 litres of oxygen per minute, enough for 50 people to use at a time. They are expected to reach India on Sunday morning, where the Indian Red Cross will help transfer them to hospitals. This support, previously announced, is in addition to 200 ventilators and 495 oxygen concentrators, which the UK sent to India in late April."

SHORT TAKES

**NIGERIA: 10
KILLED, STUDENTS
ABDUCTED**

Lagos: Ten people including two police officers have been killed and a number of students abducted in Nigeria's southeast, police said on Friday, in a region where separatist tensions are on the rise.

Dozens of security operatives have been killed during attacks by gunmen on checkpoints, police stations and prisons in the region in the past few months.

On Thursday, gunmen stormed Obosi police station in Anambra state but were engaged in a gunbattle by police officers on duty.

"Two police operatives paid the supreme price," state police spokesman Ikenga Tochukwu said in a statement, adding an investigation was under way to identify the perpetrators.

He said the gunmen also set part of the police station and two vehicles ablaze before fleeing.

**29 PEOPLE FOUND
FROM SEMITRUCK
IN TEXAS**

San Antonio: More than two dozen people were recovered from a big rig that was stopped near San Antonio, including one person who was taken to a hospital, a police official in Texas said.

A passerby called police Thursday to report a suspicious semitruck along Interstate 10, east of San Antonio, Lt. Jesse Salame told reporters. A San Antonio Park police officer initiated a traffic stop. As the officer approached the vehicle, the back door swung open and several people ran out, Salame said.

Authorities made contact with 29 of the people who had been in the semitruck. One person was taken to the hospital to be treated for dehydration, San Antonio Fire Department spokesperson Joe Arrington said.

**ISRAELI TROOPS
KILL 2, INJURE 1
PALESTINIAN**

Jerusalem: Israeli troops shot and killed two Palestinians and wounded a third after the men opened fire on a Border Police base in the occupied West Bank on Friday, police said.

They said the three attackers opened fire on the base near the northern West Bank town of Jenin. The Border Police and an Israeli soldier opened fire in response, killing two of the men and wounding a third, who was evacuated to a hospital.

The violence comes at a time of heightened tensions over east Jerusalem, where dozens of Palestinians are at risk of being evicted following a long legal battle with Israeli settlers. Palestinian protesters have clashed with police there on a nightly basis in recent weeks.

**GERMAN SPY
AGENCY TO CHECK
ISLAMOPHOBIA**

Berlin: German intelligence services said on Wednesday that they would widen their surveillance of the Islamophobic protest movement Pegida in its home state of Saxony, as the group had become a "extremist" and "anti-constitutional".

While Pegida had previously attracted "heterogeneous" support and taken "moderate" positions, it had developed "an increasingly right-wing extremist orientation" Saxony's domestic intelligence agency LfV said in a statement.

EU drug regulator taps new Covid pill

Begins accelerated authorisation process for sotrovimab to prevent deaths, hospitalisation

London, May 7: The European Medicines Agency says it has begun an accelerated authorisation process for an experimental Covid treatment made by GlaxoSmithKline and Vir BioTechnology.

In a statement on Friday, the EU drug regulator said it had started a rolling review of sotrovimab, based on early results from an ongoing study into whether the treatment can prevent hospitalisation or death in people who don't yet have severe Covid-19. But EMA said it had not yet received the complete data and cautioned that "it is too early to draw any conclusions about the benefit-risk balance of the medication."

Although the EMA has given the green light to four vaccines, there are few licensed treatments for the Coronavirus, especially any that might prevent people with mild Covid-19 from progressing to severe disease. Sotrovimab is a monoclonal antibody, a lab-produced antibody that is intended to stimulate the immune system by reducing the ability of the Covid's spike protein to enter the body's cells.

— AP

UK HEALTH DEPT WORRIED ABOUT INDIAN VARIANT

London, May 7: Health authorities in England are believed to be especially concerned about one strain out of three Indian variants they have been tracking since last month.

According to a report based on leaked data by the BBC, Public Health England (PHE) is said to have recommended the B.1.617.2 version of the Indian variant to be classed as Variant of Concern (VOC) as it appears to spread more quickly than two other identified subtypes of the Indian variant.

— PTI



French President Emmanuel Macron arrives for an EU summit at the Alfandega do Porto Congress Center in Porto, Portugal, Friday. European Union leaders meet for a summit in Portugal, sending a signal they see the threat from Covid-19 on their continent as waning amid a quickening vaccine rollout. Their talks hope to repair some of the damage the Covid has caused in the bloc, in such areas as welfare and employment.

— AP

Australia: Travel ban on India returnees only till May 15

Melbourne, May 7: Prime Minister Scott Morrison on Friday said that the travel ban on Australians returning home from Covid-hit India will not be extended beyond May 15 and repatriation flights will commence soon.

The Australian government, for the first time in history, recently imposed a temporary ban on its citizens from returning home, if they have spent time in India up to 14 days before flying back. The government threatened to prosecute them with a possibility of five years of jail term or a penalty of 66,000 Australian dollars (USD 50,899).

The government's order on the matter is set to expire on May 15. Following the National Security Committee on Friday, Morrison agreed it saw "no need to extend it beyond that date".

— PTI

OZ MIGHT CLOSE BORDERS TILL 2022

Sydney, May 7: Australia is likely to remain shut to visitors until late 2022, the country's trade and tourism minister said on Friday, as another global Covid surge smashed hopes of a quick reopening.

Minister Dan Tehan said a wave of cases on the Indian sub-continent showed Australia's near blanket ban on arrivals was still essential to keep

the country Covid-free.

Since March 20, 2020, Australians have been barred from travelling overseas and a hard-to-get individual exemption is needed for foreign visitors to enter the country. It is "very hard to determine" when borders could reopen, Tehan told *Sky News*, "the best guess would be in the middle to the second half of next year".

— AFP

VACCINE MUST FOR SAUDI WORKERS

Riyadh, May 7: Saudi Arabia said on Friday that employees will only be allowed to return to their workplace in person once vaccinated against Covid.

Vaccination will become a "mandatory condition" for the face-to-face return of public and private sector employees, the ministry of human resources and social development

said in a statement, urging workers to "begin the process" to get a jab.

The health ministry said it has administered more than 10 million Covid-19 vaccine doses, in a country with a population of over 34 million.

The kingdom has reported more than 423,000 Coronavirus infections.

— AFP

N-talks intensify in fourth round

Vienna, May 7: World powers held a fourth round of high-level talks on Friday in Austria aimed at bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, with both sides signalling a willingness to work out the major stumbling blocks.

The talks began in early April and Russian delegate Mikhail Ulyanov tweeted following Friday's meeting that "the participants agreed on the need to intensify the process." "The delegations seem to be ready to stay in Vienna as long as necessary to achieve the goal," he wrote. The US pulled out of the landmark 2015 deal in 2018 after then-President Donald Trump said the pact needed to be renegotiated.

The deal had promised Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program, and the Trump administration reimposed heavy sanctions on the Islamic republic in an unsuccessful attempt to bring Tehran into new talks. Iran reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the deal,



Deputy Secretary General/Political Director of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Enrique Mora (left) leaves the Grand Hotel Wien after the closed-door nuclear talks with Iran in Vienna on Friday.

— AFP

which is intended to prevent the country from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Iran began enriching uranium to a greater purity, stockpiling more than allowed and beginning to use more advanced centrifuges in an attempt to

pressure the world powers remaining in the deal — Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — for economic relief. U.S. President Joe Biden says he wants to rejoin the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, but

that Iran needs to return to compliance. Iran, which insists it does not want to produce a nuclear bomb, has said it is prepared to reverse all of its violations but that Washington must remove all sanctions imposed under Trump.

— AP

CHINA OPENS ITS SIDE OF EVEREST FOR -VE CLIMBERS

Beijing, May 7: China has opened Mount Everest's northern slope to a few dozen mountaineers who will be tested for the Coronavirus and must keep their distance while ascending the world's highest peak.

Both Nepal and China closed the mountain to foreign climbers last year because of the pandemic. Nepal has allowed in foreign climbers this season despite a surging Covid-19 outbreak, and at least one climber, a Norwegian, confirmed last month he had contracted the virus.

Nepal mountaineering officials have denied any outbreak on the mountain, citing only altitude sickness and other ailments common in the cold, harsh, low-oxygen environment where climbers stay in close quarters. This week, the Himalayan nation halted all flights as part of a strict lockdown.

— AP

US adds warplanes for Afghan pullout

Washington, May 7: The US has deployed a dozen additional warplanes to bolster protection of American and coalition troops making a final withdrawal from Afghanistan as Taliban insurgents step up pressure on Afghan government forces, top Pentagon officials have said.

General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said F-18 attack planes have been added to a previously announced package of air and sea power, including the USS Dwight D Eisenhower aircraft carrier in the North Arabian Sea and six Air Force B-52 bombers based in Qatar, that can be called upon as protection for withdrawing troops. Also part of that previously announced package are several hundred Army Rangers.

US officials said before the withdrawal began that they expected the Taliban to attempt to interfere, even as the insurgents continue pressuring government

forces, especially in Helmand and Kandahar provinces in southern Afghanistan. "There continues to be sustained levels of violent attacks" by the Taliban against Afghan security forces, Milley said, speaking alongside Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin at a Pentagon news conference. He said there have been no attacks against US or coalition forces since they began pulling out of the country on about May 1, and he described the Afghan forces as "cohesive," even as speculation swirls around Kabul's ability to hold off the Taliban in the months ahead.

Both Milley and Austin, a retired Army general, are veterans of the war in Afghanistan. "They're fighting for their own country now, so it's not a foregone conclusion, in my professional military estimate, that the Taliban automatically win and Kabul falls, or any of those kinds of dire predictions," Milley said.

— AP

● **THE ASSERTION** was hidden at the bottom of the statement unveiling Washington's remarkable reversal of its position on Covid-19 vaccine patents, which coincides with a shortage of doses in emerging and developing nations as cases surge in some countries.

beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the US, I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the US so that vaccine production can ramp up," the company's president Adar Poonawalla wrote on Twitter.

There is no actual embargo on exporting vaccine components. Instead, Biden, like his predecessor Donald Trump, invoked the Defense Production Act — which normally concerns wartime — to confront the pandemic.

While it does not explicitly ban exports, it puts the US government first in line to buy certain products made in the country.

US officials have previously played down the possible effect of the law on global vaccine production.

"There's just more global manufacturing happening everywhere in the world than suppliers can currently support," a US official told a White House briefing late last month on condition of anonymity.

— AFP

CONSERVATIVES STRIKE EARLY BLOW IN UK

London, May 7: Britain's governing Conservative Party has won a special election in the north of England town of Hartlepool, dealing a big blow to the main opposition Labour Party, which had held the parliamentary seat since its creation in 1974.

The victory for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's party, announced on Friday morning, provides further evidence that the Conservatives are making ground in parts of the country that have been Labour strongholds for decades. The results of Thursday's election showed the Conservative candidate Jill Mortimer winning with 15,529 votes, or nearly 52 per cent of the vote.

The Labour candidate, Paul Williams, only received 8,589 votes, or around 29per cent of the vote.

Over the coming couple of days, results from an array of elections in Britain will be announced.

— AP

BUG | INVASION

Insects have taken over social media, newspapers even before parks, gardens

US braces for cicada wave after 17 years

Washington, May 7: Some are waiting for their arrival with trepidation, others are curious what they might taste like: Americans are swapping tips on how best to weather the storm when billions of cicadas soon emerge after 17 years underground.

Before invading parks and people's gardens, the insects have already conquered the airwaves, social media and newspapers, especially in parts of the eastern, central and southern United States where "Brood X" is due to emerge.

Billions of cicada nymphs that have been living underground since 2004 will burst out of the soil, shed their skin, mate, lay eggs and then die, all against the backdrop of the deafening noise that males make to attract females. The last time they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready to host the Summer Olympics.

So when will the swarm arrive?

Hard to say, as it depends to some extent on weather

● **LAST TIME** they emerged, George W. Bush was the US president, Facebook had just been created and Athens was getting ready for Olympics.

conditions, and in particular the temperature of the soil. Expected cooler temperatures could delay their emergence until mid-May — or they could pop up any day now.

Residents have been watching for signs of their arrival for weeks, sharing photos of the tunnels the

cicadas have dug to make their way to the surface when ready to briefly face the world.

Tim Pfeiffer has taken to tweeting about the insects. The 28-year-old, who lives in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Maryland posted videos of a few bugs that had appeared ahead of the swarm and were crawling on his porch.

He said that he was "more anxious than excited" and admitted that cicadas "are kind of gross as nymphs." "But watching some of them morph into

the adult form in under an hour is fascinating," he said. On the neighborhood email network Nextdoor, there are more and more comments about the looming bug invasion, including how best to deal with the flying critters.

"Get a face shield, wear a cap, carry a fly swatter, keep your windows up while driving," advised one person.

Another user had the following advice for cyclists: "Pedal slow and use wide tires, those squished cicadas on the bike trail are mighty slick."

— AFP

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF PERSONNEL, PUBLIC GRIEVANCES & PENSIONS
(DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL & TRAINING)

Applications are invited for the post of Central Vigilance Commissioner in the Central Vigilance Commission

The details of eligibility, etc. and the proforma for sending particulars for consideration for the post may be downloaded from the Department of Personnel and Training website: www.persmin.nic.in. The last date of receipt of applications in the Department is 07th June, 2021.

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DECCAN Chronicle

8 MAY 2021

Vaccines: IP waiver fine, but tech transfer crucial

The warning by the principal scientific advisor to the Union government that a third wave of the pandemic Covid-19 is in the offing and the Supreme Court's assessment that the government needed to finalise a formula for the allocation, supply and distribution of oxygen in a scientific manner before the wave hits the nation bind the government into pulling up its socks to fight the pandemic. The decision of the United States administration to support a joint move by India and South Africa to waive patent for vaccines for the pandemic could add to its preparedness.

Most experts were of the view that the pandemic would stage a second coming after it started waning in the fourth quarter of last year but the government planned little or nothing for it. The Niti Aayog and the parliamentary committee for health and family welfare had flagged the increased use of medical oxygen during the first wave and wanted the government to streamline its supply and distribution mechanism. But the government had chosen to ignore most of them with the cumulative result that patients in their thousands choke and some die across India.

The government that had cleared two vaccines, one developed indigenously, and then launched the "world's largest vaccination drive" in the beginning of the year did little to augment their production with the result that other nations now scour their vaults to export the jabs to the "world's vaccine factory". This is almost the same in the case of life-saving anti-viral drugs, too. The government did nothing to improve the healthcare infrastructure in the interregnum, with the result that only a percentage of the patients get decent medical attention with proper care.

A repeat of the heart-wrenching scenes that several parts of the country now witness is totally unacceptable and the Union government must lead from the front the defensive actions against the third wave. It has presented and got passed a budget earmarking ₹2.23 lakh crores for the health ministry, which marked a 137 per cent hike compared with the previous year, in the light of the pandemic. This should be reflected in the preparatory work, which should also see an improvement in the infrastructure. The government must, as the court wanted, make a realistic assessment of the projected requirements of the medicines and auxiliary materials and start sourcing them from within the country or abroad.

The fresh thinking on the patent regime on Covid vaccines does not offer immediate relief but the government must do everything possible to get the technology transferred here and the production increased multi-fold in the shortest possible time. Three vaccine manufacturing units in the public sector — those in Kasauli, Coonoor and Guindy — have stopped working for want of regulatory compliance for more than a decade and the government must ensure that they are back in action at the earliest; the fourth one in Chengalpet requires only a minor effort to start production. The time for the Narendra Modi government to pluck the lowest hanging fruits is long over; it must now face tougher challenges.

Stalin era begins

Among Tamil Nadu's 10 chief ministers from Rajaji to Edappadi K. Palaniswami there were giants like Kamaraj, Karunanidhi, MGR and Jayalalithaa who brought in welfare schemes to benefit a cross-section of people from students to the poor and disadvantaged. The burden of expectation on Muthuvel Karunanidhi Stalin is, perhaps, at an apogee, especially considering the circumstances rendered dire by a sweeping pandemic. The expectations may have been lower when Edappadi took over in 2017 but in terms of tackling the coronavirus health crisis he also set an example of a leader backing a proficient set of administrators.

To Stalin's credit he has started off on a good note, first acknowledging political elders before putting together his Cabinet thoughtfully. Having waited patiently for his turn when he also revealed a statesmanlike side to his personality in not trying to take advantage of the situation during Edappadi government's existential crisis, Stalin has swung into action, signing Covid-19 relief measures and women's welfare. In taking on the job with executive decisiveness straightaway, Stalin has shown himself to be a seasoned politician who also eschewed glitzy shows in triumphalism. He has also kept off introducing into his Cabinet his kin, including his son who was so prominent at the hustings.

Having worked for his party DMK for decades, Stalin must be well aware of collective responsibility and that is reflected in the quality of ministers he has chosen for key tasks. While keeping faith with elders who were among his father's loyalists, his choice is apt of former Mayor Ma Subramaniam as health minister at a time when the virus is throwing up record numbers and the state has to look into oxygen availability among preparatory measures. Tending to finance will be Palaniivel Thiagarajan, with his rich experience as a former investment banker and there are other key ministers to look after education, etc. The mixture of the old and the new Cabinet is a promising enough sign as the Stalin era begins.

Subhani



Heal at home first, then try to be a global leader



K.C. Singh

While India was distracted by the macabre events in and outside hospitals in Delhi and other major cities as patients gasped for breath, and some even died as the oxygen ran out, minister for external affairs S. Jaishankar headed to London for a meeting of G-7 foreign and development ministers earlier this week. Also invited, besides G-7 members, were the ministers of South Korea, South Africa and the chair of Asean. Mr Jaishankar had just met US secretary of state Antony Blinken and his host, British foreign secretary Dominic Raab, when some members of his delegation tested positive for Covid-19. What could represent his government's mishandling of the coronavirus' second wave than this international embarrassment?

The G-7 meeting, preparatory to the summit later this year, issued a long joint statement. US trade representative Katherine Tai set the scene by announcing on its eve that the United States supported the Covid-19 Trips waiver at the World Trade Organisation. Its preamble begins by recognising the "critical juncture" at which stand "our people, our planet, our security and our future prosperity". This holistic approach is most welcome as it recognises the connection between pandemic elimination, future pandemic avoidance, climate change centrality and the world's prosperity depending on global interdependence.

Then it addresses the themes of continuing relevance, if the G-7 nations have to retain their moral advantage over the Chinese model of single party rule favouring economic over political and humanitarian rights. It asserts that democracy "is under pressure globally".

The pandemic is of course the immediate challenge. New technological challenges also lurk over the horizon. The seven nations reiterate their commitment to strengthen open societies, shared values, a rules-based international order, free and fair trade and the free and secure flow of capital. It concludes that "liberal democracy and free and fair markets remain the best models". Before coming to the specifics of relevance to India, this broad template should be read carefully by the Indian government. Much of its actions in the second year of the Narendra Modi government's second term do not tally with this vision. Mr Jaishankar, even when overseas, has become a flag-bearer for the current Hindutva model, precursor to the RSS' Hindu Rashtra dream. Reflexive intolerance to criticism, having his ministry flail at the likes of pop star Rihanna and climate icon Greta Thunberg for supporting the farmers' agitation in India, ill behove India as a model for democratic governance. While the pandemic prevails, India may get a pass, but it won't be for long.

On Covid-19, the US agreeing to support the Covid-19 Trips waiver is a big success for India and the developing world. The G-7 statement, while conceding in para 2 that "global collaboration" is required, changes its tune in para 62. It states that to enable equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics (VTDs), they promise to work with industry "to encourage and support on a voluntary basis and on mutually agreed terms, including licensing, technology and knowhow transfers, contract manufacturing, transparency and data sharing". Then they recommit more assistance to the global vac-

cine-sharing programme Covax.

Although since October 2, 2020, when India and South Africa introduced the Trips waiver at WTO, as India's former permanent representative to the UN in New York Syed Akbaruddin tweeted, 60-plus nations have co-sponsored and 100-plus nations extended support to it in the 164-member body. The G-7 statement shows residual resistance in Europe, which may slowly dissipate as the US draft gets circulated and perhaps amended to reflect corporate interests. In any case, it means two things — a waiver is not coming soon enough to help the developing world this year; and India has to take the lead in compelling indigenous manufacturers to voluntarily waive Trips cover and share their intellectual property to put moral pressure on the foot-draggers at WTO. However, so far, the Indian government is headed in the reverse direction by putting half the vaccine production in the market for states and the private sector to haggle over. The CEO of a major hospital chain in Gurgaon claimed on television that he was offered vaccines by intermediaries at higher prices. Will the Indian government now end up with a controversy of its own making?

However, past experience shows that the US throwing its weight behind a proposal generally gets European compliance. Germany and Switzerland may be the last holdouts. In the meanwhile, India requires to focus on two things — normalising access to hospitals by ramping up beds with oxygen, ICUs, etc. The supply of oxygen must take into account not only escalated hospital needs but also the moderately ill who are self-

isolating at home. Also, to address vaccine supplies as the government has compounded the confusion by opening-up vaccinations for the 18-plus age group just as the supply has dried up. Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawala abandoning his factory, alleging threats and making gratuitous statements from his lair in London needs deft handling. In any case, the US has now released raw material for 20 million vaccines, which he needs to put in vials promptly.

What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy. Not coincidentally, two-thirds of the G-7 statement has them in the cross-wire. One or the other figures directly in the paras relating to Ukraine, the Indo-Pacific, Myanmar or Taiwan, the entry of which to WHO has been endorsed. They also are the objects of themes like a rules-based order to human rights and freedom of religion, as indeed democracy. So, the news that Russia is starting mass production of a single-dose Sputnik vaccine comes as great relief. India also needs to be more proactive internationally in tying up contracts with emerging vaccines like a new RNA based product of Cure Vac, Germany, the final results of which are awaited in mid-May, which unlike Moderna and Pfizer can be stored in fridges. There is also the US-supported initiative between Baylor College of Medicine and the Hyderabad-based Biological E for a safe, effective and affordable vaccine. Its production does not start till later this year. This has the potential to inoculate the world.

The moral for India is that a government which cannot prioritise between a looming health emergency at home and its political and religious interests will hardly be viewed as a global leader in fighting pandemics, or anything else. Our slogan has to be to heal at home first — politically and health-wise.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

What may yet negate the pharmaceutical industry's greed is the desire of Russia and China to play the Good Samaritans, as part of their counter-West strategy

LETTERS

CONGRATS TO STALIN

Our hearty congratulations to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his family members, team of ministers and MLAs for forming the new government for the progress of the economy and better living of the people. Mr Stalin is requested to consider a ministerial (maybe Deputy CM) berth for Mr Udayanidhi Stalin in the cabinet mainly to dedicate himself to improving the low lying areas which are flooding the city during monsoon/cyclone and causing hardship to the people. He can look after the people's welfare, medical facilities, health care employment in the entire state, including infrastructure improvements that will improve the economy of the state & nation. We hope Mr Stalin will support the neighbouring states, particularly Karnataka and Kerala through his friendly strategies and governance during this Corona period.

Charles D by email

SC'S WARNING

The apex court has done the right thing by issuing a warning to all the states not to clamp down on distress calls of its citizens on social media platforms seeking help for meeting the requirements of medical oxygen, hospital beds and other critical medicines. Rather than initiating time-bound measures to alleviate the sufferings of Covid-19 affected and their families, rulers in states like Uttar Pradesh have not only treated anguished calls for health care as misinformation and rumours but also threatened those who make them to be booked and their property seized. Such intimidatory tactics from democratically elected governments to crush the legitimate concerns of people amid the raging second wave of Covid-19 pandemic will only worsen the public health crisis further. It is incumbent upon a democratic state wedded to the public welfare to pay heed to the distress call of its people and address it with the alacrity it deserves.

M. Jeyaram, Sholavandan

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



*"I lived in glass houses,
 — but confess I had no stones
 I stepped out of those kitchens
 — and rattled those marrow bones
 I stood in the ruins of the church
 — the one with the broken spire
 O Sage, O Saint, O soothsayer
 — O blessed prophetic liar!"*

— From *The Love Song of Wroor K. Gumby-Hara* By Bachchoo

Is Carrie, UK's First Girlfriend, the real driver of BoJo's govt?

We live in enlightened times, my friend... witness the fact that Boris Johnson has moved his girlfriend into 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Britain's Prime Ministers.

This is perhaps an honest if unconventional move. Boris announced his engagement to 32-year-old Carrie Symonds before their baby boy was born. So, Ms Symonds went from being a former adviser on his staff and lover to "First Girlfriend".

I call it a relatively honest, if not permanent, setup as former Prime Ministers have had unacknowledged mistresses while living in Downing Street with their wives. There was the confessed dalliance of John Major

with one of his ministers and then the alleged one-night stand of Tony Blair with Rupert Murdoch's wife Wendy Deng — and others going back further into history.

Ms Symonds, having moved into Downing Street, has proved to be a different fettle of kitsch. Recent Prime Ministers with kids have found the flat above the official rooms of 10 Downing Street constraining and have spread themselves to a connected upstairs flat of the adjoining 11 Downing Street. What the Chancellors of the Exchequer, whose right it is to live in Number 11, have thought of this I don't know, but that's now a matter for Rishi and Mrs Sunak. Perhaps gratitude for being appointed suppliants territorial discomforts.

Carrie was very rude about the décor of the flat she inherited from previous PM Theresa May, saying she was appalled by its furniture and wallpaper, calling it a "John Lewis nightmare". She commissioned a designer named Lulu Lytle to refurbish and refurbish the place. I am no expert on interior décor, but pictures of the redecorated flat and Ms Lulu's handiwork are, for me, the best definition of

that elusive word "kitsch" that I have ever seen.

The redecoration cost £200,000. So why, when the world is in the throes of a deadly plague, am I devoting space to this idiocy? Because it is now alleged that some Tory donors had paid for this extravagance, and that makes BoJo beholden to these benefactors on the principle that there is no such thing as a free lunch. This scandal, the significance of which is yet to be established, may cause BoJo to be found guilty of lying to Parliament about the settlement of the redecoration bill, thus breaching the ministerial code — a matter for resignation.

Now the commentariat, even in right-wing BoJo-supporting publications such as *The Spectator*, are getting worried about the influence of the "First Girlfriend" in the affairs of the country. Her bad taste in décor and the consequent threat to BoJo aside, it is a fact that she has packed the staff and advisory phalanx of the PM's office with her friends and people she agrees with politically.

Her overseeing several of these crony appointments had led to the resignation of the previous Svengaliish adviser, Dominic Cummings, who after his ejection from Downing Street is taking his revenge by leaking damaging information to the press on BoJo's dealings. For instance, there was the leak of a phone and text correspondence between tax-dodging Singaporee Sir James Dyson and BoJo in which the PM asked for the manufacture and delivery of ventilators for the Covid crisis and agreed to Dyson's demand to waive the taxes his employees would have to pay. The meanness of billionaires, even when discussing the alleviation of a world health crisis, is unfathomable. Couldn't Dyson have paid the tax from his profits? Can the PM really step in and, with Chancellor Sunak, waive taxes on a select band of people?

Ms Symonds is accused, apart from crony appointments of interventions in policy areas that affect the country, decisions that very many Conservatives and people in government are convinced that BoJo would not have taken had it not been for her prevalent influence. The contention is that if Ms Symonds wants to influence or dictate policy, for instance on green issues to which she is commendably dedicated, she shouldn't do it through the conjugal bed, but through the ballot box.

She allegedly caused BoJo to interfere in a parliamentary-sanctioned cull of badgers. He banned the cull which environmentalists now say has disastrously decimated the hedgehog population.

Her trivial influence was demonstrated when she insisted that BoJo interrupt and leave an important scientific meeting on Covid to demand that he immediately get in touch with *The Times* to refute a story in the newspaper that Carrie's affection for their dog Dilyn had cooled since she insisted on adopting him. Not a shaggy-dog story!

The criticisms of Ms Symonds' unconstitutional influence has been characterised by her supporters in the press as the grumblings of "old-school, sexist Tory dinosaurs who are afraid of intelligent women".

As an anti-Tory dinosaur and no supporter of Dominic Cummings or his hypocritical revenge and as someone who has never had — or has had through vast experience to overcome — a fear of intelligent women, I beg to disagree. BoJo was elected on some particular policies and democracy demands that he concentrate on those and not on the concerns of an unelected paramour.

SHORT TAKES

Abid, Azhar put Pak in command

Harare: Centuries by Abid Ali and Azhar Ali put Pakistan in a strong position on the first day of the second Test against Zimbabwe on Friday. Abid (118 not out) and Azhar (126) put on 236 for the second wicket before tall fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani brought Zimbabwe back into the match by taking three wickets with the second new ball. Pakistan had reached 268 for four at the close. Abid and Azhar came together with the total on 12 in the eighth over and ground down the Zimbabwe bowlers before Azhar edged Muzarabani to gully in the last half hour of the day. Azhar's dismissal was followed by a second failure in the series for Babar Azam, who drove Muzarabani to point after scoring two. — *AFP*

Brief scores: Pakistan 268/4 (Azhar 126, Abid 118 n.o., Muzarabani 3/41) vs Zimbabwe.

Nadal beaten in Madrid quarters

Madrid: Rafael Nadal lost 4-6, 4-6 to Germany's Alexander Zverev in the Madrid Open quarterfinals on Friday, casting doubts over the Spaniard's form ahead of this month's French Open. Nadal has now fallen early in two clay-court Masters tournaments ahead of the Grand Slam in Paris, after going out in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals last month before winning in Barcelona. Even in Barcelona, however, Nadal needed to save a championship point to beat Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final. World number two Nadal is hoping to clinch a 14th Roland Garros title and record-setting 21st major in the French capital. Zverev's impressive straight-set win at the Caja Magica earns him a meeting with Dominic Thiem in Madrid semis, in what will be a repeat of last year's US Open final, which was won by Thiem. — *AFP*

Laureus awards for Rafa, Osaka

Seville, Spain: Tennis players Rafael Nadal and Naomi Osaka picked up the Laureus Sportsman and Sportswoman of the Year awards on Thursday with football star Mo Salah and Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton also recognised. World number two Nadal claimed his fourth Laureus award as he was recognised for his 13th French Open and record-equaling 20th major. Osaka, who won the US Open for the second time and has four majors, is now a two-time Laureus winner. "Winning the French Open and equalling the 20th Grand Slam of Roger Federer has been an unforgettable moment," said Nadal. "It means a lot to equal my great rival, but at the same time, my great friend," he added. — *AFP*

Hazard sorry for upsetting Real fans

Madrid: Eden Hazard apologized to Real Madrid fans after he was seen laughing and joking with Chelsea players following the team's elimination in the Champions League. A video of the Madrid forward having fun with his former teammates after Madrid's loss on Wednesday attracted a lot of attention in Spain, upsetting fans who loudly complained against him on social media. Hazard was one of the Madrid players who performed poorly in the 2-0 defeat in London.

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Leeds United vs Tottenham Hotspur from 5 pm; Sheffield United vs Crystal Palace from 7.30 pm; Manchester City vs Chelsea from 10.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1

Italian League: Inter vs Sampdoria from 9.30 pm on Sony Ten 2, HD; Fiorentina vs Lazio from 12.15 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

FORMULA ONE

Spanish GP: Qualifying session from 6.25 pm Star Sports Select 2

UFC FIGHT NIGHT

Sandhagen vs Dillashaw from 5.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 2, HD, Sony Ten 3, HD

Pat bats for safety

Cummins says if India is unsafe for T20 Cup shift it to UAE

Male (Maldives), May 7: Australian pace spearhead Pat Cummins believes if hosting the ICC T20 World Cup amidst raging Covid-19 pandemic is a "drain on Indian resources" or is "unsafe", it would be prudent to shift it to the United Arab Emirates.

The postponement of Indian Premier League after multiple cases of Covid-19 inside the bio-bubble has led to a big question-mark on whether the marquee ICC event should be held in India where a third wave is expected around that time.

"If it's going to be a drain on resources or it's not going to be safe, then I don't think it's right to play it over here. That's the first question which needs to be answered," Cummins was quoted as saying by the *Age* newspaper.

Cummins said cricket authorities should check with Indian government and do what's best.

"It probably too early to say. It's six months away. The priority should be for cricket authorities to work with the Indian government to see what's best for the Indian people," Cummins said.

Cummins feels hindsight always provides better perspective like many who feel that IPL could have been held in UAE this time also.

"The IPL in the UAE last year was brilliant, it was really well run, but millions of people were saying it should have been played in India, so what do you do? You can see both sides. They set up this tournament with all the best advice."

Cummins has a lot of empathy for what the country is currently facing. "Around the hotel there is less staff and when you hop in the bus to go to training there is normally a few hundred people waiting. There's no one out there now and no crowds at games." — *PTI*

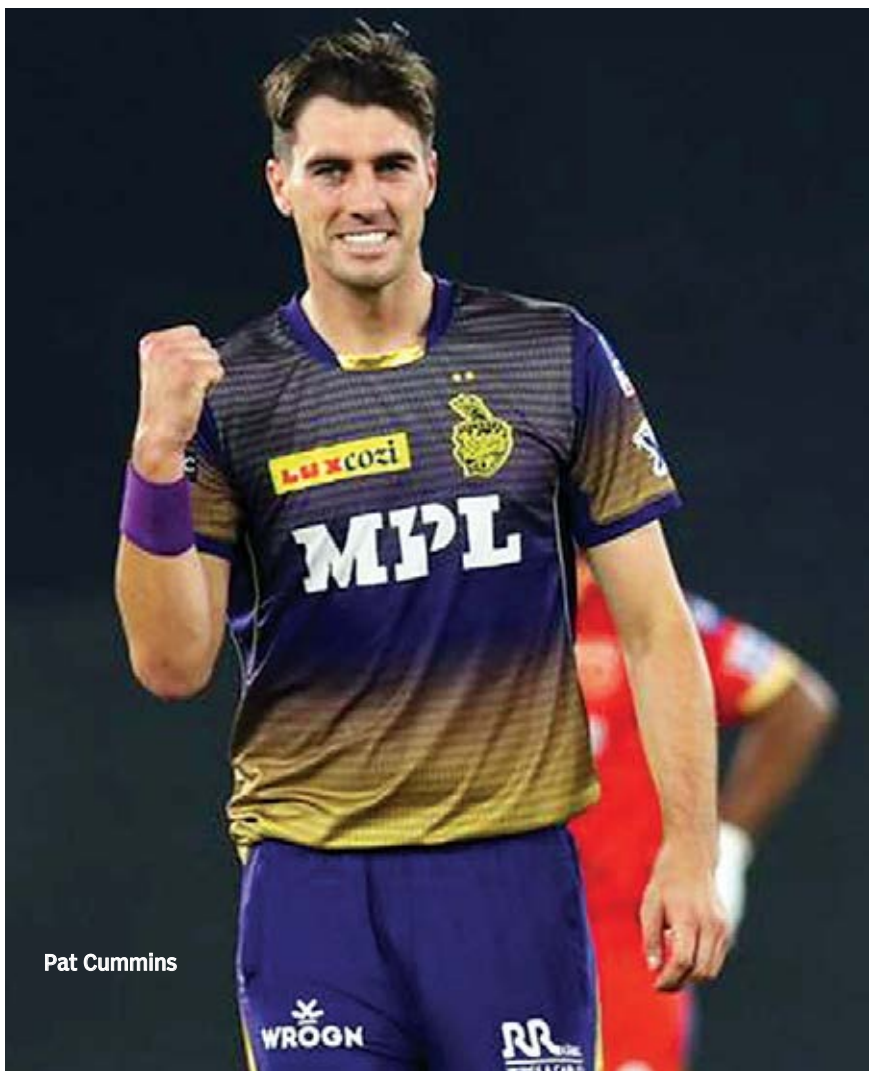
HUSSEY TESTS NEGATIVE FOR COVID-19

New Delhi, May 7: Chennai Super Kings batting coach Mike Hussey has tested negative for COVID-19 but remains in quarantine in a Chennai hotel, team CEO Kasi Viswanathan said on Friday. Australian media outlets reported that Hussey can join fellow countrymen in Maldives if he returns another negative test.

"He tested negative before getting on an air ambulance from Delhi to Chennai (on Thursday). He is doing fine. All other overseas personnel have left, head coach Stephen Fleming will be flying out tomorrow," said Viswanathan.

Hussey and CSK bowling coach L Balaji were among the prominent non-playing staff to test positive when the IPL was "indefinitely suspended" on Tuesday, following multiple COVID-19 cases inside the bio-bubble. They both flew together to Chennai.

The Australian contingent, comprising players, coaches and commentators, flew to Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight back home. — *PTI*



Pat Cummins

Morris 'relieved' after leaving bubble

Johannesburg, May 7: South Africa and Rajasthan Royals all-rounder Chris Morris is "relieved" to be safely back home after witnessing "chaos" unfold once Covid-19 cases in the IPL bio-bubble came to light.

Morris, along with his 10 other South African players have reached home, after the IPL was suspended following six cases of Covid-19 — four players and two coaches from three different teams.

"Look, obviously I'm

relieved," Morris, who is currently undergoing a 10-day mandatory quarantine at home, told *iol.co.za*.

Morris said they came to know about the Covid cases in Kolkata Knight Riders — Varun Chakravarthy and Sandeep Warrier — on Sunday night.

"The moment we heard that, when players are testing positive, inside the bubble, then everyone starts asking questions. The alarm bells definitely started going off for all of

us," he said.

"By Monday when they postponed that game (between Kolkata and Royal Challengers Bangalore), we knew the tournament was under pressure to continue."

The Twenty20 league was suspended after Sunrisers Hyderabad's wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha and Delhi Capitals' Amit Mishra tested positive on Tuesday.

"I was chatting to our team doctor, whose room

VIRAT-ANUSHKA DONATE ₹2cr IN COVID-19 FIGHT

New Delhi, May 7: India captain Virat Kohli and his actor wife Anushka Sharma have donated ₹2 crore to a fund-raising project, which will raise a total of ₹7 crore to support the country's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. The two are raising money through crowd-funding platform Ketto.

"...Virat Kohli and Bollywood superstar Anushka Sharma are aiming to raise ₹7 crore for Covid relief in India," a press release from the celebrity couple stated.

"They are kickstarting a fundraising campaign #InThisTogether on the crowd-funding platform Ketto and are putting ₹2 crore for this initiative."

The campaign will run for seven days on Ketto and the proceeds will be directed to ACT Grants, the implementation partner which will work towards providing oxygen, medical manpower, vaccination awareness and tele-medicine facilities all through the pandemic and the amount.

— *PTI*

ENGLAND | TOUR

No Hardik, Jadeja makes comeback

New Delhi, May 7: Hardik Pandya was not considered for selection as "he is still not in a position to bowl", while a fit-again Ravindra Jadeja made his way back to a 20-strong Indian squad announced on Friday for next month's World Test Championship final against New Zealand and a five-match series against England.

Along with Jadeja, batsman Hanuma Vihari and senior pacer Mohammed Shami also walked back into the side after missing the home series against England due to injuries.

All three had endured injuries during the away series against Australia earlier this year when India recorded one of their best triumphs.

Hardik, who was with team during the home series against England but did not play, has not been picked because he is not fit enough to do the job with the ball. He can play as a specialist batsman in the shorter formats but has to bowl for a place in the Test team.

"Hardik Pandya is still not in a position to bowl. The experiment of selectors to keep him during England and prepare him with bowling workload has failed miserably. He will henceforth not be considered for Test cricket," a BCCI source said.

The selectors also picked four standby players — Abhimanyu Easwaran, Prasidh Krishna, Avesh Khan, and Arzan Nagwaswalla, the BCCI stated in a press release.

INDIA SQUAD

Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (Captain), Ajinkya Rahane (vice-captain), Hanuma Vihari, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shardul Thakur, Umesh Yadav, KL Rahul (subject to fitness clearance), Wriddhiman Saha (wicket-keeper; subject to fitness clearance).

Opener Easwaran and pacer Avesh Khan were also with the team during the England series while the extra pace did it for IPL regular Prasadh Krishna and Gujarat left-arm fast bowler Arzan Nagwaswalla, who had a stellar 2019-20 season. He is the only Parsi cricketer currently playing at the first-class level in India.

The 23-year-old left-arm pacer has 62 first-class wickets to his credit in 16 matches that he has played since his debut in 2018.

K. L. Rahul, who underwent a surgery after being diagnosed with appendicitis, and Wriddhiman Saha, infected with Covid-19 during the recently-suspended IPL, have been included subject to fitness.

Out-of-form spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Navdeep Saini have been left out of the squad, which is expected to depart for England for the twin assignments in the third week of this month. — *PTI*

INDIAN ROWING TEAM BOOK OLYMPIC BERTH

New Delhi, May 7: Indian rowers Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh qualified for the Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event after finishing second in the final race of the Asia/Oceania Continental Qualifying Regatta in Tokyo on Friday.

Another Indian, Jakar Khan finished fourth in the men's singles sculls final which offers five Olympic quotas but he missed out as a country gets only one qualifying spot from this regatta.

The top three qualify for Olympics in men's lightweight double sculls event.

"A country can qualify in only one boat from this regatta and since Arjun Lal Jat and Arvind Singh had finished second in men's lightweight double sculls, they will qualify," Rowing Federation of India president Rajlaxmi Singh Deo said.

'NO ATMOSPHERE OF OLYMPIC BUILD-UP'

The Olympics open in Tokyo on July 23 but Arjun said the Games will be unlike any previous edition if they happen.

"It is less than 80 days for the Olympics but it is weird, there is very little Olympic atmosphere building up. The streets are empty, no people, very few vehicles, though we are told there is lockdown going on," Arjun said from Tokyo. — *PTI*

Seema & Sumit seal Tokyo spots

Sofia (Bulgaria), May 7: Seema Bisla on Friday became the fourth Indian woman wrestler to qualify for the Tokyo Games by reaching the final of the 50kg competition even as Sumit Malik settled for a silver medal after conceding his final bout due to a knee injury at the World Olympic Qualifiers, here.

Seema booked an Olympic berth for herself after a close 2-1 win over European Championship bronze medallist Anna Lukasiak of Poland, showing tremendous defensive skills in the semifinal.

After giving away a point on passivity, Seema pulled off a quick take down in the first period for a 2-1 lead, which she kept till the end to earn the quota.

She will now fight for gold against Ecuador's Lucia Yamileth Yezpez Guzman on Saturday.

The 29-year-old is the fourth Indian to qualify for the Games after celebrated Vinesh Phogat (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg) and Sonam Malik (62kg). It will be first time that four Indian women wrestlers will compete in the Olympics. In the 2106 edition, three Indian women wrestlers had competed.

Nisha (68kg) and Pooja (76kg), however, failed to win quota after losing their respective bouts.

Meanwhile, Malik, who had become only the fourth



Sumit Malik

men's free style wrestler to qualify for the Olympics, did not take the mat for his 125kg gold medal fight against Russia's Sergei Kozyrev, the 2018 Youth Olympic champion, due to injury.

National coach Jagminder Singh said that Malik had injured his right knee during practice at the national camp a few weeks back and competed only because an Olympic quota was at stake.

"There is a minor ligament injury and we did not aggravate it since he had already locked the Olympic quota. He had competed in Almaty last month (Asian Championships) and Olympic qualifiers) with this injury," he said.

"This was one last chance to get the quota, so he competed. He came here without much practice and winning four bouts was remarkable. — *PTI*

Emery gets Arsenal revenge

London, May 7: Villarreal will face Manchester United in the Europa League final after the Spanish side held out for a 0-0 draw at Arsenal on Thursday to prevent a clean sweep of European finalists for Premier League sides.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang twice hit the post for Arsenal, but a 2-1 aggregate defeat means the Gunners will miss out on Champions League football for the fifth consecutive season.

Edinson Cavani scored twice for United, who progressed 8-5 on aggregate despite a 3-2 defeat away to Roma.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men will aim to end a four-year trophy drought when they take on Villarreal in Gdansk on May 26, three days before Manchester City face Chelsea in the Champions League final on May 29.

Sitting ninth in the Premier League, Arsenal's season was hinging on Europa League glory for Champions League qualification.

But former Gunners' boss Unai Emery got revenge for his sacking after just 18 months as Arsene Wenger's succe-



Manchester United's Edinson Cavani (left) celebrates after scoring against Roma in their Europa League semifinal second leg in Italy on Thursday.

— *AP*

sor by leading Villarreal to their first European final.

Emery won this competition three times with Sevilla and also took Arsenal to the Europa League final in his only full season in charge at

the Emirates.

The Spaniard was criticised for his cautious approach after taking a 2-0 lead inside the first-half in the first leg, allowing Arsenal back into the tie through Nicolas Pepe's penalty. — *AFP*

Saina, Srikanth's Olympic hopes take hit

New Delhi, May 7: The Malaysia Open Super 750 tournament, one of badminton's last two Olympic qualifying events, was on Friday postponed due to a recent Covid-19 surge in the host country, dealing a severe blow to the qualification hopes of India's Saina Nehwal and Kidambi Srikanth.

The \$600,000 event was scheduled to be held in Kuala Lumpur from May 25 to 30. "All attempts were made by the organisers and BWF to provide a safe tournament environment

for all participants, but the recent surge in cases left no choice but to postpone the tournament," Badminton World Federation said in a statement.

"BWF can confirm the rescheduled tournament will no longer take place in the Olympic qualifying window. New tournament dates will be confirmed at a later date."

The decision came as a huge setback for London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina and men's star Srikanth in their bid for

● **Following the postponement of the India Open (May 11-16), Saina and Srikanth's qualification for the Tokyo Games hinged on the Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (June 1-6).**

Olympic qualification.

Following the postponement of the India Open (May 11-16), Saina and

Srikanth's qualification for the Tokyo Games hinged on the Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (June 1-6).

In light of the new development, Badminton Association of India on Friday reached out to the world body, seeking clarity on the qualification scenario for its shuttlers.

"It's really unfortunate that the crucial qualifier had to be postponed in this way but that is the time we live in now," BAI General Secretary Ajay

Singhania said.

"Though four of our players have already qualified and there are few more including Saina and Srikanth who can still make it. I have reached out to BWF Secretary Thomas Lund asking for clarity on the future course of action."

With Singapore suspending all flights from India, it will be a difficult task for the Indian players, including Saina and Srikanth, to travel to the country for the last qualifier. — *PTI*