

# DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VISAKHAPATNAM | FRIDAY | 7 MAY 2021

## WEATHER

Max: 35.2°C  
Min: 24.6°C  
RH: 62%  
Rainfall: Trace

Forecast: Partly Cloudy Sky.  
Max/Min temp. 35/24 °C

## ASTROGUIDE

Plava: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Chaitra Bahula Ekadasi till 3.34 pm  
Star: Poorvabhadra till 12.27 pm  
Varjyam: 10.59 pm to 12.45 pm  
Durmuhurtam: 8.23 am to 9.14 am; 12.37 pm to 1.28 pm  
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

## HIJRI CALENDAR

Ramzan 24, 1442 AH

## PRAYERS

(ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.05 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 5.00 pm

Maghrib: 6.19 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM

SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.27 AM

MOONSET TODAY 1.10 PM

MOONRISE TOMORROW 1.32 AM

## RAMZAN TIMINGS

IFTAR: 6.24 PM (TODAY)

SEHR: 4.08 AM (TOMORROW)

## COUNTER POINT



The highest bidder will get the bed!

## SHORT TAKES

### RLD leader Ajit dies of Covid

**New Delhi:** Former Union minister and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) leader Ajit Singh passed away at a Gurgaon hospital on Thursday morning battling Covid-19, his family said. He was 82. Singh, the son of former prime minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, was diagnosed positive for Covid-19 on April 20, the family said.

■ Full report on Page 4

### Sri Lanka bans Indian travellers

**Colombo:** Sri Lanka on Thursday announced that all arrivals from India will be banned with immediate effect due to the record rise in COVID-19 cases in the neighbouring country. Several countries like the UK, the UAE, Australia and Singapore have already banned travellers from South Asian countries.

■ Full report on Page 5

### Monsoon to enter India on June 1

**New Delhi:** Extended forecast suggests that monsoon will arrive in Kerala around June 1, its normal onset date, said M. Rajeevan, the secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, on Thursday. "This is an early indication The India Meteorological Department (IMD) will issue an official monsoon forecast on May 15," the secretary said in a tweet.

### Three militants killed in J&K

**Srinagar:** Three Al-Badr militants were killed while one surrendered before security forces in an encounter in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, police said. While one militant responded to the appeal of security forces to surrender, the other three fired indiscriminately on the search party. The fire was retaliated, leading to the death of three militants.



## WORLD | 5

Britain, France spar over fishing rights



## SPORTS | 8

Chelsea take on City in Champs League final

## TABLOID

Polymorous relationships



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## SC rules out gag order on media

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Ruling that any gag on media from reporting court proceedings would be retrograde, the Supreme Court on Wednesday said that the internet has revolutionised the court hearing and ensures that information relating to a court proceeding is available in public domain. An open court proceeding ensures "public scrutiny" and "transparency."

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud heading a bench also comprising Justice M.R. Shah said that the High Court should exercise a "degree of caution and circumspection" in making oral observations in the course of the hearing more so when party in question is another constitutional authority.

The court made these observations in its judgment on a petition filed by the Election Commission complaining against the harsh oral observation made against it by the Madras High Court in the course of the hearing of a

plea seeking enforcing of Covid protocol in the just concluded assembly polls and the countering.

The observations in question were made on April 26, 2021. The Election Commission was aggrieved with the oral observation attributing responsibility on the poll panel for surge in Covid cases and saying why it should not "be put up for murder charges".

Assuaging the poll panel, the court said, "The remarks of the High Court were harsh. The metaphor is inappropriate. The High Court — if indeed it did make the oral observations which have been alluded to — did not seek to attribute culpability for the Covid-19 pandemic in the country to the EC."

Declining to expunge the oral observations by the High Court and the media reporting of the court proceedings be restricted to judgments and orders, Justice Chandrachud said that the media reporting was not limited to just reporting the judgments and the court orders but also included its proceedings as well.

## Central team in WB for review

RAJIB CHOWDHURI and RAJNISH SHARMA | DC KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, MAY 6

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused some Union ministers of trying to instigate riots in the state after the BJP's defeat in the Assembly election on the pretext of visiting saffron party workers injured in the post-poll violence.

The Trinamul Congress supremo also asked the BJP not to create unrest and accept the fact that it had lost the election. Speaking at Nabanna, the state secretariat, she said: "Not even 24 hours have passed since I took again, and letters have started pouring in as Union ministers resumed visits. Political rallies have been banned due to the Covid-19 pandemic here, so I don't know why some Central ministers are unnecessarily visiting villages and trying to provoke riots."

The Chief Minister added: "I request them not to worsen the situation through their provocation. I ask the BJP to show restraint, accept the mandate. This is happening as they haven't been able to accept the people's verdict."

Meanwhile, in a move that is bound to further escalate tensions between the Central government and the West Bengal government, the Union home

Not even 24 hours have passed since I took again, and letters have started pouring in as Union ministers resumed visits. Political rallies have been banned due to the Covid-19 pandemic here, so I don't know why some Central ministers are unnecessarily visiting villages and trying to provoke riots.

— Mamata Banerjee, WB Chief Minister

ministry on Thursday sent a four-member team to review the law and order situation in the state, led by an additional secretary-level officer. This was done after the MHA sent two letters to the state government seeking a detailed report on the post-poll violence in West Bengal.

In Kolkata, the chief minister's remarks came hours after a violent attack allegedly by TMC workers on the convoy of minister of state for external affairs V. Muraleedharan in West Midnapore. The minister, however, escaped unhurt but a car in his motorcade, that included pilot cars from the state police, was vandalised by an armed mob at Panchkuri.

■ Page 4: Centre seeks report on WB violence

## 50% beds for AarogyaSri: CM

Jagan directs officials to ensure no patient is sent back without treatment

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday instructed officials to ensure 50 per cent of beds in all empanelled hospitals are allotted for Covid-19 treatment without fail so as to serve critical patients.

During a review meeting on the Corona situation at his camp office at Tadepalli on Thursday, the Chief Minister said that the state has set new records in terms of conducting Coronavirus tests.

He said 50 per cent of beds must be provided to AarogyaSri patients in all the AarogyaSri-empanelled hospitals. "If more patients turn up, they should also be admitted and none should be turned away," the Chief Minister said.

He ordered the extension of this facility in temporary empanelled hospitals and also in non-empanelled hospitals notified by District Collectors. He directed the officials to empanel the notified hospitals temporarily and allot beds.

The Chief Minister reiterated that the Covid treatment be provided at free of cost in all the hospitals empanelled for Covid treatment under the AarogyaSri Scheme.

He insisted on same quality treatment in government, AarogyaSri empanelled and all other hospitals. He called for collating and updating data on the beds available in AarogyaSri hospitals as well as their allotment to the needy across the state.

Explaining the process of functioning of the '104' call centre, the Chief Minister said when a phone call is made to the 104 call centre, a message would go to district officials concerned, depending on the location of patient. He directed that the district collector and the district administration respond and admit patients in hospitals. He also asked the official to set up Covid care centres near all Covid hospitals so that the doctors could also serve in those centres. There should be no shortage of facilities at these care centres, he specified.

Jagan Mohan Reddy noted that there are currently 108 government hospitals, 349 corporate empanelled hospitals, 47 corporate temporary empanelled hospitals and 94 private category hospitals in the state for Covid treatment. There are 48,439 beds at 598 hospitals, of which 41,517 beds are occupied and 6,922 beds are vacant. Around 24,500 patients are being treated under the AarogyaSri scheme.

The Chief Minister also said that food quality, sanitation, oxygen, medical care and availability of doctors must be monitored and any shortage met immediately.



The staff of the Rani Chandramathi Devi Hospital make arrangements at the newly created Covid-19 isolation ward on the hospital premises in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

## Modi speaks to Jagan on Covid

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called up Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and enquired about the prevalence of Coronavirus and the measures being taken to contain its spread on Thursday.

The CM briefed the PM about a series of measures being initiated to curb the spread of the virus and explained the treatment facilities being provided to the infected patients. The CM informed that they had improved the infrastructure facilities at hospitals to provide better care to the patients. Measures were being taken based on the prevailing trend of the virus, he added.

## HC expresses its displeasure

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has expressed displeasure in taking certain measures in Covid-19 management by the state government.

A division bench headed by Chief Justice A.K. Goswami and Justice C. Praveen Kumar heard a batch of petitions here on Thursday, stating that the steps being taken by the state government on providing treatment to the Covid patients were inadequate. The court observed lack of coordination among the officials in making arrangements for handling Covid-19 situation.

■ Full report on Page 2

## DELHI RESTRICTS VISITORS FROM TELANGANA, AP

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 6

In an abrupt move, the Delhi government on Thursday imposed immediate travel and arrival restrictions on people visiting the capital from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state, saying such individuals would have to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine at a Delhi government identified facility, either run by the government or private parties that charge fees for their services.

■ Page 2 Week-long isolation for vaccinated

## TS STOPS BUS SERVICES TO AP DURING CURFEW

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MAY 6

All inter-state bus services from Telangana state to Andhra Pradesh state have been suspended in the wake of the extended Covid-19 related curfew in Andhra Pradesh.

Vehicles would be allowed into AP at the border points only between 6 am and 12 noon. As buses might reach post noon and break the curfew, the decision was taken to suspend the services, officials said.

■ Full report on Page 3

## US backs IPR waiver for Covid vax

**Washington, May 6:** The Biden administration is throwing its support behind efforts to waive intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines in an effort to speed the end of the pandemic.

United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced the government's position in a Wednesday statement, amid World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks over easing global trade rules to enable more countries to produce more of the life-saving vaccines.

"The administration believes strongly in intellectual property protections, but in service of ending this pandemic, supports the waiver of those protections for Covid-19 vaccines," Tai said in the statement.

But she cautioned that it would take time to reach the required global "consensus" to waive the protections under WTO rules, and US officials said it would not have an immediate effect on the global supply of Covid-19 shots.

## Russia okays new single-shot vaccine

**Moscow, May 6:** Russian authorities gave regulatory approval on Thursday to a single-dose version of the country's Sputnik V vaccine, arguing that the move could accelerate the process of achieving herd immunity against the coronavirus.

Named Sputnik Light, the new version is identical to the first dose of the two-dose Sputnik V and has yet to complete the advanced testing needed to ensure its safety and effectiveness in line with established scientific protocols. Russia started human trials of Sputnik

Light in January, and the studies are still ongoing, according to official records. Sputnik Light is the fourth domestically developed Covid-19 vaccine approved in Russia.

Commenting on the decision to authorise it for use, President Vladimir Putin said Thursday, "It's nice to know that this range of tools (against COVID-19) is expanding."

Russian health minister Mikhail Murashko said authorising a fourth jab will help speed up the process of forming herd immunity against the virus.

— AP

"This is a global health crisis, and the extraordinary circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic call for extraordinary measures," said Tai.

"The administration's aim is to get as many safe and effective vaccines to as many people as fast as possible," she said.

Tai's announcement

## SAGE | ADVICE

Court directs govt to create required infra to handle next surge

## Prepare for 3rd wave, SC tells Centre

**New Delhi, May 6:** The Supreme Court on Thursday said the country needs to be prepared for the third wave of Covid-19 which experts say could be more harmful, especially for children, and emphasised upon the need to create buffer stock of oxygen.

The apex court asked the Centre not to reduce oxygen supply to Delhi from 700 metric tonnes till further orders and ensure that rationalisation exercise is completed while taking into account the pan-India perspective. The

court said that people in Delhi are dying despite efforts being made to treat Covid-19 patients and there is also no denying that many have lost their lives due to shortage of oxygen.

It made clear to the Centre and Delhi government that it will not allow the top court of the country to be a ground of recrimination between the two as both indulged in a blame game on the issue of allocation and supply of oxygen.

A bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and M.R. Shah said: "We need to pre-



We need to prepare for the third surge of Covid-19. We have to be ready for that. We have been reading that some experts have said that the third surge will be more harmful especially to children.

— Supreme Court

pare for the third surge of Covid-19 which may have altogether different parameters. We have to be

ready for that. We have been reading that some experts have said that the third surge will be more harmful especially to children.

"We understand children are more resilient as compared to elders but we have to also consider that they themselves will not go to hospitals and their parents will have to take them making them vulnerable."

The bench warned both Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, and senior advocate Rahul Mehra, repre-

senting the Delhi government, that the Supreme Court being the top Constitutional court of the country cannot be allowed to be a ground of recrimination.

"People and even some big hospitals of the national capital are making SOS calls about a shortage of oxygen supply. Why are you not creating a buffer stock? If as you claim, Delhi is not using or needs 700MT and only 490MT is needed, then this excess 200MT can be used to create a buffer stock," the bench said.

— PTI

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy virtually inaugurated an APSRTC bus depot at Punganur and RTC Area Hospital at Kadapa from his camp office here on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said he was happy to inaugurate both the RTC facilities, which would benefit the public and also RTC employees. He commended the efforts of RTC officials for building a hospi-

tal in these tough times and augmenting the efforts of the health department. He said the hospital would provide better medical services to the RTC employees and reiterated that he had kept his word by establishing a bus depot and a hospital.

Transport minister Perni Venkataramaiah said that the previous government had tried to privatise the RTC by closing down depots.

■ Page 2: Jagan gave new life to RTC, says Perni



## IN BRIEF

## SEC LIFTS MODEL CODE IN RURAL AREAS IN STATE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

The State Election Commission lifted the model code of conduct in the rural areas in the entire state from Thursday.

The SEC issued an order here on Thursday stating that as the High Court heard the arguments and reserved its judgement, it has lifted the model code of conduct with immediate effect.

The SEC issued notification for resumption of adjourned election process for MPTCs/ZPTCs in the state and imposed mode code of conduct in the rural areas from April 1. Following a batch of petitions to set aside election notification, a division bench of the high court directed the SEC to conduct elections to MPTC/ZPTC as per schedule on April 8 but instructed it not to take up counting of votes and declaration of results scheduled on April 10.

## AMARA RAJA GETS RELIEF FROM HC ON CLOSURE NOTICE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Amara Raja Batteries owned by Telugu Desam MP Galla Jayadev got a relief from closure in AP High Court.

The court held a hearing on the petition filed by the management challenging AP Pollution Control Board's earlier direction to close it down for its failure to comply with environmental norms in Chittoor district. The court directed the firm to comply with the green norms recommended by the APPCB by June 17.

The court directed the APPCB to inspect the firm after June 17 and submit a report to it and posted the next hearing to June 28.

## AP SUB-REGISTRAR OFFICES OPEN FROM 7:30 TO 11:30 AM

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

The registration of documents and related services will be carried out at sub-registrar offices from 7.30 am to 11.30 am in the state.

The state government issued a memo, changing the business hours of the registration offices in the state following imposition of curfew in the state from 12 noon to 6 am next day to contain spread of the Coronavirus from May 5 to 18.

Accordingly, the commissioner and inspector general of registration and stamps department issued a direction to allow functioning of sub-registrar offices from 7.30 am to 11.30 am from May 5 to 18. However, the officers will work till 2 pm at the sub-registrar offices.

## CM EXPRESSES GRIEF OVER DEATH OF AJITH SINGH

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY. 6

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Sri Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has expressed grief over the passing away of Ajith Singh, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) Chief and former Union Minister who worked for the cause of farmers.

The Chief Minister conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family members.

Telugu Desam Chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday expressed deep shock and grief over the death of former Prime Minister Charan Singh's son and Rashtriya Lok Dal President Ajit Singh.

Mr. Naidu recalled how the RLD chief rendered memorable services to the people in his capacities as a Member of Parliament and as a former Union Minister. He was one of the committed leaders who always yearned to serve the people. He conveyed his condolences to the bereaved family members.

● **TELOGU DESAM** Chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday expressed deep shock and grief over the death of former Prime Minister Charan Singh's son and Rashtriya Lok Dal President Ajit Singh. Naidu recalled how the RLD chief rendered memorable services to the people in his capacities as a MP.

## O2 storage has to be doubled, Jagan told

44,236 beds in 88 Covid care centres across the state

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said every teaching hospital should have 10 kilo litres (kl) of oxygen storage capacity and other hospitals should have at least 1 kl storage capacity. He was holding a review meeting on the Corona situation at the CM camp office in Tadepalli on Thursday. He said the officials should be ready for any eventuality.

The officials informed the CM that around 420 to 500 metric tonnes of oxygen is being used per day in Covid hospitals and it is expected to reach 1,000 metric tonnes by May 15. But the state has a storage capacity of only 515 met-

● **STRESSING ON** the key role of '104' call centre, the CM said complete support and cooperation should be provided to the people who call up the call centre. Beds should be allocated within three hours as instructed previously. The officials should be ready for any situation.

ric tonnes, they said. In view of the growing demand for oxygen, the state is requesting the centre for more tankers to transport 200 tonnes of oxygen per day from Sriperumbudur and another 200 metric tonnes from Bellary, as well as from Odisha.

Stressing on the key role of '104' call centre, the CM said complete support and cooperation should be provided to the people who call up the call centre. Beds should be allocated within three hours as

instructed previously. He wanted senior officials to step in and help with admissions if beds are not available.

The officials informed the Chief Minister that there are currently 44,236 beds in 88 Covid care centres across the state, and 13,356 patients are present in those centres. The state government recruited 16,981 staff so far this year, including medical professionals, staff nurses, technicians, data entry operators, MNOs, FNOs and sweepers.

In regard to Covid Vaccination, two doses of Covid vaccine were administered to 12 lakh people and single dose to 42 lakh people, the officials said.

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Krishna Srinivas, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, DGP Goutam Sawang, Covid command control chairman Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy, Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, Covid task force committee chairman M.T. Krishna Babu, Health Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, Health Secretary M Ravi Chandra, '104' call centre in-charge A Babu, Aarogyasri CEO Dr Mallikarjuna were there.

## No N440K strain of Corona in AP, says top state official

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

The state government has ruled out the presence of N440K strain of coronavirus and made it clear that only B.1.167 and B.1 strains are found prevalent in the samples collected from south India, based on a finding by CCMB, Hyderabad.

Responding to reports in a section of media that the presence of N440K strain was resulting in the rapid spread of the virus in the state, AP State Covid Command and Control Centre chairman Dr K.S. Jawahar Reddy released a statement here on Thursday stating that CCMB was carrying out genome sequencing for the samples being sent from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka at the rate of 250 samples every month.

He said that N440K strain of virus (B.1.36) was found in June-July of last year from the samples

● **STATE COVID** Command and Control Centre chairman pointed out that at present B.1.167 and B.1 strains were found to be popular from coronavirus positive samples collected in April.

collected from the three states and added that the strain was prevalent in December and this January and February. He said that the strain has dropped drastically in March.

Reddy pointed out that at present B.1.167 and B.1 strains were found to be prevalent from coronavirus positive samples collected in April. He said that they were very infectious and spreading even among youngsters.

Referring to the double mutant strain B.1.617, he said that it was found initially in western states. Quoting WHO's Covid-19 weekly epidemiological update of April 25, he stated that WHO mentioned

about lineage of B.1.617 as a variant of interest from India but did not mention the N440K variant, which discounts the media reports.

He clarified that research data from reputed scientific bodies did not establish that the N440K strain was a variant of interest and urged people not to panic about it.

He said that the WHO declared B.1.617, a 'variant of interest', originally found in samples from Maharashtra in January and added that it was spreading quickly in India. He also said that the variant was detected in samples collected from Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Delhi, Gujarat, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and others. Quoting WHO, he further said that this Indian strain was detected in at least 17 countries including the UK, US and Singapore.

## Nani slams Naidu, terms him deadlier than virus

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Refuting TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's charge that a dangerous N440K variant of Coronavirus has been detected in Kurnool, which is spreading fast, information minister Perni Venkataramaiah alias Nani clarified that there has been no such diagnosis.

The minister retorted that Naidu is more dangerous than the N440K mutant.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Nani underlined that the government has been relentlessly working to provide medical services even beyond its means. But opposition leader Chandrababu Naidu is trying to defame the state by falsely accusing the government, in the process scaring people with false rumours.

He maintained that no confirmation is there about the spread of N440K virus. Senior scientists have also confirmed that there is no new virus mutant in the country other than B.1.617.

## YSRC NETAS SCARED TO SPEAK TRUTH TO JAGAN, SAYS NARA LOKESH

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 3

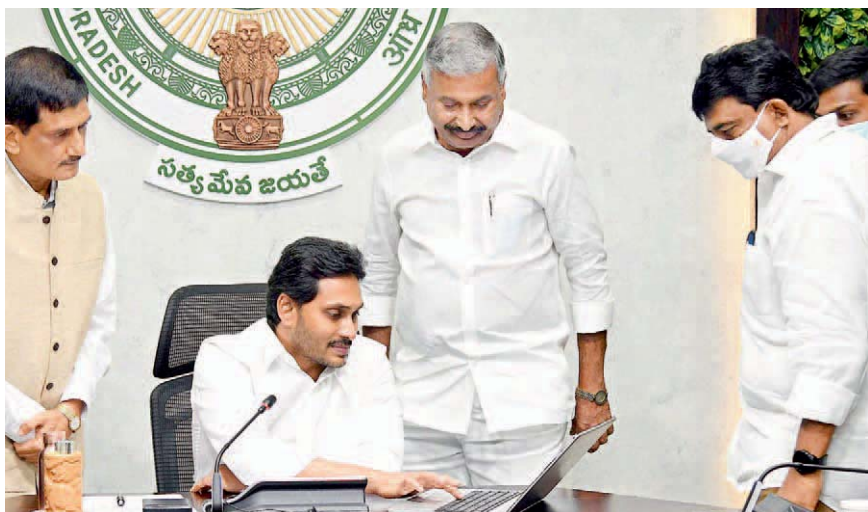
Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday criticised Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for creating such a 'fear psychosis' that even his own party MPs were terrified to talk frankly to him about the people's suffering during this Covid calamity. He said the situation became so worse that not a single YSRC leader was opening his mouth even as people were getting infected in

thousands and dying in hundreds.

Lokesh alleged that even the YSRC MPs were afraid to take up the issue with the Chief Minister for fear of vindictive actions if they spoke out frankly. He told the CM to do some soul searching at a time when his own party MPs were privately discussing about the collapse of the Covid treatment machinery in the state. He claimed that the ruling party MPs were saying privately how the inefficient regime of CM Jagan was posing a big danger to the people of AP.

The minister said Chandrababu Naidu should know better who is controlling the vaccine supply.

He explained that so far, 67,42,700 people have been vaccinated in the state with both the two doses when only 73,49,960 doses of vaccine had been supplied by the centre. He asserted that if the centre gives vaccines in abun-



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy virtual launches Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy area hospital (Kadapa) and Punganuru Bus depot (Chittoor district) from the camp office on Thursday. Ministers Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), Peddireddy Ramchandrareddy, and APSRTC vice-chairman and managing director R.P. Thakur (left) are also seen.

— BY ARRANGEMENT

## AP seeks Railways help to lift O2 from Angul

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

In the wake of growing demand for medical oxygen, spurred by uptick in Coronavirus infections in the state, the Andhra Pradesh government is making efforts to fully utilise its entire quota from Angul in Odisha. Apart from use of military aircraft, it wants to use railway services to make faster deliveries to hospitals across the state.

Though the centre has allotted nearly 428 tonnes of medical oxygen to AP in varying quantities from Angul, Odisha, RINL, Visakhapatnam, Bellary, Karnataka, Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, and also from parts of Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam in small quantities, the government is unable to draw the allotted quantities for want of cryogenic tankers, especially from Angul, and also from Visakhapatnam plants.

At this juncture, the state government intends to lift the whole allotted quantity of medical oxygen, especially from Angul, apart from pursuing with the centre for additional quantity. Accordingly, it is even airlifting empty cryogenic tankers in a military aircraft and bringing the filled tankers back to AP by road. As the road transport is taking nearly 48 hours from Angul to AP and

thereafter several hours to reach local hospitals across the state, the government is planning to avail of rail transport by holding talks with the railway authorities concerned. Once it is through, more number of cryogenic tankers can be transported all the way from Angul to parts of AP by rail in relatively less time as compared to road transport.

State health authorities maintain that at present they are lifting 100 tonnes of medical oxygen from Angul against allotted the 150 tonnes. So is the case with RINL in Visakhapatnam. As against allocation of nearly 100 tonnes, around 70 tonnes of medical oxygen is being drawn per day. Lack of cryogenic tankers is said to be the reason for not fully utilising the allotted quota to the state.

State nodal officer (medical oxygen) S. Shan Mohan said, "The state government is making all efforts to get additional allotment of medical oxygen from Angul by the Centre, and lift all the allotted oxygen especially by rail as it helps transport of more number of cryogenic tankers in relatively less time to AP from Odisha. Efforts are on to lift all allotted quantities of oxygen from RINL also by arranging more cryogenic tankers to meet the increasing demand for oxygen in the state."

## YSRC starts Covid care centres at state office

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 3

In an innovative act, YSRC Congress has started a Covid help centre at its state headquarters in Tadepalli to serve virus affected people and their families. The party has asked all its MLAs to open similar centres in their respective constituencies too.

The ruling party's State Covid Command Control Help Centre helpline numbers are 9143541234 and 9143641234 for people to

get Corona-related assistance. They can also WhatsApp these numbers with their issues.

YSRC state general secretary and adviser to government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy claimed Andhra Pradesh government is an example for other states in the country in tackling Coronavirus. He pointed out that the government is waging a war against Covid-19 by enforcing curfew on one hand and providing effective medical services to

poor and middle class people on the other through Aarogyasri.

Ramakrishna Reddy said in addition to the government, ruling party MLAs and leaders too have been actively helping patients affected by Coronavirus within their assembly constituencies. YSRC has decided to further expand these services at the field level by starting Covid-19 help centres, apart from a State Covid Command Control Help Centre at Tadepalli.

## Week-long lockdown for vaccinated: Delhi govt

From Page 1

If such visitors can produce a full vaccination certificate, or a negative RT-PCR certificate issued to them within a 72-hour window of their arrival in Delhi, then such individuals will have to be quarantined for a week, the Delhi government said.

Some exemptions have been given to "all Constitutional and government functionaries and the staff members accompanying

them to the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the government said.

However, such individuals must be asymptomatic, or not to have any Covid-19 related symptoms, and should self-monitor their health for the next 14 days. They will be expected to strictly follow the Covid-19 related guidelines/instructions/SOPs issued by the government of India as well as the Delhi government.

Such people must also

restrict their travel within Delhi to the minimum that is required to perform the work for which they have visited Delhi.

But if any such exempted individual shows symptoms, then they too will have to undergo mandatory quarantine as is the case with normal travellers from the two states.

These restrictions will be enforced for those visiting Delhi, irrespective of the mode of transport they use to visit the capital.

COVID | FIGHT 50% of beds in empaneled hospitals allotted to Covid-19 patients, vacant beds under Aarogyasri

## Hospitals to have beds under German hanger tents

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Given the rise in coronavirus positive and the resultant shortage of beds, the state government has decided to arrange 200 to 300 beds under German hanger tents in each big hospital with oxygen facility to overcome the shortage.

The Health principal sec-

retary Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Thursday that depending upon the area available on the premises of big hospitals located in urban centres like Vijayawada, Guntur, Nellore, among others, they would arrange additional beds and run them as Covid Care Centres in order to treat patients with less symptoms. He said

that the task to arrange beds has been entrusted to the roads and buildings department.

Maintaining that 16,967 beds were available in government hospitals, he stated that 50 per cent of beds available in empaneled hospitals and those set up after getting the go-ahead from the district collectors, would be allotted to Covid patients under

● **HEALTH PRINCIPAL** secretary Anil Kumar Singhal told media persons here on Thursday that depending upon the area available on the premises of big hospitals located in urban centres, they would arrange additional beds.

Aarogyasri scheme. If beds are lying vacant, they would also be brought

under Aarogyasri scheme.

At present, there are 349 network hospitals with 25,058 beds. Of them 7,647 patients are taking treatment under Aarogyasri scheme, he said and added that 1,949 beds were available in 47 private hospitals.

The health principal secretary said that the purchase committee had decided to procure 25 cryo-

genic tankers with each having a capacity to store 20 tonnes and a total capacity to store 500 tonnes. They would be available in three to four weeks.

He said that an order was placed for purchase of 10 oxygen concentrators and added that the state government had decided to shortly set up plants with a capacity to produce 76 tonnes of oxygen. He said

that six plants with 25 tonnes capacity had started production while four more plants with 19 tonnes capacity will be ready in three to four days.

With regard to vaccines, he said that the state government had allotted ₹100 crore to the health department and ₹45 crore for vaccine and added that AP required nearly three crore doses.



## IN BRIEF

SUGGESTIONS ON  
TENDERS FOR 1,893  
AGRI GODOWNSDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

The AP Agricultural Marketing Department is inviting suggestions for proposed tenders invitation for 1,893 godowns along with drying yards with an estimated cost of ₹369.95 crore to construct 500 MT and 1000 MT capacity godowns along with drying yards for utilisation by farmers.

The godowns include 863 godowns to built at a cost of ₹161.15 crore in Vijayawada division, which comprises East Godavari, West Godavari and Krishna districts, and 1,030 godowns at a cost of ₹208.80 crore in Rayalaseema division which covers Chittoor, Kadapa, Kurnool and Anantapur respectively.

For these godowns, required documents were submitted to the Judge, Judicial Preview, for approval. The details are uploaded in the websites <https://judicialpreview.ap.gov.in> and <https://vyavasayamar-ketingshakha.ap.gov.in>.

The department said any suggestions or objections or clarifications may be submitted before 5 pm on or before May 17 at the website: <https://judicial-preview.ap.gov.in>.

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Visakhapatnam-8, Cell : 885596999

BUS SERVICES  
FROM TS TO AP  
SUSPENDEDDC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD MAY 6

All inter-state bus services from Telangana state to Andhra Pradesh state have been suspended in the wake of the extended Covid-19 related curfew in Andhra Pradesh.

Vehicles would be allowed into Andhra Pradesh at the border points only between 6 am and 12 noon. As buses might reach post noon and break the curfew, the decision was taken to suspend the services, officials said.

Ambulances, goods vehicles, doctors, and persons who have flight tickets and need to reach the Gannavaram airport near Vijayawada, however, are exempted from the restriction.

The restrictions will continue till May 18 as per the GO issued by the Andhra Pradesh government. Meanwhile, there is no restriction on the movement of vehicles from Andhra Pradesh into Telangana state.

DRDO CHIEF  
ARRANGES O2  
CONCENTRATORSDC CORRESPONDENT  
NELLORE, MAY 6

Chairman of Defense Research and Development Organisation G. Satish Reddy arranged 40 oxygen concentrators to SPSR Nellore district.

After inspecting the equipment at the GGH in Nellore on Thursday, District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said they would send five oxygen concentrators each to the five divisions of the district and allot ten among them to the GGH. He said that they will be good results to the patients in casualty with mild symptoms.



A RTC bus driver offers sanitiser to a passenger as part of the measures against the spread of Covid-19, at Dwaraka bus station in Visakhapatnam on Thursday.

— P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

Kurnool in dire need  
of pulmonologists

Covid care crippled; severe cases referred to GGH, other cities

D. SIVA RAMI REDDI | DC  
KURNOOL, MAY 6

With thousands of people getting admitted into Covid care centres and a few hundred acute cases undergoing treatment at Covid hospitals in the district, it is appalling to note the shortage of pulmonologists and anaesthesia specialists, causing problems in the diagnosis of Covid patients.

The district has 28 Covid hospitals besides Coronavirus care centres at Adoni, Nandyal, Kurnool, Yemmiganur and Sunnipenta. They are brimming with patients. Of the 6,000 beds, 5,900 are occupied. The occupancy rate has reached 98.33 per cent,

THE DISTRICT Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr Rama Giddaiah said there is an acute shortage of pulmonologists and anaesthetists at the primary health care centres (PHCs). PHCs have just two pulmonologists and no anaesthetists. The role of pulmonologists is crucial in the treatment of Covid patients. The DMHO informed that severe cases would be referred to Kurnool Government General Hospital (GGH).

The District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr Rama Giddaiah said there is an acute shortage of pulmonologists and anaesthetists at the primary health care centres (PHCs). PHCs have just two pulmonologists and no anaesthetists. The role of pulmonologists is crucial in the treatment of Covid patients. The DMHO informed that

severe cases would be referred to Kurnool Government General Hospital (GGH). The district has been reporting over 1,000 cases for some time and the demand for hospitalisation is further straining the already hard-pressed medical resources of the district. The former secretary of Indian Medical Association (IMA) unit at Kurnool, Mallikarju-

nayya, said every Covid hospital must have one pulmonologist and an anaesthetist per shift. The 28 Covid hospitals should have 84 pulmonologists and anaesthetists to cater to three shifts in the hospitals. He said the entire district does not have more than 40 pulmonologists.

Patients turning critical at Covid hospitals at Kurnool are being referred to Hyderabad or Bengaluru, said Veera Reddy, whose relative was shifted to Apollo Hospitals in Hyderabad. Adoni MLA Y. Siva Prasad Reddy is also getting treatment for Covid in Hyderabad, his aides said.

Getting a second dose of  
same vax a daunting taskDC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MAY 6

The third vaccination drive which was launched on May 1 in the district, opening doors to all above 18 years, is leading to severe shortage of vaccines as the demand for first dose is growing by leaps and bounds. This is unwittingly leaving those waiting for a second dose in the lurch.

People who have taken the first Covid-19 vaccination dose are making frantic efforts to get the same vaccine for the second dose. With private hospitals not getting any supplies, those who took the first jab are running after govt hospitals and centres to get inoculated for a second time.

After registering himself for the dose at a primary healthcare centre near Nandyal, he reached there only to be told that there was Covaxin shortage. Narayana Reddy, a resident of Kurnool, said, booked his slot on the app for Covaxin at a centre 100 km away from the city. But just before he could plan his journey, he received a message that the pro-

gramme was cancelled. Hundreds of people are facing the same predicament. When contacted, District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr Rama Giddaiah admitted there were lapses in Covid vaccine dispensation. He said that they received a directive from the government that preference should be given to second dose cases.

He informed that around 40,000 vaccines left with them would suffice for the next couple of days only. "We have got the Covishield vaccines only and we are administering the same across the district. We have no stocks of Covaxin." When told that 28 days elapsed since the first dose of Covaxin to many people, Dr Giddaiah said nothing would happen if there was a delay in taking the second vaccine.

He appealed to the people to be patient and cooperate with the healthcare workers in the district.

SCR CANCELS 14  
PAIRS OF TRAINS  
TILL END OF MAYDC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 6

Citing poor occupancy, the South Central Railway has cancelled 14 pairs of trains till the end of the month.

The cancelled services between Telangana state and AP include: Train 07023/24 between Secunderabad and Kurnool; Train 02795/96 between Lingampalli and Vijayawada; 02775/76 Kakinada Town to Lingampalli; 02762/61 between Karimnagar and Tirupati; 02784/83 between Secunderabad and Visakhapatnam and 02800/02799 between Secunderabad and Vijayawada.

Within AP, the cancelled services are trains 02708/07 Tirupati-Visakhapatnam; 07249/50 Kakinada Town-Renigunta; 02744/43 Vijayawada-Gudur; 07237/38 Bitragunta-Chennai Central and 07231/32 Narasapur to Nagarsol.

● The SCR cancelled services between Telangana state and Andhra Pradesh.

21,994 Covid cases,  
72 deaths reportedDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Andhra Pradesh reported 21,994 fresh Coronavirus infections and 72 deaths in the last 24 hours. The state health authorities reported here on Thursday that out of 1,10,147 samples that were tested, 21,954 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,70,60,446 samples tested so far, 12,28,186 persons were found Covid positive. Of them, 10,37,441 have recovered while 1,82,329 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, 12 of 13 districts reported over 1,000 cases each with East Godavari registering the highest number at 3,531 followed by 2,354 in Chittoor, 2,107 in Visakhapatnam, 1,939 in Srikakulam, 1,920 in Kurnool, 1,871 in Anantapur, 1,666 in Prakasam, 1,348 in Guntur, 1,292 in Nellore, 1,160 in Vizianagaram, 1,130

in Kadapa, 1,088 in West Godavari and 548 cases in Krishna.

Chittoor was the worst hit with highest number of cumulative active cases at 20,689 followed by 20,603 in East Godavari, 19,098 in Srikakulam, 18,334 Guntur, 15,244 Visakhapatnam, 15,126 Nellore, 14,323 Kurnool, 13,938 Anantapur, 13,143 Prakasam, 9,434 West Godavari, 8,520 Krishna, 7,478 Vizianagaram and 6,399 in Kadapa.

Among daily cases of deaths, Visakhapatnam reported the highest at 11, followed by nine each in East Godavari and Vizianagaram, eight in Anantapur, six in Prakasam, five each in Chittoor, West Godavari, Guntur, four each in Krishna, Kurnool and Srikakulam and two in Nellore. The death toll rose to 8,446.

A total of 10,141 patients were discharged after recovery in the last 24 hours.

250 rly staff recover,  
asked to attend dutyDC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MAY 6

Nearly 250 railway employees undergoing treatment for Coronavirus in railway hospitals in AP have been discharged and asked to report for work.

Following rapid spread of Coronavirus in the second wave, nearly 250 railway drivers, assistant drivers and guards of South Central Railway working at Vijayawada, Rajahmundry and Bitragunta had got infected with the virus. They had been admitted to local railway hospitals for treatment.

SCR, however, without giving intimation to any patient, directed authorities of these hospitals on Wednesday to discharge all staff at one go. The employees had also been asked to report for duty on Thursday. Railway sources said the move is aimed at avoiding any disruption in running of trains transporting both

passengers and freight.

Sources say some patients on ICU beds and seriously ill did not report for work on Thursday. Instead, they opted to apply for leave. However, certain discharged employees did report for work.

One of discharged patients sent a communication to his colleagues saying, "Dear friends, don't get worried over it. The health of you and your family is more important. Don't panic and get tensed up regarding such issues. If you are safe, your family will be safe. If you cannot attend to work, just take leave. Be cool and happy, and come back to work like a warrior."

Affected railway employees say top railway officials are being callous about their health. They went on to allege that no proper facilities had been there for treating virus-infected persons at their respective hospitals.

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## SHORT TAKES

## BJP TAKES DOWN VIDEO CLAIMING DEATH OF 'JOURNO'

DC CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

A video released by the BJP on its social media platform of its members who were “victims of the post-poll violence” in West Bengal had to be pulled back as photograph of one of the victims — Manik Moitra from Sitalkuchi — turned out to be that of a journalist.

The BJP had earlier shared the names of nine victims of post-poll violence in West Bengal including Monik Moitra. The party had to pull back the video after the journalist tweeted that he was “living and hale and hearty and around 1,300 km away from Sitalkuchi.”

“The image of Abhiro Banerjee was erroneously included in the video while using an article by him as a source for the content,” said a statement issued by the BJP, which also included a hyperlink and an image link in its statement claiming that Manik Moitra “succumbed to his injuries in Sitalkuchi following violence instigated and inflicted by TMC members.”

## CHARTERED PLANE MAKES BELLY-LANDING

**Mumbai, May 6:** A chartered plane carrying five people, including a patient and a doctor, landed on its belly at Mumbai airport late on Thursday evening after declaring a full emergency. Airport authorities carpeted the runway with foam to prevent the plane catching fire.

All passengers were evacuated safely after the belly-landing of the plane, which was flying from Nagpur to Mumbai, according to the CSMA (Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport Mumbai). A full emergency was declared for the non-scheduled Beechcraft flight.

While it could not be independently confirmed, reports said that a wheel of the aircraft came off soon after taking off from Nagpur.

Pictures of the plane landing on the foamed runway were also doing the rounds on social media.

In a detailed statement, the Mumbai airport said the plane — carrying two crew members, a patient, one relative and a doctor — did a belly-landing at the airport at 9.09 pm on Thursday.

“As a precautionary method, CSMA also foamed RWY (runway) 27 in order to prevent the aircraft catching fire. All passengers were evacuated safely and flights operating in and out of CSMA remain on schedule,” the airport said in a statement.

“The airport’s emergency response team, including the fire and rescue responders, follow-me vehicles, CISF, medical team amongst many others, was activated instantly and on stand-by to provide immediate assistance to ensure the safe evacuation of the passengers,” the statement said.

Full emergency is declared when an aircraft approaches an aerodrome in a manner that there is a danger of an accident occurring.

## WRESTLER'S DEATH: POLICE LOOK FOR SUSHIL KUMAR

**New Delhi, May 6:** The Delhi Police on Thursday said it is conducting raids in search of two-time Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar and others in connection with a brawl that led to the death of a wrestler inside the Chhatrasai Stadium complex in north Delhi.

A senior police officer said Kumar, the only Indian to win two individual Olympic medals, is yet to join the investigation.

Teams have been formed and raids are being conducted in Delhi and the neighbouring states, the police said.

A 23-year-old wrestler died and two of his friends got injured after they were allegedly brutally assaulted by other wrestlers inside the Chhatrasai Stadium.

The incident occurred in the intervening night of Tuesday and Wednesday over a dispute related to a property located in the Model Town area.

Prince Dalal (24), a resident of Haryana’s Jhajjar, has been apprehended in connection with the case and a double-barrel gun has been seized from his possession.

The police said they have seized two double-barrel guns, seven live cartridges, two wooden sticks and five cars in connection with the case.

## Centre seeks report on WB violence

Mamata offers jobs of home guards to one family member each of Cooch Behar victims

From Page 1

The MoS was going to visit the family of a slain BJP worker and other injured.

He later tweeted: “TMC goons attacked my convoy in West Midnapore, broken windows, attacked personal staff. Cutting short my trip. We could not visit the house of @BJP4Bengal Karyakarta, Biswajit Mahesh, who was killed in the post-poll violence at his village Markundachak. Police advised us not to go after the attack on my convoy at Paanchkuri.”

Mr Muraleedharan added: “@BJP4India will not be threatened by Un-Democratic forces. Our fight against perpetrators of violence will continue in Democratic means. Arrived at Debra to meet workers of @BJP4Bengal who have been brutally attacked, whose houses have been destroyed by TMC goons.”

At Nabanna, Ms Banerjee said, referring to the troubled zones: “We have marked some areas as black spots where unrest is spreading after the BJP has won by transferring police officials, including superintendents of police, due to their organisational inefficiency.”

She also announced her government’s compensation of ₹2 lakhs for the family of each person killed in the post-poll clashes.

At Dinhat in Cooch Behar of North Bengal, former TMC MLA Udayan Guha, who lost to Nishith Pramanik of the BJP this time, was injured in the right hand while two of his security personnel suffered head injuries after saffron party workers beat them in an attack.

Ms Banerjee also offered jobs of home guards to one family member each of all five villagers killed in the paramilitary forces’ firing at Sitalkuchi in the district during the elections.



A team of home ministry officials seen after a meeting with a West Bengal BJP delegation at the BSF office in Kolkata on Thursday. The team is tasked with filing a report on the post-poll violence in the state. — PTI

## Nadda condemns attack on Muraleedharan’s car

**New Delhi, May 6:** BJP president J.P. Nadda on Thursday condemned the attack on Union minister V. Muraleedharan’s convoy in West Bengal and claimed that “TMC-sponsored” violence was in full swing in state after the assembly poll results were declared.

Union minister of state for external affairs V.

Muraleedharan’s car was vandalised at Panchkuri village in West Midnapore district on Thursday while he was visiting the area following alleged post-poll violence on saffron party workers.

Muraleedharan alleged in a tweet that “TMC goons” were behind the attack on his convoy.

Condemning the attack,

claimed all police officers in key positions were also appointed by the Election Commission.

The MHA had asked the chief secretary why ade-

quate measures to stop the violence had not been taken so far. “There are fresh reports which suggest that post-poll violence has not stopped.

Nadda alleged that law and order has completely collapsed in West Bengal. “If an Union minister can be attacked then what would be the condition of common man?” he posed.

“TMC-sponsored violence is in full swing in West Bengal after assembly elections in the state,” the BJP president alleged. — PTI

Immediate measures should be taken to stop the violence and a report should be sent immediately,” the home secretary said in his letter.



A family member reacts as he speaks on the phone after a relative died of Covid-19, in Ajmer on Thursday. Rajasthan reported 161 Coronavirus-related deaths and 17,532 fresh cases, pushing the toll to 5,182 and the infection count to 7,02,568. — PTI

## Kerala imposes total lockdown

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
MAY 6

The Kerala government on Thursday decided to enforce total lockdown from May 8 to 16 in view of he huge spike in Covid 19 cases.

The state on Thursday reported 42,464 new cases

● DURING THE last 24 hours 1, 55, 632 samples were tested and the test positivity rate was 27.28 per cent.

of Covid-19 taking the total number of active cases to 3,90,906. During the last 24 hours 1, 55, 632 samples were tested and

the test positivity rate was 27.28 per cent.

The state also recorded 63 deaths taking the total death toll so far to 5,628.

Meanwhile, the state government decided to put in place strong curbs to contain the increasing number of cases. With two districts ; Ernakulam and Kozhikode districts

currently having more than 50,000 patients each in hospitals , there’s is tremendous pressure on health care facilities including ICU beds , oxygen requirement and ventilators. Similar situation prevails in Malappuram, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram districts.

## FALSE | BELIEVES

RABINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY | DC  
BHOHAL, MAY 6

A few remote pockets in rural Madhya Pradesh are currently battling the Coronavirus pandemic with superstitious practices and quacks, due to lack of access to medical facilities.

In the village of Johri under Bomari block in Guna district, people have started thronging the nearby river of Barni to fetch ‘miracle water’ to

cure Covid-19, official reports reaching here on Thursday said.

According to the reports, a rumour that a small patch of the dried up river bed has begun yielding water made rounds, the area immediately witnessed mad rush by locals who wanted to fetch a bottle of the ‘miracle’ liquid to treat people infected by Coronavirus.

The block administration has rushed the local ‘patwari’ or revenue inspector to probe the inci-

dent and dissuade the villagers not to believe in such superstitions.

“Patwari Mahendra Singh Dhakad visited the spot on Wednesday. He asked people gathered on the riverbed to disperse. He was, however, chased away by the mob”, a senior district officer said unwilling to be quoted.

In another village of Umaria under Aron police station in the district, police last week arrested three healers who were taking gullible villagers

for a ride by promising them to ward off ‘corona ghost’ to make them immune to Covid-19.

The three accused, Kalyan Singh Ahirwar, Ram Singh Ahirwar and Maheswar Ahirwar, were arrested under section 269 (negligently spreading infection), 270 (willingly spreading infection) and 188 (disobedience to order promulgated by public servant) and Section 4 of the Epidemic Act, 1897, police said.

In the village of

Ganeshpur in Agar Malwa district, people took out a torch rally last fortnight to ‘drive out’ corona from their village.

The local youths ran around the village holding torches and chanting ‘bhago corona bhago’ (go corona go) slogans on the night of April 22 believing that the pandemic would be driven out by resorting to such superstitious practices.

Quacks in the villages were seen making hay out of the pandemic due to

## POST-POLL CLASH: WB ANNOUNCES ₹2L COMPENSATION TO KIN OF VICTIMS

**Kolkata, May 6:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said 16 people have lost their lives in post-poll violence in the state, and announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh each for their families.

Banerjee, during a press meet here, also said that her government will provide jobs of home guard to one family member each of all five persons killed in CAPF firing in Cooch Behar’s Sitalkuchi area last month.

She further said that a CID team has initiated a probe into the incident of firing in Cooch Behar that took place when the voting exercise was underway for the fourth phase of assembly elections, on April 10.

“At least 16 persons — mostly from the BJP and the TMC and one of the Samyukta Morcha — died in post-poll violence. We will pay a compensation of ₹2 lakh to their family members. Our government will also provide jobs of home guard to the next of kin of Sitalkuchi victims,” she said.

Taking a swipe at the BJP, the CM said that the saffron party was yet to come to terms with people’s mandate.

She accused central leaders of inciting violence in the state.

“Not even 24 hours have passed since I was sworn-in as the Chief Minister, and letters, a central team have started arriving. This is because the BJP has not yet reconciled to the mandate of common people. I will request the saffron party leaders to accept the mandate,” she told reporters. — PTI



Ajit Singh

## RLD LEADER AJIT SINGH DIES OF COVID-19

**New Delhi, May 6:** Former Union minister and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) leader Ajit Singh passed away at a Gurgaon hospital on Thursday morning battling Covid-19, his family said. He was 82.

Singh, the son of former prime minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, was diagnosed positive for Covid-19 on April 20, the family said in a statement.

“Chaudhary Ajit Singh ji was diagnosed as Covid+ on the 20th April. He battled his condition till the very end and breathed his last today morning, the 6th of May, 2021,” his son Jayant Chowdhury tweeted.

“Throughout his life journey, Chaudhary Sahib was loved and respected by many. He, in turn cherished this bond with all of you and gave his best consideration and efforts for your welfare,” he said.

“As our Nation confronts the horrific pandemic, it is our humble request to all those who wish to pay their respects, to please stay at home as far as possible. We must observe all safety protocols to keep ourselves and everyone around us healthy and safe. This would be the best way to honour Chaudhary Sahib as well as all those Covid warriors who are working night and day to protect us,” he said. — PTI

## Delhi, Maha see a fall in new cases; under testing suspected

VINEETA PANDEY | DC  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI, MAY 6

Delhi and Maharashtra are finally witnessing some respite with fresh Covid-19 cases showing decline but it may be too early to rejoice as there are also complaints of under testing. In Delhi, the positivity rate is below 25 per cent and on Thursday it recorded about 1,900 cases less than Wednesday. India on Thursday had over 4 lakh fresh cases and close to 4,000 deaths in the last 24 hours, the highest so far ever since the pandemic began last year.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday reviewed the Covid-19 situation in the country during which the need to ensure quick and holistic containment measures were discussed. “Prime Minister noted that an advisory was sent to the states to identify districts of concern where case positivity is 10 per cent or more and bed occupancy is more than 60 per cent on either oxygen supported or ICU beds,” a statement from PMO said.

Modi also spoke with the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand and Telangana about the Covid-19 situation in their respective states, as well as with lieutenant governors of Jammu & Kashmir and Puducherry, sources said.

Several oxygen plants and machines donated by different countries have been made functional even though the Central government is yet to give a complete list of their deployment locations.

The Prime Minister also reviewed the availability of medicines and was briefed about the rapid augmenting of production of medicines, including Remdesivir, officials said.

Meanwhile, the Union government on Thursday approached the Supreme Court against a Karnataka high court

● PRIME MINISTER reviews the availability of medicines and was briefed about the rapid augmenting of production of medicines, including Remdesivir.

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Meanwhile, the Union government on Thursday approached the Supreme Court against a Karnataka high court

direction asking the Union government to allocate 1,200 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen to the state. Karnataka is facing an acute shortage of medical grade oxygen and 38 patients have already died due to lack of oxygen supply at various hospitals.

Meanwhile, there was an interesting tweet from Indian Commercial Pilot’s Association demanding vaccines given their risk level. “We want vaccines, not your attitude. We’re sick of your stupid platitudes. So from longitude to latitude, we can serve the nation with gratitude,” the tweet said.

Ministry of civil aviation (MoCA) responded by saying it has issued guidelines to facilitate the vaccination program in a fast and efficient manner to ensure timely vaccination of the aviation community.

“As per the guidelines, all players in the Civil Aviation Sector would be advised to cover their personnel under the ongoing vaccination program. Guidelines further state that the organisations which have already made arrangements with government/private service providers for the vaccination to their employees may continue to do so,” MoCA said.

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According to Agar Malwa district chief medical health officer Samandar Singh Malviya, the orange farm owner was allegedly running the ‘open ground’ hospital.

“Four cases have been registered in connection with the incident against the ‘unlicensed practitioners’ for duping people”, he said.

Madhya Pradesh on Thursday reported 12,319 fresh cases taking the tally to 6,24,98.



## SHORT TAKES

INDONESIAN  
LANDSLIDE DEATH  
TOLL RISES TO 10

**Medan, Indonesia:** The death toll from a landslide at a hydroelectric dam project on Indonesia's Sumatra island has risen to 10, an official said on Thursday, as authorities called off a week-long search for victims.

A landslide triggered by heavy rains struck the Chinese-backed Batang Toru hydropower plant on Thursday last week, burying an estimated 13 people.

Employees were checking on the area over concerns that heavy rains could trigger landslides when the disaster struck. At least two children are among the victims. The body of a Chinese employee of the plant was identified on Wednesday.

Another Chinese employee narrowly escaped as he fled the scene.

ISRAELI AIR  
STRIKES HIT  
SOUTHERN SYRIA

**Damascus:** Israel carried out air strikes overnight in the southern Syrian province of Quneitra, Syrian state media and a war monitor said on Thursday, though there were no reports of casualties.

The strikes came a day after one civilian was killed and six others injured in similar attacks in the northwestern region of Latakia, a bastion of President Bashar al-Assad's Alawite minority.

Official news agency SANA said there had been "an Israeli attack led by a helicopter in one of Quneitra's zones" not far from the border with Israel. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also reported there had been "Israeli strikes".

The Britain-based war monitor, which relies on an extensive network of sources on the ground, said the strikes targeted the Syrian Army's 90th Brigade and regime military positions in north Quneitra, near the Israel-occupied Golan Heights.

UN: 155 MILLION  
FACED SEVERE  
HUNGER IN 2020

**United Nations:** At least 155 million people faced acute hunger in 2020, including 133,000 who needed urgent food to prevent widespread death from starvation — and the outlook for 2021 is equally grim or worse, a report by 16 organisations said on Wednesday.

The report, which focuses on 55 countries that account for 97% of humanitarian assistance, said the magnitude and severity of food crises last year worsened as a result of protracted conflicts, the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, and weather extremes that exacerbated "pre-existing fragilities."

The 155 million people faced "crisis," "emergency" or "catastrophe/famine" levels of food needs, an increase of around 20 million people from 2019, it said.

According to the report, two-thirds of the people in those crisis levels were in 10 countries — Congo, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan, northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Haiti.

GUNMEN KILL  
FORMER TV  
PRESENTER, FLEE

**Kabul:** Gunmen killed a former Afghan TV presenter on Thursday as he was travelling in the southern city of Kandahar, a provincial official said, adding to fears for press freedom in the war-wrecked country.

Nimat Rawan was shot at noon, provincial spokesman Baheer Ahmadi said, by two assailants who were able to escape with his mobile phone. Security officials have told several other journalists in the area that extremists are targeting them as well, he added.

The killing heightens worries over the fate of Afghan journalists as US troops pull out. Many fear violence will spike and reprisals will be taken out against those who worked with foreign forces. Rawan was a former presenter for the well-known local channel *Tolnews*.

He had been working in the Finance Ministry's media office, media watchdog Nia said in a statement. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but it comes a day after the Taliban issued a threat to Afghan journalists it considered too close to US-backed security agencies.

EU ready to discuss Covid-19  
vaccine patent scheme today

## Move comes after US backs patent waivers for Covid-19 vaccines

**Brussels, May 6:** European Union leaders said on Thursday that in the wake of the US backing patent waivers for Covid-19 vaccine technology, the 27-nation bloc immediately will start discussing whether they should join such a move.

The leaders' first opportunity to moulder a common view will come as soon as a two-day summit in Porto, Portugal, that starts Friday. While many insist that waiving patents would only go part way toward making vaccines available and likely in the midterm only, French President Emmanuel Macron said he "completely" supports opening up intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines as "a global public good".

At the same time, Macron insisted that the immediate priority for wealthier countries should be first donating more vaccine doses to poorer countries.

EU nations have long insisted they were in the vanguard of helping the rest of the world obtain vaccines, and have looked with a weary eye at how the United States effectively banned such exports itself.

The move to support waiving intellectual property protections on vaccines under World Trade Organisation rules marked a dramatic shift for the United States, which had previously lined up with many other developed nations opposed to the idea floated by India and South Africa. While the EU did not echo the US position, it generally welcomed President Joe Biden's move.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that "we are ready to discuss how the US proposal for waiver on intellectual property protection for Covid vaccines could help" end the crisis. Von der Leyen said in a video address Thursday, though, that other issues should take center stage. "In the short run...we call upon all vaccine-producing countries to allow exports and to avoid measures that disrupt supply chains," she said. —PTI



Patients arrive to receive a dose of a Covid-19 vaccine at a vaccination centre in a shopping mall of Belgrade on Thursday. Serbia's president said that his country would pay each citizen who gets a Covid jab before the end of May, in what could be the world's first cash-for-jobs scheme. — AFP

Oz's Victoria state to send  
\$41 million help to India

**Melbourne, May 6:** The Australian state of Victoria on Thursday announced 41 million dollar worth of aid and medical equipment, including 1,000 ventilators, for India to assist it to curb the devastating second wave of Covid-19.

The donation will be made to the Commonwealth medical stockpile. "We are working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to deliver this support to India as the country works to manage the second wave of coronavirus and treat those infected," according to an official statement.

"The 1,000 ICU Ventilators are currently owned by the Department of Health and will be donated to India for humanitarian purposes and the state was also preparing to send a range

of supporting equipment like connectors and humidifiers, with the total package valued at over 41 million Australian dollars. Announcing the support package, the state's acting Premier James Merlino said: "The situation in India right now is devastating and shows that the fight against this pandemic is not over — we have a responsibility to help where we can and that's exactly what we're doing." Minister for Multicultural Affairs Ros Spence said: "Our thoughts are with everyone impacted by this unfolding tragedy and we hope this package will go some way to addressing the challenges India is facing right now."

New Coronavirus cases and deaths in India hit a record daily high with 4,12,262 new infections and 3,980 fatalities being

reported, taking the total tally of Covid-19 cases to 2,10,77,410 and the death toll to 2,30,168, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

Expressing solidarity with India and the people, Kaushalya Vagghela, the first Indian born MP elected to the Victorian Parliament, said "at this painful and difficult time, all Victorians stand side by side with our Indian community, both here and abroad." She said she had also expressed her concerns about India and requested the state government to support India and Australians in India during this crisis. "I stood up in Victorian Parliament to urge the federal government to explore all options possible to safely bring back Australians currently in India," she added. —AP

SRI LANKA BANS  
TRAVELLERS  
FROM INDIA

**Colombo, May 6:** Sri Lanka on Thursday announced that all arrivals from India will be banned with immediate effect due to the record rise in Covid-19 cases in the neighbouring country.

Several countries like the UK, the UAE, Australia and Singapore have already banned travellers from India as well as other South Asian countries. The Civil Aviation Authority on Thursday said that travellers from India will not be allowed to disembark in Sri Lanka.

The decision has been taken as the coronavirus continues to spread rapidly in India. The Director General Civil aviation in a letter to the CEO of the national carrier Sri Lankan Airlines has said, "in accordance with instructions received from health authorities of Sri Lanka due to pandemic." —PTI

Macron endorses  
share of vax tech

**Paris, May 6:** French President Emmanuel Macron is joining the Biden administration in saying that he backs the sharing of the valuable technology behind Covid-19 vaccines. But Macro is also insisting that the immediate priority for wealthier countries should be first donating more doses to poorer countries.

Speaking on a visit Thursday to a vaccine center, the French leader said he "completely" supports opening up intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines. Macron said that "evidently, we must turn this vaccine in a global public good." But he also argued that even if patents are

waived, pharmaceutical companies in places like Africa aren't currently equipped to make Covid-19 vaccines and that donations of doses should be prioritized instead.

Macron claimed that the European Union is leading the way in vaccine donations and called for the United States and Britain to share more, too.

He said that "Europe is the most generous continent with the rest of the world," having exported 45 million doses, and expressed hope that "the British, the Americans and others will follow." He added that, "in the short term, this is what will allow us to vaccinate." —AP

Japan builds statue  
with Covid-19 grant

**Tokyo, May 6:** A remote Japanese fishing town has sparked debate after spending coronavirus relief funds on a giant squid statue that cost nearly \$2.50,000 in a controversial bid to boost post-pandemic tourism.

The huge pink monument with its tentacles outstretched was unveiled in March by the coastal town of Noto in central Japan as a proud nod to its local delicacy.

It cost around 27 million yen (\$2,47,000) and was mostly paid for with a national tax grant to aid communities hit financially by Covid-19 restrictions.

Despite online debate over the merits of the public spending, local officials said they hoped the installation at a roadside rest stop would pique travellers' interest at home and abroad.

"Tourism in our town has been badly damaged by the coronavirus. We wanted to do something to support the local industries," including promoting squid fishing, an official at Noto town hall said on Thursday.

As well as the impact of Japan's border restrictions and calls to limit domestic travel in the past year, the town's economy has also been hurt by recent bad catches, he



A giant squid statue, built at a cost of nearly \$2.50,000. — AFP

added. Many people came to see the 13-metre (43-foot) monument this week during a series of public holidays, the official said, with children playing on it and adults taking quirky pictures for social media.

But some people online were less delighted by the 10-tentacled statue.

"This is too surreal. What is also unclear is why this qualified for the grant," one Twitter user wrote in Japanese.

"It is wrong to spend tax on a non-urgent, unnecessary item. The mayor and local politicians should pay for it," said another.

But others were supportive. "My daughter will go there for a picnic in autumn. I hope they will not take it away," one person tweeted. —AFP

US downplays prospect  
post-Brexit deal with UK

**London, May 6:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has downplayed any prospect of an imminent trade deal with a post-Brexit Britain. In an interview with BBC radio broadcast Thursday, Blinken said any deal would take "some time" and that US President Joe Biden wants to ensure any trade agreement would benefit American workers and their families.

"Our trade negotiator just got on the job, so she's taking the time to go back and review everything that was discussed and that's going to take some time," said Blinken, who was in

London in the early part of the week for the Group of Seven meeting of foreign ministers.

"We want to make sure that, whether it's with the United Kingdom or anyone else, any agreements reached are consistent with the principles that President Biden has established to focus on making sure that these agreements really advance the well-being of our workers and their families. That's our focus." Blinken said the US's new trade negotiator, Katherine Tai, would be taking time to review the discussions that had taken place with the preceding administration of Donald Trump before

progressing with the talks.

Trump had been a keen proponent of a trade deal with Britain, which formally left the economic orbit of the European Union at the start of this year. Now outside the EU, the UK can negotiate its own trade deals — previously, when within the bloc, the EU had negotiated trade deals on behalf of its members.

One of the main arguments of Brexit supporters in the runup to the referendum on Britain's membership of the EU in 2016 was the prospect of a swift trade deal with the US, the world's largest economy. —AP

SpaceX successfully  
lands Starship rocket

**Washington, May 6:** SpaceX successfully landed its prototype Starship rocket at its Texas base on its fifth attempt, a livestream showed.

The test flight represented a big win for Elon Musk's hard-charging space company after the last four tries ended in explosions.

"Starship landing nominal!" tweeted Musk.

"Nominal" means normal in the context of spaceflight.

The execution wasn't quite perfect, with a small fire engulfing the base of the 50 meter- (160 feet-) high space vessel shortly after landing.

● The rocket dubbed SN15 took off from the Starbase in Boca Chica, southern Texas at around 5:25 pm.

Chica, southern Texas at around 5:25 pm local time (2225 GMT), reached an altitude of around 10 kilometers (6 miles) and performed a series of flight maneuvers.

SpaceX was facing added pressure to succeed with Wednesday's flight after NASA announced a version of Starship will be used as a lunar lander when the space agency returns humans to the Moon.

The \$2.9 billion contract is currently suspended after two rival companies, Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin and Dynetics, lodged a protest. —AFP

French boats leave Jersey,  
stand-off with Britain ends

**Saint Helier, Jersey, May 6:** French trawlers withdrew from waters around Jersey on Thursday after a protest over post-Brexit fishing rights that led to a brief standoff between British and French navy and coastal patrol boats.

The latest blow to cross-Channel relations was caused by angry French fishermen protesting over new fish licensing arrangements on the Channel island of Jersey following Britain's departure from the European Union.

At dawn, a flotilla of around 50 trawlers massed in front of the Saint Helier harbour on Jersey, a picturesque self-governing territory that is dependent on Britain for its defence.

Fears of a blockade prompted British Prime Minister Boris Johnson to send two royal navy gunboats to the area, with France following suit by sending two of its own coast patrol vessels.

"We won't be intimidated by these manoeuvres,"



French fishing boats return home following their protest in front of the port of Saint Helier off the British island of Jersey to draw attention to what they see as unfair restrictions on their ability to fish in UK waters after Brexit, on Thursday. — AFP

French Europe Minister Clement Beaune told AFP of the navy deployment.

Jersey lies just off France's northern coast and its rich fishing waters

were previously open to French boats before Brexit tore up the previous arrangements.

In the middle of the afternoon, after hours of

bobbing around while letting off the occasional smoke flare, the French trawlers began withdrawing. —AFP

## CHINA HALTS ECONOMIC DEAL WITH OZ

**Beijing, May 6:** China said on Thursday it had suspended an economic agreement with Australia, in an apparent tit-for-tat response to Canberra's scrapping a Belt and Road infrastructure pact and threat to undo a deal leasing Darwin Port to a Chinese company.

The China-Australia Strategic Economic Dialogue deal has been pulled "based on the current attitude" of the Australian government, China's National Development and Reform Commission said in a statement, blaming some officials of "ideological discrimination." Beijing will "indefinitely suspend all activities under the framework" of the agreement, the statement said. —AFP

| PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited  |  |
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| Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001   |  |
| Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813 : Website: www.pspcl.in (Contact No. 96461-22185)  |  |
| Tender Enquiry No.: 231/2021  | Dated: 06.05.2021                          |
| Dy. CE/Substation Design/ TS Organization, PSPCL, C-1, Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala invites E-tender For Manufacturing, Testing And Delivery of Various types of Marshalling Boxes. For detailed NIT & Tender specifications, please refer to <a href="https://eproc.punjab.gov.in">https://eproc.punjab.gov.in</a> from 10.05.2021 (11:00 AM onwards). |  |
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| C-170/21  | RO No PR-Adv. No :- 76155/12/235/2021/4344 |



# DECCAN Chronicle

7 MAY 2021

## As she fights Covid, Mamata must check Bengal violence

On taking the oath as West Bengal's chief minister for the third time on Wednesday, Mamata Banerjee went into top drive on the issue of battling the Covid-19 pandemic and the post-poll political violence in the state that had claimed 14 lives till then. Action on both began immediately, although she did say tackling Covid-19 was her "top priority".

If not Covid, what else can it be for any major leader of significance? Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a notable exception. The news of the second wave reached him late. Even today, the trench warfare against Covid-19 is being waged by state governments, with the Centre lording it over as the distributor of charity imports of oxygen.

It is just as well, therefore, that Ms Banerjee prioritised the fight against the virus. It is noteworthy, though, that the Centre has a different priority. The PM telephoned governor Jagdeep Dhankhar to say the post-poll violence must be tackled urgently. The PM's phone call is far from customary. It would have sufficed for the Union home secretary to call the state chief secretary.

The PM bringing himself into play is apt to be seen as a dog-whistle. BJP president J.P. Nadda rushed to Kolkata and staged a dharna. The notorious BJP IT cell went into overdrive with fake images that were called out by Alt News. An out-of-work ex-MP began lurid messaging on "Hindus" coming under even sexual attack.

In fact, a commission of inquiry will be needed to go into all aspects of the violence in the state in recent weeks, including the communal dimension. It will be found the dangerous process and the entire period of electioneering were co-terminous, and the post-poll violence was only the tailend of it. It is also incontrovertible, as Ms Banerjee noted, that for the past three months the state's law and order machinery was under the control of the Election Commission.

With a popular government back in the saddle, the chief minister now can't evade her responsibility. She must crack down on the troublemakers in all districts. It is not enough for her to say that the violence was mostly in constituencies where the BJP won. Attempts to communalise the situation with violence after a bitter defeat may be expected by bad losers, but triumphalist exuberance by the winners to showcase their prowess can't be ruled out.

In Tamil Nadu, Ms Banerjee's counterpart M.K. Stalin, the DMK chief, had his party supporters arrested for ransacking "Amma Canteens", a symbol that recalls late AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalithaa. This show of "raj dharma" and neutrality in administrative affairs is a fine example to emulate.

In recent days, repeated direct and indirect calls from elements at all levels within the BJP to impose President's Rule in West Bengal, using the post-poll violence as a pretext, it is self-evident that such posturing ridicules the saffron camp. In the real world, imposing Central rule is undoable after a stunning election. In fact, the BJP's moves are no more than a desperate attempt by the defeated side to shore up the battered morale of the faithful.

Besides tackling the Covid-19 pandemic, and the very culture of political violence — which Ms Banerjee is now uniquely placed to root out after her stupendous win — dealing with the unemployment monster must engage Ms Banerjee's attention without delay.

## 50% cap on quotas ideal

The Supreme Court has drawn a line in the sand in the matter of quotas. While striking down the reservation created for the Maratha community in Maharashtra, the court emphasised that the 50 per cent limit on total reservations cannot be crossed. This significant part of the ruling should help immensely in curbing the adventurism of political parties in creating openings for the wooing of community-based votes or pandering to dominant communities that have already achieved social salience. Also, in stretching quotas without end by quoting extraordinary circumstances, the states have been inclined to breach the 50 per cent, limit as Tamil Nadu (69 per cent) and Telangana (67 per cent) have done in extreme examples of reservation limits stretched unduly.

It is in perpetuating the principle of reservation, first thought of as a decade of social upliftment for disadvantaged people, that it has become an entitlement impelling movement beyond 50 per cent for those who, like dalits and SCs/STs, were historically denied by India's rigid and reprehensible caste system. True emancipation lies in the creation of opportunities in education and jobs so that no community feels left out. In the midst of the pandemic, this might seem a huge challenge, but progress can be achieved only if reservation is supported for those who really need it. Welfare measures for all economically backward people will be of greater help.

The court's stand on the inviolability of the 50 per cent limit set down in the Indra Sawhney verdict in 1992 might curb the rights of the states. The ruling that a single list of socially and educationally backward classes notified by the President of India alone will prevail, with states having only a recommendatory, role may prove contentious as it could lead to a further empowering of the federal at the cost of the regional. History does, however, suggest that neither the law nor the states have been able to do much about the creamy layer and their succeeding generations cornering opportunities stemming from reservations. In any event, breaching the 50 per cent ceiling will undermine the noble intentions of quotas for the most disadvantaged.

### DECCAN CHRONICLE

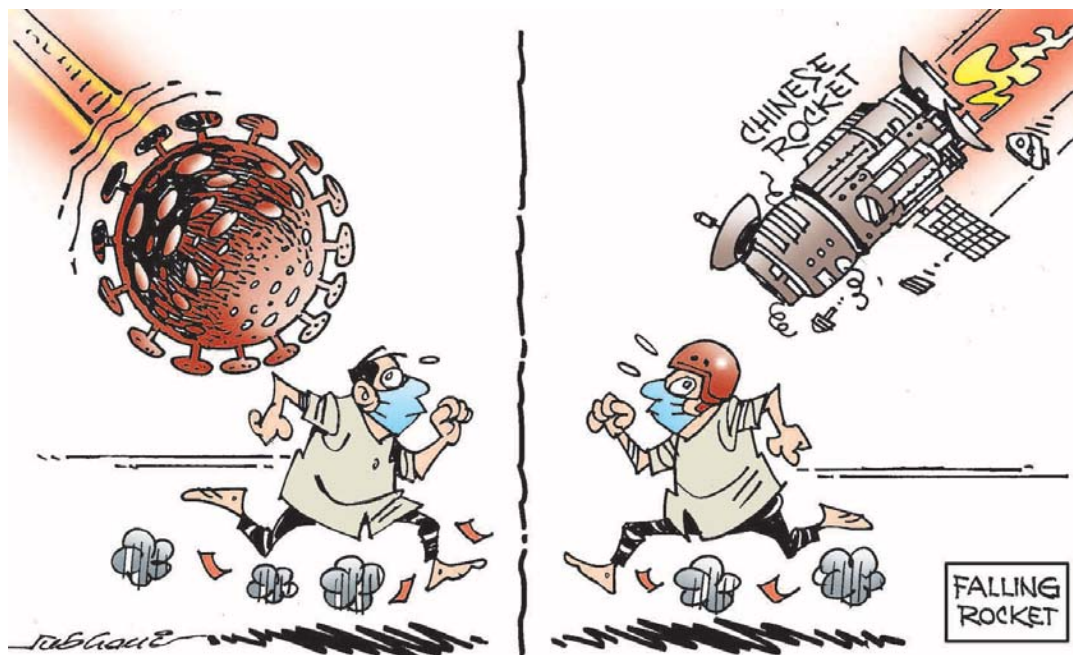
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DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

**Hyderabad:** 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930/4; Fax : 040-27805256  
**Vijayawada:** No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284/2555287; Telefax: 0866-2555234  
**Visakhapatnam:** Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285  
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Subhani



## The case against quotas isn't about meritocracy



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

The five-member Supreme Court Constitution Bench's order quashing the Maharashtra law granting reservations in admissions to educational institutions and in government jobs for the Maratha community is quite a complicated ruling. It does not reject the idea of affirmative action, which is what many opposed to caste-based reservations of any kind want, nor does it approve the free run of reservations for different groups. The 50 per cent limitation on reservations pronounced in the 1992 Mandal ruling by a nine-member bench of the Supreme Court is indeed a compromise between the need for affirmative action and the need to set up a cutoff point. But it is not a rigid cut-off point, and there is room to accommodate groups which need affirmative action even if it means breaking the 50 per cent barrier.

In its May 5 verdict, the Supreme Court had spelled out various reasons for disallowing reservations for the Marathas. It said that the move breached the 50 per cent ceiling on reservations and that there were no compelling reasons to do so because the community was adequately represented in all government services. It made the additional observation that the states have no right to determine which group belongs to the backward class, and that this can only be decided by the Central government through the National Backward Class Commission. The state government can only make its recommendation to the Central government. All these issues pass muster legally, but

they do not close the possibility of discussion and the tenability of contrary and legitimate viewpoints.

It is but a truism that things are rarely if ever purely legal, and the politics of it all, and not always in the negative sense, cannot be brushed aside. It is on the political ground that the case of reservations for Marathas in educational institutions and government jobs will have to be assessed. And there would be sufficient arguments on the side of those favouring reservations for the Marathas, as well as of those who are opposed to it. And it is a moot point as where does the principle of equality figure in the middle of this political and social tussle.

A look at the three Articles of the Constitution related to equality show that the principle is not a simple one at all. Article 14 is about "equality before the law", which means "equal protection of the laws". And while Article 15 prohibits discrimination "on grounds of only religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them", it says in Article 15(4) that this shall not "prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes". And power of the State to make "special provision" is reiterated in Article 16, which is about "equality of opportunity in public employment".

The ideal solution would be when there would not arise the need to make any "special provision" for certain sections of society which has been historically

unequal, not just in unthinking ways but in a deliberate and vicious manner. In Indian society, the battle lines have been shifting from that between traditional upper castes to the middle class, middle castes, and again to a battle between the newly empowered middle caste middle classes to the middle classes of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. There is the further complication of a battle between the middle classes of different middle castes seeking special provisions. It is not an easy thing for either the political leaders or for the judges to resolve the social disequilibrium.

The reservations issue poses a special dilemma for the Shiv Sena and the BJP, as both subscribe to conservative ideologies of different shades. The Shiv Sena's belief in the Maharashtrian identity is not sufficient to tackle the demands of different groups like that of the Marathas. Similarly, the BJP's Hindu identity, which seeks to overlook the clash of castes in the intra-Hindu framework, is of no help in facing up to the demand for reservations by the powerful middle class middle caste groups like the Patidars in Gujarat, the Marathas in Maharashtra and Jats in Rajasthan and Haryana.

It is quite easy to derive satisfaction from the discomfiture of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, but it does not help in resolving the basic challenge of delivering the terms of equality as enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16. What is needed is a debate across different

**It is quite easy to derive satisfaction from the discomfiture of the Shiv Sena and the BJP, but it does not help in resolving the challenge of delivering the terms of equality as enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16.**

sections of society about equality and how the fairness principle as spelled out by American political philosopher John Rawls can be applied. In a memorable passage from his classical treatise, *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls had stated: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems. A theory, however elegant and economical, must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise, laws and institutions, no matter how efficient and well-arranged, must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust."

This statement can serve as an ideal touchstone for discussions in the legislatures and courts, in universities and homes for debating the question of equality and how every individual and every section can have access to it. It will always remain a work in progress. There can be no permanent solutions. If today the Maratha community feels the need for reservations in educational institutions and government jobs, there must come a time through remedial laws that it will not suffer from those handicaps. It is a judgment call that the Marathas must take. Also, the leaders of the Maratha community must be able to decide as to who among the community really needs reservations. If every citizen has an equal right to education, and there are enough schools and universities for all, would there be a need for reservations? If there are enough jobs, would there be a need for reservations for government jobs for any community?

The BJP-led Central government can bring in the necessary legislation to break the 50 per cent ceiling in reservations, and all other parties would support it. But it does not provide a solution to the basic issue — education for all, and full employment.

*The writer is a commentator and analyst based in New Delhi*

### LETTERS

#### MODEL LEGISLATOR

Thanks to legislator Bhumana Karunakar Reddy (*Bhumana perform last rites of unclaimed Covid victims, DC, May 6*). The MLA is a role model for other MLAs and MPs of India. Hope other social activists and religious organisations will also come out to help needy citizens in this fatal time. Hats off to the MLA, including his Muslim joint action committee (JAC) team members.

**Mahesh Kumar Kachhawah**  
*Anantapur*

#### IPL DEFERRED

The deferral of IPL was waiting to happen amid the alarming surge in Covid-19 cases across the country (*In the end, IPL proved to be a bridge too far, DC, May 6*). It has proved that Coronavirus is not impervious to even the bio-secure bubble. The safety of the players is far more important than the game and there should be no compromise on that score.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam**  
*Visakhapatnam*

### 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

#### Rare gold coins recovered

HYDERABAD, MAY 6. The city police stumbled on to rare coins of the 14th century A.D. belonging to the Vijaynagar empire at Mubarakpur village, about 35 miles from here in Vikarabad taluk.

This happened in strange circumstances. One hundred rare gold coins were recovered from a vaddar, who earlier was nabbed by the police for suspected robbery.

Forty-five-year-old Yelliah, a vaddar (stonecutter), while cutting rocks and digging earth ten days ago, found a stone vessel. He dug out the vessel and when he heard tinkling sounds from inside became curious and broke it. To his surprise, he found it was filled with gold coins. There were 200 coins. Being an illiterate, the vaddar did not realise the value and historical importance of his discovery.

Thanking his stars he rushed to a goldsmith in a nearby village and converted 100 of the gold coins into ingots.

Jawed Naqvi



## Will Cong, Left help or hinder Mamata's effort to unite Opp?

It was a crucial make-or-break vote that P.V. Narasimha Rao faced when Mamata Banerjee was ushered into a packed and tense Lok Sabha in a wheelchair and helped to her seat. From the press gallery above, one could see her shaking with spasm under a woollen blanket that wrapped her. The fever from malaria ran high and she struggled to control waves of rigour that came with the affliction. Eventually, Rao won the trust vote with a narrow margin. She did her duty by the Congress and contributed in her way to the early economic reforms, which usually Rao and Dr Mannohan Singh are credited with.

Now, the tycoons her vote had helped become rich with India's top-down neo-liberal policies were switching sides. Their money power was transferred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP. All the loot one could imagine was thrown into the massive effort to dislodge Mamata Banerjee. She though was confidently plotting the fightback for a third term as West Bengal's chief minister. Her secular resolve and populist economic priorities can be gleaned from her modest home surrounded by lower-middle-class

dwelling and shanties in a non-descript Kolkata district. The Trinamul Congress she set up was itself a critique of the Congress, which nurtured her as a youth leader but was beginning to be associated with wealth and pelf.

Trinamul means "grassroots" in Bengali, and her party's name suggests her plain thoughts about her parent group. The results were out on May 2, the same day as Satyajit Ray's birth centenary. Bengal has been shaped by Ray, Nazrul Islam and Tagore, by Vivekananda and Kali worship. For her to open her account in West Bengal, her worldview had to challenge the invincible Communist hegemony, much of it secured under Jyoti Basu's watch. He had steered the state for most of the three decades of Left rule since 1977, a handy reward for steadfastly fighting Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

After Basu retired, citing age, the party's fortunes quickly melded with the economic chaos across India. The party evicted peasants from fields to make space for industry, a lesson they erroneously believed could be bodily lifted from China. If Nandigram and Singur were what the comrades saw as aspects of "socialism

with Bengali characteristics", the move boomeranged, and Ms Banerjee pounced on the opportunity.

During much of the post-Basu rule, Communist priorities in West Bengal dovetailed with the core quests of the Vajpayee-Advani duo in Delhi. West Bengal's Marxist CM and the BJP's Union home minister found common cause, really two causes, in fact. They both desired to deal decisively with the Maoist challenge, and both harboured strong reservations about a real or imagined influx of people from Bangladesh. This worked as a wedge that eventually drove many Muslims away from the party, while alienating many who opposed harsh solutions to tackle the Maoists.

Marxist CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharya went a step further in his induced aloofness from a people he had no use for. He turned down a request from a fellow partisan in Delhi to help the Progressive Writers Association host an Urdu conference in Kolkata. "Do you want me to patronise another Partition?" he had exploded.

Sunday's results saw the CPI(M) wiped out of West Bengal's Assembly. Self-criticism and intro-

spection don't seem to go well with the current crop of Leftists. They blamed their decline on state terror supposedly unleashed on the party by Ms Banerjee's TMC. If that were true, why did the cadre switch en masse to the BJP? Did the Communists really hope to challenge the BJP had they succeeded in defeating Ms Banerjee in the recent polls? The election results showed how Left votes helped in the narrow defeat of Ms Banerjee in Nandigram.

This mindless game of revenge and short-sighted gambits to somehow crawl back to power has harmed the Left enormously. It has also dented the cause of Opposition unity that is urgently needed to arrest the erosion of India's democracy under Narendra Modi. The party may learn from the DMK in Tamil Nadu, under whose umbrella it could win two seats in the southern state.

Ms Banerjee has periodically invited the Communists to join her struggle against the essentially anti-federal, anti-secular character of the BJP. This has also been the quest of Kerala's Marxist CM Pinarayi Vijayan, who landed a record second consecutive term by defeating the Congress. Ironically, it's these two

parties that are holding Opposition unity to ransom, has both display a marked inability to identify self-harm in their cherry-picking of friends and foes. The Marxists offer a terrible logic of being adversaries of the Congress in Kerala and its allies elsewhere. What kind of a national messaging does that invite? Was it a good idea for them to join hands against the TMC in West Bengal, granted that they at least benefited from being together in Tamil Nadu?

Everyone has congratulated Mamata Banerjee on her fine victory against extremely heavy odds posed by the combined strength of India's right, left and centre parties. She has shown them their place. A Shiv Sena leader called her the "Tigress of Bengal". Arvind Kejriwal, M.K. Stalin, Akhilesh Yadav and Sharad Pawar, no small-time leaders, have greeted her with renewed hope to stall the march of fascism. The question is, will the Congress and the Left Front work with Ms Banerjee? Or will they persist with their misplaced zeal to inflict harm on themselves, and thereby on India's struggling democracy?

*By arrangement with Dawn*



quick BITES

| INDICATORS             | %               |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Sensex                 | 48949.76 0.56   |
| Nifty 50               | 14724.80 0.73   |
| S&P 500*               | 4,178.58 0.26   |
| Dollar (₹)             | 73.77 0.20      |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 102.64 0.06     |
| Euro (₹)               | 88.86 -0.15     |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 46,680.439 0.94 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 68.36 -0.87     |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 5.974 0.00      |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 1.561 -0.023    |

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

C19 resurgence bringing new challenges: Fitch

Fitch Solutions said while Covid-19 containment measures will weigh on India's ongoing economic recovery, the localised nature of restrictions means that the actual impact is likely to be much less severe relative to April-June 2020 when a strict nationwide lockdown was imposed. Fitch forecast real GDP to grow 9.5 per cent in 2021-22. Risks to this forecast are to the downside, it said.

BoE expects UK economy's best year since 1941k



The Bank of England has kept interest rates on hold as it forecast the fastest annual pace of growth for the British economy since early on in World War II, largely from the rapid rollout of vaccines. The Monetary Policy Committee said it will maintain the bank's main interest rate at 0.1 per cent, the lowest in the bank's 327-year history. The bank is now projecting economic growth of 7.25 per cent in 2021, instead of 5 per cent.

LIC to have five-day week from May 10

LIC will have five working days starting from May 10 since Saturdays have been declared as a holiday for the insurer. Pursuant to a notification on April 15, 2021, wherein the central government has declared every Saturday as a public holiday for LIC, all policy holders are informed that w.e.f May 10, all offices of LIC will work from Monday to Friday, it said. Office hours would be 10 AM to 5:30 PM," it added.

Revolt EV bikes' booking closed to meet demand

Electric bike maker Revolt Intellincorp said it has received strong response for Revolt EV bikes and has stopped taking any fresh bookings owing to high demand. Due to over-booking, Revolt has suspended taking any fresh bookings on its website, the company said. It said it will re-open the bookings after meeting the current set of orders in hand. But it did not share the number of confirmed booking orders.



■ Malaysia's IHH runs 34 hospitals in India

Mitsui eyeing reins of Fortis parent IHH

SANGEETHA G with agency inputs CHENNAI, MAY 6

In a move that will help grab a large pie of India's private healthcare delivery infrastructure, Japan's Mitsui & Company is exploring a deal to take full control of Malaysian hospital group IHH Healthcare. IHH Healthcare runs 34 hospitals in India through Fortis Healthcare, Gleneagles Global Hospitals and Continental Hospitals.

The Malaysian group also has a presence in India's diagnostic market through Fortis subsidiary Religare Ltd.

According to a Bloomberg report, Mitsui & Company is exploring a deal to take a majority stake in Kuala Lumpur-headquartered hospital group IHH Healthcare and delist it from the stock exchanges of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. Mitsui has reached out to Malaysian sovereign fund Khazanah Nasional, IHH's second largest shareholder, to pick up the latter's 26 per cent stake in the company. Mitsui has a 32.9 per cent stake in IHH Healthcare through a subsidiary. As of now IHH Healthcare is run as an independent company.

It may be recalled that IHH Healthcare acquired a 31 per cent stake in Fortis Healthcare in August 2018 in a \$1.1-billion deal, but could not make an open offer to acquire a 26 per cent more



stake in Fortis, owing to a Supreme Court stay order secured by Japan's Daiichi Sankyo over its disputes with the Singh brothers, the erstwhile promoters of Fortis.

As per the report, a few private equity firms have approached the Japanese trading house to team up on the potential transaction to buy out IHH's other shareholders.

Mitsui had raised its stake in IHH in 2018 to 32.9 per cent, after buying additional 15 per cent shares in the hospital operator from Khazanah. The Japanese firm is now the single biggest shareholder in the company.

IHH, which is listed on the stock exchanges of Malaysia and Singapore, has a market value of \$11 billion. IHH runs a total of 80 hospitals in 10 countries.

In India, IHH runs 34

hospitals, with 4,770 operational beds across Fortis Healthcare, Gleneagles Global Hospitals and Continental Hospitals. IHH had a 50-50 joint venture with Apollo Hospitals to operate Apollo Gleneagles Hospitals in Kolkata, but last December IHH entered into a share purchase agreement to divest its 50 per cent stake in this.

IHH, which has majority stake in Fortis Healthcare, plans to rebrand the Fortis chain as Parkway, the Malaysian healthcare chain owned by it, but this will now require permission from the Supreme Court.

Recently, IHH had also entered into a partnership with Bharat Biotech to provide Covaxin at its Gleneagles Global Hospitals in three locations in India—Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad.

IBM UNVEILS WORLD'S FIRST 2 NANOMETER CHIP TECHNOLOGY

New Delhi, May 6: Tech giant IBM on Thursday said it has developed the world's first chip with two nanometer (nm) nanosheet technology that promises to speed up access to the internet, longer battery life and faster processing time in applications.

Semiconductors are needed to run everything from computers to appliances and transportation systems to critical infrastructure.

According to IBM, the potential benefits of advanced 2 nm chips could include quadrupling of cell phone battery life, reduction in the carbon footprint of data centres, and drastically speed up a laptop's functions (including quicker processing in applications to assisting in language translation more easily and faster internet access).

The use of the new technology could also contribute to faster object detection and reaction time in autonomous vehicles like self-driving cars, it said in a statement.

The demand for increased chip performance and energy efficiency continues to rise, especially in the era of hybrid cloud, AI and the Internet of Things.

"IBM's new 2 nm chip technology helps advance the state-of-the-art in the semiconductor industry, addressing this growing demand. It is projected to achieve 45 per cent higher performance," it said. —PTI

Prime residential prices drop in top Indian cities

ANGEETHA G CHENNAI, MAY 6

The coronavirus pandemic seems to have hit the country's prime real estate market relatively more compared to the trend in the global market. Indian cities figuring in property consultant Knight Frank's Global Prime Residential Index saw a drop in prices while prime properties became dearer in many key cities abroad.

While the global index moved up 4.6 per cent in January-March (Q1) 2021, all the Indian cities in the index—Bengaluru, New Delhi and Mumbai—slipped down the index, with the property prices declining.

Prime residential property prices in Bengaluru declined 2.7 per cent, Mumbai 1.5 per cent and Delhi 0.2 per cent in Q1 against the same quarter last year. Sequentially also prices dropped. Against Q4 2020, Bengaluru prices fell 1.6 per cent, Mumbai 0.6 per cent and Delhi 0.1 per cent.

Due to price drop, Bengaluru came down

| THE KNIGHT FRANK PRIME GLOBAL CITIES INDEX Q1 2020 |                 |               | %                                    | %                         |
|--|-----------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Rank   | City            | World regions | 12-MONTH (Q1 2020-Q1 2021)           | 3-MONTH (Q4 2020-Q1 2021) |
| 1  | Shenzhen        | Asia          | 18.9                                 | 6.7                       |
| 2  | Shanghai        | Asia          | 16.3                                 | 8.5                       |
| 3  | Guangzhou       | Asia          | 15.2                                 | 12.6                      |
| 4  | Vancouver       | North America | 15.2                                 | 6.3                       |
| 5  | Seoul           | Asia          | 14.8                                 | 1.3                       |
| 6  | St. Petersburg  | Russia & CIS  | 13.4                                 | 2.5                       |
| 7  | Los Angeles 1,3 | North America | 12.6                                 | 2.2                       |
| 8  | Moscow          | Russia & CIS  | 12.4                                 | 7.3                       |
| 9  | Taipei          | Asia          | 12.2                                 | 6.5                       |
| 10   | Miami 1,3       | North America | 10.2                                 | 2.4                       |
| 11   | Toronto         | North America | 10.1                                 | 5.3                       |
| 32   | Delhi           | Asia          | -0.2                                 | 0.0                       |
| 36   | Mumbai          | Asia          | -1.5                                 | -0.1                      |
| 40   | Bengaluru       | Asia          | -2.7                                 | -0.6                      |
| 46   | New York        | North America | -5.8                                 | -1.6                      |
| (Ranked by annual % change)                        |                 |               | Source: Knight Frank Global Research |                           |

four places in the index from 40 to 36 while Mumbai fell from 36 to 35 and Delhi from 32 to 31.

During the January-March 2021 quarter, prices of top three cities in the index—Shenzhen, Shanghai and Guang-

zhou—appreciated 18.9 per cent, 16.3 per cent and 15.2 per cent, respectively, against the year-ago quarter. Against Q4 2020, prices of these cities moved up 6.7 per cent, 8.5 per cent and 12.6 per cent, in the same order.

STATES GET ₹9,870 CRORE AS REVENUE DEFICIT GRANT

New Delhi, May 6: The finance ministry on Thursday released the second monthly instalment of revenue deficit grant of Rs 9,871 crore to 17 states.

With the release of the second instalment, a total amount of Rs 19,742 crore has been released in the first two months of the current financial year as

Post Devolution Revenue Deficit Grant to the states, the ministry said in a statement.

The Centre provides such grant to the states under Article 275 of the Constitution.

The grants are released as per the recommendations of the Finance Commission in monthly

instalments to meet the gap in revenue accounts of the states post-devolution.

The 15th Finance Commission has recommended Post Devolution Release Deficit Grants to 17 states based on the gap between the assessment of revenue and expenditure of the state.

—PTI

Top pharma firms lobby for G-20 protection for patents

ALESSANDRO SPECIALE MAY 6

Representatives for the world's major pharmaceutical and medical companies are warning Group of 20 leaders that moves to weaken intellectual property rights protection will reduce investments and hurt innovation.

The warning comes in a report prepared for G-20 leaders by representatives of health and life-sciences companies, including Novartis AG, Sanofi FF, AstraZeneca PLC and Johnson & Johnson, and from organisations such as the OECD and Europe's EFPIA pharmaceutical industry association.

"No investment can be made or secured without proper intellectual property rights, that are fundamental and must be maintained to foster a life-sciences ecosystem that can deliver innovation and improve patient outcomes across the world," reads a draft report seen by Bloomberg.

The US gave its support for a waiver of intellectual property protections for Covid-19 vaccines that will

PATENT WAIVER TO HELP VAX MFG:GOVT

New Delhi, May 6: India on Thursday said temporary waiver of certain provisions of intellectual property rights under a WTO agreement would be an important step to enable scaling up of manufacturing and timely availability of affordable Covid-19 vaccines and essential medical products.

India and South Africa had on October 2 proposed in the WTO a relaxation in norms of the Trips agreement to ensure quick and affordable access to vaccines and medicines for developing countries.

be discussed by the World Trade Organization, setting the stage for potentially thorny talks over sharing proprietary know-how needed to boost global supplies of the life-saving vaccines.

European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has also signalled readiness to discuss any



Piyush Goyal

India welcomed the US government's support for this initiative.

"We welcome the US government supporting this initiative and joining 120 other countries working towards affordable Covid-19 vaccines," commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal tweeted. —PTI

proposal that "addresses the crisis in an effective and pragmatic manner."

Business leaders say that the G-20 should share a "balanced international and local vision regarding an effective protection of intellectual property rights in health and life sciences," according to the draft. —Bloomberg

Framework for onboarding social enterprises suggested

New Delhi, May 6: A Sebi-appointed panel on Thursday suggested a detailed framework for onboarding social enterprises and non-profit organisations on the proposed social stock exchange.

Corporate foundations, political and religious organisations, among other entities should not be allowed to be on the bourse, the panel said as it listed out 15 broad activities that will make a social enterprise (SE) eligible to be onboarded on the exchange.

In its report submitted to Sebi, the panel, under the chairmanship of Nabard former chairman Harsh Kumar Bhanwala, also deliberated on aspects related to the ecosystem development, especially on social auditors.

SE eligible to participate in social stock exchange (SSE) should be entities non-profit organisation (NPO) and for-profit social enterprise (FPE) having social intent and impact as their primary goal. And, such intent is demonstrated through its focus on eligible social

objectives for the underserved or less privileged populations or regions, as per the recommendations.

The primacy is to be determined through application of three filters SE should be engaged in at least one of the 15 broad eligible activities; it should target underserved or less privileged population segments or regions; and SE should have at least 67 per cent of its activities qualifying as eligible activities to the target population.

The 15 broad areas of eligible activities included eradicating hunger, poverty, malnutrition and inequality; promoting health care, supporting education, employability and livelihoods; gender equality empowerment of women and supporting incubators of social enterprises.

Besides corporate foundation, political or religious organisations, the committee has recommended that professional or trade associations, infrastructure and housing companies should not be permitted on the exchange. However, it said

that entities in the affordable housing segment can be allowed.

Further, the panel has made certain recommendations for capacity building fund which will enable NGOs to navigate the SSE and its fundraising mechanism.

"These concepts of social auditors and capacity building fund are unique to fundraising for social enterprises in India, and would facilitate SSE in its activities," according to the report released by Sebi for public comment.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has sought comments from public till June 20 on the report.

The panel or the technical group (TG) was constituted by Sebi in September 2020 for developing framework to onboard NPOs and FPEs on the SSE, including defining for-profit social investing/enterprises, prescribing disclosure requirements related to financials, governance, operational performance and social impact. —PTI

GOOGLE TO MOVE TO HYBRID WORK WEEK: PICHAJ



Sundar Pichai

New Delhi, May 6: Google will move to a hybrid work week, where most Googlers spend approximately three days in the office and two days "wherever they work best", according to a note by Google and Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai.

About 20 per cent of Google's workforce will continue to work remotely after its offices reopen later this year, while about 60 per cent Googlers will come together in the office for a few days a week, Pichai said.

"Since in-office time will be focused on collaboration, your product areas and functions will help decide which days teams will come together in the office. There will also be roles that may need to be on site more than three days a week due to the nature of the work," he added.

Pichai also noted that the company will offer opportunities for employees to apply for completely remote work (away from team or office) based on their role and team needs.

As per the financial details released in Q1 2021, Google has 139,995 full time employees worldwide. While Google doesn't disclose country-specific headcount, the company is estimated to have over 4,000 people in India.

"Before the pandemic, we had thousands of people working in locations separate from their core teams. I fully expect those numbers to increase in the coming months as we develop more remote roles...Taken together these changes will result in a workforce where around 60 per cent of Googlers are coming together in the office a few days a week, another 20 per cent are working in new office locations, and 20 per cent are working from home," he said. —PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## India's Oly-bound shooters get vax

**New Delhi:** Many shooters, coaches and officials from India's Olympic-bound contingent received their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine across cities on Thursday. The shooters were to get vaccinated before leaving for Zagreb, Croatia on May 11 to participate in the European Championship. "All the shooters have got vaccinated today. Some of them got their jab in Delhi while some in their respective home towns," a National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) source said. Some of the members of the Indian team have already got their first dose of the vaccine last month, including pistol ace Manu Bhaker and rifle shooter Anjum Moudgil. As far as the national shooting team's coaches are concerned, quite a few of them, including Smaresh Jung, Suma Shirur and Deepali Deshpande, had got themselves vaccinated last month. — PTI

## Indian archers to miss Swiss WC

**Kolkata:** India's Olympic-bound archers will not get to compete in the Stage 2 World Cup in Lausanne as their short-term visa application has been rejected by the Switzerland Embassy. India has been battling a second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic that has forced many countries to ban travellers from India. The Indian archers will now directly compete in the Stage 3 World Cup in Paris which will be the last Olympic qualification event for the Indian women's recurve team. The seven-day competition will begin on June 23. "Swiss Embassy did not allow any short term Visa and we had little time for the Stage 2 World Cup (May 17-23). Our focus is solely on the Paris World Cup now," Archery Association of secretary general Pramod Chandurkar said. — PTI

## Bopanna in men's doubles last eight

**Madrid:** India's Rohan Bopanna combined with his Canadian partner Denis Shapovalov to stun top seeds Juan Sebastian Cabal and Robert Farah in straight sets and reach the men's doubles quarterfinals of Madrid Open Masters. This was the 41-year-old Bopanna's first win on the ATP tour in 2021. The Indo-Canadian duo won their round of 16 match 6-3, 6-4 on Wednesday. Bopanna and Shapovalov will take on German duo of Alexander Zverev and Tim Puetz in the quarterfinals. "A superb victory by #TOPSAthlete tennis player @rohanbopanna and his partner @denis\_shapo who beat World #1 men's doubles pair of Robert Farah and Juan Sebastian Cabal 6-3, 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals of the MutuaMadridOpen," Sports Authority of India (SAI) tweeted. — PTI



Sports Authority of Telangana State chairman Allipuram Venkateshwar Reddy (left) congratulates badminton world champion and Olympic silver medalist P. V. Sindhu after she was nominated as athlete ambassador for International Olympic Committee's 'Believe in Sports' campaign, at the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium in Hyderabad.

## Live on TV

## FOOTBALL

**Europa League semifinal second legs:** Roma vs Manchester United from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 2, 3, HD, Arsenal vs Villarreal from 12.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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## DEPARTURE GATES

## Aussies fly out, New Zealand contingent leaves on Friday

**New Delhi, May 6:** The Australians flew off to Maldives, the South Africans headed home and the ones from New Zealand waited to be sent back on Friday as the suspended IPL's foreign cricketers bid adieu to India, hoping that the country recovers from the mayhem unleashed by a second wave of Covid-19 cases.

The 40-strong Australian contingent, except for a Covid-positive Mike Hussey, left for Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia once the travel restrictions end on May 15.

"We can confirm that Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators have been safely transported from India and are en route to the Maldives," Cricket Australia stated in a press release.

"The Australians will remain in Maldives until the conclusion of the travel pause pertaining to flights from India to Australia," it added.

The IPL was suspended on Tuesday after four players and two coaching staff members from three different teams tested positive for Covid-19 inside the bio-bubble.

Of the 40 Australians involved in the league after three early pullouts, 14 were players, including mega-stars such as David Warner, Pat Cummins, and Steve Smith among others.

The 11 South Africans in the league boarded flights for Johannesburg as their country has not imposed any restrictions on travel from India, which recorded more than 4 lakh Covid-19 cases on Thursday and close to 4,000 deaths.

"My constant prayers is with the people from India to get through this. Pls Take care of yourselves," Proteas star Faf du Plessis, who turned up Chennai Super Kings, posted on Instagram.

The Cricket Australia thanked the BCCI for its assistance in ensuring that players were able to leave India within two



Trent Boult (left) and Chris Lynn of the Mumbai Indians.

● The 40-strong Australian contingent, except for a Covid-positive Mike Hussey, left for Maldives on Thursday to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia once the travel restrictions end on May 15.

● Of the 40 Australians involved in the league after three early pullouts, 14 were players, including mega-stars such as David Warner, Pat Cummins and Steve Smith among others.

days of the league's suspension owing to Covid-19 cases inside its bio-bubble.

"CA and the ACA extend their sincere thanks to the BCCI for their responsiveness in moving the Australians from India to the Maldives..." the statement read.

On the wait-list were the Black Caps. Four members of their Test contingent, including captain Kane Williamson, will head for the United Kingdom on May 11 while the rest will make their way back home on Friday, the country's cricket board announced.

New Zealand are scheduled to play hosts England in a two-match Test series, beginning on June 2, before facing India in the World Test Championships final at Southampton from June 18.

"We've worked closely

with the BCCI and the IPL franchises on the various departure strategies and we're very appreciative of their support during what is, clearly, a very challenging time," New Zealand Cricket (NZC) chief executive David White said in a statement on Thursday.

Williamson, pacer Kyle Jamieson and spinner Mitchell Santner, as well as physio Tommy Simsek, will remain in a mini-bubble in New Delhi before departing for the UK, ahead of preparations for the Test series against England, and the WTC final against India.

There were 17 New Zealanders involved in the League, including 10 players.

NZC said May 11 is the earliest date it could obtain for the team's arrival in the UK.

However, pace spearhead Trent Boult will return home briefly to see

his family before joining the Test squad in early June, for the second match against England and the WTC final.

"...Boult will leave MIQ (Managed Isolation and Quarantine) on May 22 and will spend a week at home with his family, training at Mt Maunganui before departing for the UK in early June," NZC stated.

White said IPL players, support staff and commentators returning to New Zealand would adhere to all regulatory protocols, including pre-departure Covid-19 tests.

Those returning to New Zealand on Friday from India also include Stephen Fleming, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Shane Bond, Mike Hesson, Tim Seifert, Adam Milne, Scott Kuggeleijn and James Pamment.

— PTI

## AFTER MOTHER, VEDA LOSES HER SISTER TO VIRUS

**New Delhi, May 6:** Indian women's cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy's sister Vatsala Shivakumar has died due to Covid-19, two weeks after her mother succumbed to the dreaded virus. The 45-year-old died at a private hospital in Chikkamagaluru on Wednesday night.

The all-rounder, who has been helping others through her social media by amplifying their requests for aid, had lost her mother Cheluvamba Devi last month.

On April 24, the Bengaluru-based cricketer, who has represented India in 48 ODIs and 76 T20s, had tweeted about her mother's demise while also informing that her sister too was battling for her life.

— PTI

## EX-RAJASTHAN PLAYER YADAV DIES OF COVID

**Jaipur, May 6:** Vivek Yadav, a former Rajasthan leg-spinner and a member of their Ranji Trophy-winning squad, died of coronavirus-related complications.

He was 36-years-old and is survived by his wife and a daughter.

Yadav breathed his last at a city hospital on Wednesday.

"Rajasthan Ranji Player and a dear friend...Vivek Yadav is no more. May his soul R.I.P. Thoughts and prayers with the family," former India opener Aakash Chopra tweeted.

Yadav was undergoing treatment for cancer and had gone to the hospital for his chemotherapy, where he was tested and returned positive for Covid-19. His health deteriorated before he lost his battle against the dreaded virus.

— PTI

## Sri Lanka offers window for IPL

BY BIPIN DANI

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is "keen" to help the Indian cricket board host the remainder of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

This offer has come at the time when former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who is now BCCI president, has said: "We have to speak to other boards and see if a window can be made available before the T20 World Cup".

"If we fail to complete the IPL, the loss will be close to ₹12,500 crore (\$340 million approximately)," going by early estimates.

"Yes, we can certainly provide a window to host the IPL in the month of September," Prof. Arjuna de Silva, chief of the managing committee of Sri Lanka Cricket, speaking exclusively over the telephone from Colombo, said.

"We hear the UAE (United Arab Emirates) is one option for BCCI but Sri Lanka cannot be ignored for all reasons," he said. "We are planning to host the Lanka Premier League

We hear the UAE is also an option but Sri Lanka cannot be ignored for all reasons. We are planning to host the Lanka Premier League in July-August and the grounds and other infrastructure will be ready for the IPL in September.

— ARJUNA DE SILVA  
SLC managing committee chief

(LPL) in July-August and the grounds and other infrastructure will be ready for the IPL in September," de Silva added.

Prof. de Silva's term is scheduled to be over this month after the SLC elections on May 20, but the offer will stand whoever comes into power.

The IPL teams have already hired the services of Sri Lanka's legendary cricketers — Kumar Sangakkara, Muthiah Muralitharan and Mahela Jayawardene in coaching roles.

## COVID-INFECTED HUSSEY, BALAJI FLY TO CHENNAI

**Chennai, May 6:** Chennai Super Kings' batting coach Mike Hussey and bowling coach L Balaji have been flown into the city from Delhi in an air ambulance as they recover from Covid-19, a top franchise official said on Thursday.

Hussey and 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.

"We decided to bring Hussey and Balaji to Chennai by an air ambulance as we have better contacts here and wanted to ensure better medical facilities in case of any need," the CSK official said.

He further said the duo was "asymptomatic and doing fine."

The CSK official said Hussey would have to wait for a Covid-19 negative report to be able to leave the country.

"Hussey has to wait and get a Covid negative report before he can leave India. We will make arrangements for a charter when it is safe for him to fly," the official added.

While Hussey will have to wait, rest of the Australians participating in the IPL on Thursday left for Maldives to serve out the waiting period before they can board a flight to Australia.

The CSK official said the franchise made arrangements for the foreign players of the team to leave by charter planes.

The official also informed that CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni would leave for his hometown Ranchi in the afternoon once all his team members head for their respective bases.

— PTI

## Blues blank Madrid to set up all-English final

**London, May 6:** Chelsea set up an all-English Champions League final against Manchester City as goals from Timo Werner and Mason Mount beat Real Madrid 2-0 in a dominant display on Wednesday to seal a 3-1 aggregate victory at Stamford Bridge.

If anything, the scoreline flattered Madrid as the 13-time European champions had no response to Chelsea's greater strength and speed.

The Blues should have ran out far more convincing winners as they toyed with the tired visitors in the second half.

However, Werner's cushioned header into an empty net on 28 minutes after Kai Havertz's initial effort came back off the crossbar and Mount's tap-in five minutes from time were enough to seal their place in Istanbul on May

## THE RESULT

Chelsea 2  
(Werner 28, Mount 85)  
Real Madrid 0  
(Chelsea win 3-1 on aggregate)

29. "To never lose the concentration, focus and positive energy on the pitch — it was a huge performance and well deserved," said Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel, who has masterminded a huge turnaround in Chelsea's season since replacing the sacked Frank Lampard in January.

Backed by Russian billionaire owner Roman Abramovich, Chelsea's £220 million spending spree last summer has been rewarded with a first Champions League final since they lifted the trophy for the only time in 2012.

"We never lost the hunger, the desire to defend," added Tuchel.

"In the second half we had even better structure to defend and it was a fantastic performance.

"We could have scored so much earlier and more to be safe, but it's no time for criticism now. It's a fantastic achievement and big congratulations to the team."

Madrid boss Zinedine Zidane welcomed back captain Sergio Ramos for the first time in six weeks, while Eden Hazard was handed a rare start in an injury-hit season on his return to Stamford Bridge.

But the Belgian was again a peripheral figure as Madrid's over-reliance on Karim Benzema to provide a goal threat was exposed.

"We needed to be better going forward," said Zidane.

— AFP



Chelsea's Timo Werner (right) scores against Real Madrid in their Champions League second leg semifinal match at Stamford Bridge in London on Wednesday.

— AFP

## Major blow for Saina, Srikanth

**New Delhi, May 6:** London Olympics bronze-medallist Saina Nehwal and men's star Kidambi Srikanth's last hopes of Olympic qualification hang in balance as the Indian government negotiates for their participation in the Malaysian Open amid a ban on flights from India in that country.

Following the postponement of the India Open (May 11-16), Saina and Srikanth's hopes of qualifying for the Tokyo Games hinge on the (May 25-30) Kuala Lumpur event followed by the Singapore Open (June 1-6).

In the wake of an unprecedented Covid-19 surge in India, Malaysia and Singapore have banned flights from the country effective April 28.

"The Sports Ministry, through the Ministry of External Affairs, has approached the Malaysian Government requesting to grant permission to the

Indian Badminton Team to travel to Malaysia to participate in the Malaysian Open scheduled from May 25 to May 30," the Sports Authority of India said.

"This is in light of a temporary travel ban that has been imposed by Malaysia on travellers from India, owing to the rising Covid-19 cases in India," it added.

After an initial request made earlier this week, the Indian High Commission in Malaysia "received information from the Malaysian Government that the travel of the team may not be possible immediately."

The tournament is one of the last events that contribute to Olympic qualification which ends on June 15. All top players like P. V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal, Kidambi Srikanth, Sai Praneth, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty, Ashwini Ponnappa and Sikki Reddy are due to participate in this.

— PTI

## Anti-Olympic petition gains tens of thousands of signatures

**Tokyo, May 6:** An online petition calling for the Tokyo Olympics to be canceled has gained tens of thousands of signatures since being launched in Japan only days ago.

The rollout of the petition comes with Tokyo, Osaka and several other areas under a state of emergency with coronavirus infections rising — particularly new variants. The state of emergency is to expire on May 11, but some reports in Japan say it is likely to be extended.

The postponed Olympics are to open in just under three months on July 23.

The petition is addressed to International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who has tentative plans to visit Japan later this month. He is expected to meet the Olympic torch relay on May 17 in Hiroshima, and perhaps also travel to Tokyo where small anti-Olympic are protests being planned.

Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics cancelled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen. Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Tokyo

organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto, and Bach have repeatedly said the games will go on as scheduled.

Organizers and the IOC unveiled so-called Playbooks last week, explaining rules for athletes and others to show how the Olympics can be held in the middle of a pandemic. Several test events have been conducted in the last few days, and organizers have reported few problems.

The Olympic torch relay has been crisscrossing Japan for a month. Organizers say that eight

● Although 70-80% of Japanese citizens in polls say they want the Olympics cancelled or postponed, there is no indication this will happen.

people working on the relay have tested positive for the virus.

The Tokyo Olympics have become a face-saving exercise for Japan, which has officially spent \$15.4 billion to prepare them. For the IOC, the Tokyo Olympics are critical since

73% of its income comes from selling television rights.

Organisers say the Olympics will be "safe and secure," though this has been challenged by local medical specialists, and in an editorial last month in the British Medical Journal.

It said mass events like the Olympics are "neither safe nor secure." Organisers say they will need 10,000 health workers to support the Olympics. They have also requested 500 additional nurses — a nurses' federation balked at the request — and 200 sports

medicine specialists.

The petition was organized by Kenji Utsunomiya, a lawyer who has run several times for Tokyo governor. It registered about 50,000 signatures in the first 24 hours after being launched.

"Government policies are being set with the Olympics in mind, and measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic are being neglected," Utsunomiya told The Associated Press.

"Hospital are stretched thin, and some people are dying at home."

The headline in English

over the petition reads: "Cancel the Tokyo Olympics to protect our lives."

The petition suggests the Olympics cannot be held safely and says the games have drained finances away for other needs such as the rollout of a Covid-19 vaccine.

"In order to host the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in July, we must devote a large number of medical professionals, valuable resources such as medical facilities and medical equipment, and various other resources," the petition says.

— AP